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THE SIX PILLARS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The six pillars of leadership evolved over my twenty years serving as an assistant principal and principal. By working through staff, student, parent, and instructional challenges, I developed the six pillars and always keep them in the forefront of my mind:

1. Vision
2. Relationships
3. Trust
4. Efficacy
5. A student-centered environment
6. Instructional knowledge

I believe the pillars work in concert to form a solid and lasting leadership foundation. They are guideposts for you, and as you build and reinforce each one, you also can develop them in all members of your school community. The pillars enable you to develop a positive school culture that values taking risks, encouraging kindness, raising questions, practicing collaboration, and using communication. The pillars also encourage school community members to view problems as challenges and support one another. They help us recognize that the students we serve deserve to learn in a student-focused environment that values and respects their needs but also works diligently to meet those needs.

My hope is that as you read about the six pillars of leadership they will resonate with you as much as they do with me. They have become my beacon and lead my thinking and reactions as I navigate daily challenges and celebrate the positives I notice. I'm hoping they will become your leadership compass.

The pillars form the foundation of leadership and developing a creative and innovative school culture. It's helpful to reflect on each pillar and how your school integrates the pillar into every aspect of school life. Frequent reflection on the pillars, the challenges you face, and initiatives you're juggling can help you become a proactive leader. Deep reflection brings understanding, and it's possible to change or adjust what you understand. Be

Figure 1.1   The Six Pillars

Vision

Efficacy

Relationships

Student-Centered Environment

Trust

Instructional Knowledge

intentional with your time. Effective leaders intentionally carve out quiet moments to reflect in order to gain insight into myriad problems and challenges faced every day.

Be intentional with your time. #10MinutePrincipal

THE FIRST PILLAR: VISION

If you want to build a ship, then don't drum up men to gather wood, give orders, and divide the work. Rather, teach them to yearn for the far and endless sea.

—Antoine de Saint-Exupery (*The Little Prince,* 1959)

When the principal uses imagination and creativity to develop with staff a clear and concise vision, it's possible to move beyond today's needs and imagine the "far and endless sea." A school's

vision statement is best when it's concise, clear, and explains where the school is heading. Included in your vision statement should be its purpose and the commitments needed to take the journey. One characteristic of effective leadership is for you to collaborate with staff to develop a clear vision.

Starbucks has an excellent example of a vision statement: "Establish Starbucks as the premier purveyor of the finest coffee in the world while maintaining our uncompromising principles as we grow" (Starbucks, 2008). Starbucks communicates a clear and action-focused vision statement; effective schools do the same. Moreover, vision statements work for the present, but also reach for the future.

My school's vision statement is an example of meeting present needs but working toward future needs, stating "Each child is given the opportunity to succeed in a nurturing, positive, and flexible environment created by all staff." The statement focuses staff's energy on continuous instructional improvement to meet the ever-changing needs of students.

To collaboratively create a vision for your school, ask and reflect on these questions: *What does your school want to be? How will you get there? How can you inspire others for this journey?* Your ultimate goal is to develop a collective vision by listening to the comments, questions, and stories of your staff.

Building a Collective Vision

To develop a collective vision among all or most staff, collaborate and create common goals linked to the vision, revisit and adjust goals often, and hold ongoing conversations to assess the staff's needs. Once you are aware of these needs, you can support staff through providing professional development, studying

professional articles, and visiting other schools. A clear collective vision allows you to make decisions, organize shared initiatives, and hire staff aligned with your vision and the school's beliefs.

Your role is to keep the vision alive by communicating it, sharing stories about staff members who exemplify it, and integrating the vision into instructional conversations. Remember, it is always important for you to ask or personally consider whether your decisions, teachers' decisions, or groups' decisions connect to your school's vision. When actions repeatedly don't coordinate with your communicated vision, the vision's meaning wanes, and staff might stop using it as an instructional beacon.

THE SECOND PILLAR: RELATIONSHIPS

The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.

