
Preface

Why Leaders Must Take Care of Themselves

I wrote this book because I haven't always paid attention to taking care of myself. For many of my years as an administrator, I was a workaholic. I know that some of you reading this, if you are really honest with yourself, can identify with this. Are you so dedicated to your work that you sometimes forget to take time for those other, more personal, aspects of your life? When do you think about what you value besides your job?

I still work hard and have been called a "high achiever," but I have learned that the most important part of life is to pay attention to all areas of my life, to maintain a balance between my work and personal life, to be a whole person. I say "I have learned," but it is truly an ongoing process. Becoming aware of your need for a more balanced life, perhaps as the result of a personal life crisis, is the first step.

Gradually it becomes a way of living: to find time on a daily basis to do something for your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health; to discover who you really are as a person, beyond the job title and the professional role; and to know what you value most, your purposes in life, your mission for being here. And then, as this awareness becomes a part of you, and as you put into practice what this means, you begin to notice that you are better at your job, too. Others tell you that you are more patient, more reflective, sometimes less rational in decisions and more focused on matters of the heart. You begin to learn how to say "No" when a request doesn't contribute to the wholeness of your being. The stresses of the job don't get to you as much, because you react from the center of your being, and you have tools to respond more effectively in such situations. I have been working at this for many years and continue in my Personal Growth every day.

What I am describing in this book, putting into practice the strategies to help you become a more balanced person, is not easy. It requires constant awareness and the determination that you want to, and need to, make time for your personal life. But the rewards are great! They will open the gates, and give you the gift, to a richer and more meaningful life, both as a leader and a person.

LEADERS NEED A BALANCED LIFE

This book is based on observations, research, and experiences from my many years as a principal, a school district superintendent, and an educational administration professor. It is also based on my work with groups of administrators and on research I have been conducting during the past 10 years. I have observed leaders who reached the top of the ladder and failed, even with the best training in knowledge and skills of our profession. Their expertise and competence could not save them from the inner turmoil and confusion that resulted when they were attacked, maligned, demoted, or even lost their positions and careers. I am convinced that the leader's own inner state is the key to survival and success, to his or her personal and professional effectiveness.

A few years ago, a dear superintendent friend lost her job when a recently elected school board majority set out to get rid of her—even before they started their terms on the board. She was devastated and felt worthless as a person because her professional life had become who she was.

RESEARCH BASE FOR THIS BOOK

The experiences of my close friend compelled me to begin a study that would ultimately lead to this book. I sought out and interviewed 39 superintendents who had involuntarily lost their jobs (Metzger, 1997). Their struggles to find new meaning in their lives deeply touched my heart as I listened to their stories. Some of them had contemplated suicide or gone into a lengthy depression because their work had become everything that had meaning for them, and they felt that they were nothing without it. Their sense of self, their identity, was so connected with their work that they did not know who they were without their job.

Pulley (1997) calls the loss of a job one of the most devastating events a person can encounter. Some of the superintendents I interviewed were able to pick up the pieces; others had to face themselves first, find out who they were, and how they might rebuild their lives. These interviews made

me curious about the differences among these colleagues, and I decided to continue my research.

In the fall of 2000, I conducted a national study (Metzger, 2003) of 128 urban school district superintendents and college of education deans to learn what strategies they used to cope with stress, relax, get away from it all, nurture their soul, replenish their spirit, find renewal, and keep a balance in their lives. I coined a term, *Self/Inner Development*, which I asked the participants in this study to help define. I also wanted to know what practices administrative leaders use most often for their Self/Inner Development and how they found time for such practices.

During the subsequent years, I continued my research and asked more administrators—this time mostly school principals at all levels—what practices they used and how they found time for themselves (Metzger, 2004). A total of 162 administrators responded to these surveys and interviews: 89 high school, middle, and elementary school principals; 21 beginning administrators; and 52 administrators from district levels and higher education.

Through my research, a definition of the term Self/Inner Development emerged as related to the following six themes: balance, self-actualization, values, personal improvement, inner focus, and relationships. These themes, as well as the strategies and practices used by administrators, form the basis of what will be discussed in this book.

A strong recommendation from these studies was that these themes and strategies should be incorporated into the everyday life of the school administrator as well as included in university administrator preparation programs and inservice professional development. I will address some ways this might be done in the last chapter.

SOME CLARIFICATION ON TERMINOLOGY

In this book I will use the term *Personal Growth* or *Personal Development* to describe the dimensions of Self/Inner Development from my studies. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find the right words to describe what I will call Personal Growth or Personal Development. Perhaps it would be helpful to describe it as distinct from the practice of Professional Development, something with which all administrators are quite familiar. Professional Development focuses on knowledge and skills required for the job. Personal Growth or Personal Development is more about the individual who holds that job.

I will use the term Personal Growth as essentially a process that involves the inner life of the leader/administrator as a person: your sense of self;

the essence, the soul, the heart of who you are; your personal identity; that subjective core that determines your life's purpose; that which is the seat of your core values; the ground of your being from which arise your actions and decisions. More specifically, Personal Growth (or Personal Development) describes the following:

- What you do to get to know yourself better: Your values, needs, dreams, life goals, motivation, deepest desires; paying attention to your inner life.
- How you can become a more whole person, so that you are able to recognize and fulfill your potential in all aspects of your being: Mental, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual.
- How you can improve yourself as a person: Living each moment of your life more fully, developing habits that foster your total well-being in your daily life.
- Being more aware of the need for a balanced life: Spending the right amount of time and energy on work as well as play, time alone as well as time with others, keeping a perspective on all of your activities and measuring their effectiveness in terms of the central meaning and purpose of your life.

It is not easy to find the right words for such dimensions of being. Throughout the ages, many terms have been used by psychologists, philosophers, theologians, and spiritual leaders to refer to this aspect of human existence. C. G. Jung (Jaffe, 1989) called it *individuation*. Goleman (1995) called it *emotional intelligence*. Frankl (1984) described it as man's search for meaning. Covey (2004) made it the 8th habit of highly successful people, requiring what he termed *spiritual intelligence*. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) related it to the experience of *flow*. Senge (1990) labeled it *the fifth discipline*. Walsh (1999) referred to this as "central practices to awaken heart and mind." Bolman and Deal (1995) portrayed it as "leading with soul." Michael Thompson (2000) used the term the *congruent life* and defined it as following the inward path to fulfilling work and inspired leadership, connecting what we do for personal fulfillment and what we do for a living.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THESE REAL LEADERS

This book is dedicated to all of my administrator friends and colleagues over the many years who symbolize the inner strength and the determination to keep going despite personal attacks and unexpected twists in their careers. I have changed their names, but they are real.

To Superintendent Bill, whose school board turned against him and didn't renew his contract. Bill had given many years to this district as a teacher and administrator. He became so disillusioned that he left education and is now working in construction. I imagine he will be working his way up to be job superintendent or project manager soon.

To Lisa, a dear principal colleague whose teachers got together a petition to convince the superintendent to get rid of her; it was something about her communication style. I don't know what she'd done wrong, and I don't think she did either. Luckily she found another principalship in a different district.

To Gary, whose school board asked him to fire one of the high school principals in the district. This principal had been popular with his community and, after his dismissal, ran for the school board. He convinced the other new board members to terminate Superintendent Gary. Because Gary was near the end of his career, he moved to another state and took a university teaching position.

To Mary, whose contract was bought out by her board when things began to snowball around a custodian, a neighbor of a newly elected board member, whom Mary had documented for dismissal because of his excessive absences. Mary took an assistant superintendency in another district.

And to the many other administrators who were mostly highly competent, well prepared, and good people who fell victim to something related not to their job skills, but to the political climate in which they found themselves. Many survived and moved on to other positions; some are still struggling to find new meaning for their lives.