—Teddy Roosevelt

Education is about human interaction, communication, and connections. Think relationships, relationships, relationships! As Roosevelt points out, success depends on how people get along with each other. So the big question is *How do you foster positive relationships among staff?* One experience that enabled me to build better relationships among grade-level teams was to invite teachers to explore ways to find time during the day to work collaboratively on developing project-based learning experiences. You'll find that when you combine clear expectations and turn some leadership over to teachers, relationships build as well as commitment to the initiative. You can reflect on other ways to

have teachers collaborate, such as working with the librarian on updating the collection or with a technology resource teacher to find effective ways for technology to enhance project-based learning. When positive, professional relationships coordinate with your school's vision, community develops and success follows. This happens when you share your leadership vision and turn part of the process over to staff.

Relationship Building

Savvy educators know that students don't learn from teachers they perceive don't like them. The same it true for teachers who resist cooperating with you when they perceive you dislike them. Consider the suggestions in Figure 1.2 for relationship building among staff and students.

Avoid using your positional authority to compel students or staff to comply with a scheduling or instructional decision. Sometimes top-down decisions are tempting because they appear easy. But the fallout from such decisions can take months to repair. Instead, build relationships and trust to create a community committed to supporting your school's vision.

For example, if you want teachers to risk trying new instructional strategies such as inquiry and project-based learning, they need to feel comfortable taking risks. They need to believe that you support them and recognize that mistakes may be part of their best efforts. Your staff's risk taking is highly dependent on how they internalize your communications about risk taking and their observations of you taking risks. If your leadership builds trust and positive relationships, a result can be strong confidence among staff and a willingness to be innovative and creative (Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

Figure 1.2   Relationship Building With Staff and Students

Relationship Building: Staff	Relationship Building: Students
Be an active listener. Listen with the intent of understanding instead of just responding.	Invest time to get to know all students in the building: Be visible when classes change or in the lunchroom, always ready for quick exchange.
Communicate your expectations clearly.	Give specific praise to students when teachers point out their progress.
Be visible in the school and accessible in your office.	Offer specific praise when you observe good behavior.
Continue to get to know your staff as individuals.	Help students understand that they have hope for improving.
Demonstrate positivity in your words and actions.	Have diverse ways for students to connect to the school, such as extracurricular activities and leadership roles.
Strive to be honest and transparent.	Establish formal ways to hear students' opinions, such as a principal–students leadership team.
Attend school functions.	Encourage teachers to display students' work around the building.

THE THIRD PILLAR: TRUST

When we tell people to do their jobs, we get workers. When we trust people to get the job done, we get leaders.

—Simon Sinek (2009)

Relationships are the foundation of trust. When you nurture positive relationships, trust develops. When you help staff and students feel safe at school, when you value their thinking and respect them as individuals, you create a trusting school culture. Simon Sinek (2009) implies that if you trust yourself to nurture positive relationships in your school, you demonstrate a leadership style that focuses on others and values collaboration, communication, and consensus building.

If you make top-down decisions, know that turmoil among staff may occur and trust can diminish. For example, project-based learning (PBL) is certainly a popular instructional method. The question for you to consider is *How can I bring PBL into my building in a manner that builds trust?*

A top-down administrator announces that all teachers will start a PBL project in October, and students will share with other classes at the end of November. Consider the negative impact on trust of top-down decision-making and whether it truly impacts instructional change (most likely, it doesn't). To accomplish this type of innovative practice, it would be better to explore how much your staff members know about PBL, to include staff in professional learning offered, and then give teachers the choice of starting and ending dates. Not only does this increase trust among staff, but it also showcases your inclusive leadership style and encourages taking risks.

The vision of preparing students for their future (not our past) cannot be met if staff are afraid to try new things. You can foster trusting relationships among and between staff and students by making collaborative decisions that can lead to teachers trying current research-based practices. If you want a new and different result in using technology to enhance students' learning, support

your staff with training. But for staff to try new techniques requires risk, a change in their mindset, and modeling by you. When you encourage staff to take risks by making them feel supported and part of the decision-making process, they in turn feel safe to try new methods.