I also dedicate this book to the many administrators who are bravely facing the daily stresses of their jobs, who are the quiet heroes and the champions of the schools and districts they serve.

FOR WHOM AND WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

The content of this book will be useful to all types of administrators and educational leaders, including district level, county, or state, and higher education administrators, men and women administrators, beginning level and those close to retirement. Even those who are not administrators (yet) might benefit from reading this book.

What unites all of these positions is the very nature of the administrator's job. The stresses, the workload, the constant demands of others on the administrator's time, and the continuous criticisms when making decisions have created a need for more attention to the personal dimensions of the leader's life.

One commonly felt need among administrators is their desire to find a healthy balance between their personal and professional lives and the realization of how difficult this is to attain. According to Senge (1990), keeping a balance between personal and professional lives has become a dominant issue for leaders. Such a balance becomes especially critical in times of crisis, change, and disappointments such as loss of a job, demotion or transfer, or personal losses, such as divorce, ill health, or the death of a loved one.

The issues addressed in this book will not only support individual leaders, but I hope that this book will ultimately contribute to addressing the current shortage of administrators. The lack of qualified persons interested in becoming school principals and the frequent turnover of administrators, particularly in the superintendency, have been well documented. When administrators learn to take better care of themselves, I believe that there will be fewer who will leave the profession, and more who will want to become school leaders. There will be fewer who will suffer burnout, and more who will remain vibrant and effective in their jobs.

Most importantly, I know that this book will help you as a leader to be more successful at focusing on the most critical goal of all education professionals: to promote maximum student learning while staying healthy and balanced yourself. To reach the highest ideals of your chosen work as an educator, you must keep a balance in your own life and pay adequate attention to yourself, especially your inner self. You must make yourself a priority, as I read in an advertisement for a resort in Sedona. Peter Block (Block, 1993, p. 77) writes, "If there is no transformation inside each of us, all the structural change in the world will have no impact on our institutions."

This book is for you if any of these descriptions fit you. If you . . .

- love your job most of the time, but feel you are often too busy with your work responsibilities
- feel stressed by too many obligations
- feel that you don't have enough time to do everything you're expected to do
- are concerned that you're not taking enough time for yourself or for your family
- sometimes wonder why you're in this job and how it relates to the rest of your life goals
- have ever wondered when you're going to burn out if your pace and stress level continue as they have
- just want to learn a few more ways to be better at taking care of yourself

You may not be able to change the nature of your job, or control what life offers you, but you can change how you respond to it. You can learn to

take care of yourself, so that you can be the kind of educational leader that you dreamed of being when you first wanted to become an administrator. You can rediscover how you can make a difference in the lives of the young people in our schools. The key to an effective organization is its leader. Leaders must be whole themselves in order to serve others.

HOW IS THIS BOOK UNIQUE?

This book is a kind of self-help book in that it hopes to inspire you, and give you suggestions for how to help yourself to be more balanced. But it goes beyond the affirmations and suggestions that are typical of such books.

First, this book is unique because it seeks to engage the reader in an open discussion of all dimensions related to Personal Growth. This includes some terms, such as spirituality and religion, which are often avoided in academic and professional circles. Throughout the book it has been my intent to be inclusive and sensitive to the fact that some readers will have a personal religious belief system and others will not. Readers who do not subscribe to any particular faith or religious conviction may still acknowledge the existence of a power greater than themselves, some invisible reality which they may call spiritual. Examples and quotes used represent various religions and philosophies. The exercises and practices in this book may be adapted to suit each individual's personal viewpoints. Even for a reader who may not accept higher levels of consciousness, these practices will still be good for you as a human being. For a discussion of these and other similar terms, check the section on terminology in chapter 2.

Second, these practices have the potential to affect a deeper place within you, a real transformation, because they engage you through actual experiences with practices that have been used and advocated by both Eastern and Western spiritual and religious traditions from ancient times.

Third, the practices I will describe are based on research done with practicing school administrators—educational leaders like you. Their experiences will be useful for you to discover how your colleagues are taking care of their Personal Growth. I have included stories about real school administrators to illustrate the concepts presented.

Finally, the practices included in this book are comprehensive and allow you choices depending on your own needs and interests. This book gives you access to a variety of strategies for your Personal Growth and Development. I have also incorporated references to other books for each particular practice so that you may read more in depth on a topic that interests you.

SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1 addresses various aspects of the need for leaders to take care of themselves. What causes stress for administrators, and how stress and crises often lead us to reprioritize our values and pay more attention to ourselves, is a major theme of this chapter. You will meet Principal Steve, whose activities serve to illustrate why it is important for you to know yourself and maintain a balanced life. The documented current shortage of persons willing to take on the job of a school administrator may have something to do with this lack of balance. A short review of research about stress and burnout is presented, including how response to these affect your health and well-being. How a crisis in your life can create greater awareness of the need for meaning and for paying attention to your personal and inner dimensions is discussed, followed by a section on "Ordinary Mondays." This part illustrates that even boredom with the job, and settling into a predictable and unmotivated routine, signals the need for more attention to Personal Growth. The chapter ends with a reflection on the nature of the school administrator's job and highlights what it might be like to be a balanced leader.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the themes and definitions of Personal Growth and will introduce various dimensions associated with this term. This chapter tackles the difficult task of defining and describing the concepts for which I am using the term Personal Growth. As pointed out in the section on terminology above, this process involves subjective constructs, concepts that deserve discussion and need definition. I have defined Personal Growth as a process that involves inner dimensions of one's being that focus on these six themes: balance, self-actualization, personal improvement, values, inner focus, and relationships. This process includes words that administrators might not generally use in their day-to-day vocabulary, but that are unquestionably related to Personal Growth, such as heart, soul, spirit, religion, and spirituality. The chapter concludes with a discussion of what other writers have to say about such words and how these might be used in the workplace.

How to find time for yourself and for your Personal Growth is at the heart of success in balancing your leadership responsibilities and your Personal Growth. Chapter 3 provides some assistance with this by reviewing basic principles of time management and techniques for prioritizing time. The chapter includes specific suggestions from other administrators about how they have found time for Personal Growth activities.

What are these Personal Growth practices? Chapter 4 gives an overview of all of these and how they have been used by various groups of administrators. These practices are then described in more detail in the following

chapters (5–10). Each chapter focuses on one of them, and provides motivation and recommendations for incorporating them into your Personal Growth: physical activities, reflective and recreational reading, creative work (music, art, writing), spending time for and by yourself (silence, solitude, meditation), dreamwork, and spending time with others. These chapters may be read in whatever order you choose, depending on what interests you the most.

The last chapter of the book summarizes how Personal Growth can be balanced with leadership responsibilities. It shows how and why such practices need to be incorporated in the preparation of school administrators as well as in professional development programs. The chapter concludes with a list of specific suggestions of how you can begin to do this as a leader in your school or organization. You will be invited to develop an action plan for your own Personal Growth that will result in your becoming a more balanced and fulfilled person, and a better leader for others. In the Resource notes for this chapter we will visit with Principal Steve again in “A Day in the Life of a Balanced Leader.”

Every chapter concludes with a set of Reflections and Exercises from which you may select one or more to make the concepts in that chapter come alive for you in terms of your own practices. All of them have been tried and used by your colleagues in some way. You may adapt them to suit your own style and need. Most of the chapters also include Resource notes where you will find additional information and suggestions, including some graphs from my studies.

I hope you will make a commitment to one or more of the practices in this book. Choose something that fits your style, but also try some of those new to you. Take as much time as you need to develop these, but make them a habit and remain committed to them. Most importantly, don't become discouraged if you don't feel immediate results. It takes a while—maybe a lifetime. But I guarantee that you will find yourself on a wonderful and exciting journey to a profoundly richer and more meaningful life—both personally and professionally.

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