Let me give you an example. It's interesting that the chairman of Jet Blue, in his book on leadership (Peterson & Kaplan, 2016), chose trust as a way to build bonds among workers and to improve corporate culture and customer service. The same is true of schools. A goal of JetBlue was to build high trust because it leads to altruistic decisions and success. For you to create a high-trust school, your decisions need to be in the best interest of students. In addition, your staff need to feel safe and understand they aren't working in a school with a "gotcha" environment. Important to remember: How you manage trust directly affects all members of your school community.

THE FOURTH PILLAR: EFFICACY

They are able who think they are able.

—Virgil

Efficacy is the belief that you and I can make a difference in the lives of students we work with every day. Point out a school where all teachers have high efficacy, and I'll wager their staff and administration are working to meet all students' needs. As Virgil told us more than two thousand years ago, if you believe you can effect change, you will find ways to inspire others to join you.

There are two kinds of efficacy schools need: individual efficacy and collective efficacy. A combination of both can result in staff, administration, students, and parents developing and sustaining a mindset that focuses on making a difference in every aspect of school life. Fostering individual efficacy in your school community starts with you. By developing efficacy within yourself, by reading about and discussing efficacy at team, department, and full faculty meetings, and by integrating it into daily interactions with staff and students, you hold the key to changing and strengthening an individual's efficacy.

Individual Efficacy

When professionals believe it's possible to make a difference in how students learn, show their school spirit, and display their citizenship, they seek new ways to enhance their skills and improve their job performance. Such educators see themselves as learners who want to develop as professionals and explore new ways of teaching and interacting with students, colleagues, parents, and administrators. They understand and accept that all students don't learn new skills at the same time or pace. Equally important, they adjust curriculum to students' needs and provide support. Staff and administrators with these characteristics almost always have a strong sense of efficacy.

Administrators who have strong efficacy can affect the efficacy of the entire school community—teachers, staff, students, parents, and other administrators. Teachers with strong efficacy can develop efficacy among their students. Faith in the capacity of students and the belief in themselves to make a difference

will always be common traits of great teachers. In addition, great teachers work diligently to improve their practice by reading professional materials, observing other teachers, and discussing ideas with like-minded colleagues.

However, an even greater impact is the efficacy of an entire staff—when all and not just a few dedicate themselves to students' success and believe they can make a difference for each student in their school.

Collective Efficacy

This moves from the individual to all staff in a school or, even better, in a school division. When all staff believe they can impact learning and help students find success, then every student can improve. John Hattie has conducted a meta-analysis of what factors most influence student achievement. With an effect size of 1.57, collective total efficacy is ranked as the *number-one* factor influencing student achievement (Hattie, 2016). Just as with school culture, collective efficacy does not happen by accident. For collective efficacy to take hold in a school, it must be led by the principal. Research has clearly proven that students learn and achieve better in schools that have staff with high collective efficacy.

Every student who attends school in America or any country deserves a teacher and a school that believes in his or her capacity to learn and grow. Let me bring this back to you: It is impossible to find a school with high collective efficacy led by a principal who does not believe and, most importantly, communicate the same.

THE FIFTH PILLAR: A STUDENT-CENTERED ENVIRONMENT

There is an emphasis on doing things right rather than on doing the right things.

—Thomas Sergiovanni (1992)

Put students at the center of your thinking when developing a student-centered environment. Equally important is for you to find opportunities to include students in some decisions. For example, when planning a school spirit week, if you and teachers decide what will happen, most likely students won't buy into the plan. However, you can use students' suggestions gathered from a student leadership group, review their ideas, develop and conduct a survey among students, and then use the top results for your spirit week.

I have known teachers who believed they were doing things right, but their notion of right wasn't always best for students. I recall a science teacher who planned his lessons, tests, assignments, and homework for the entire school year—definitely not student-centered. He stressed out when we missed school for a snow day because it messed up the sequence of his lessons. This is an extreme example, but I share it with you to point out rigidity has little place in education. Rigid educators are not student-centered. Student-centered teachers certainly plan in advance, but they know plans are not written in stone. What they do know is that plans change based on the formative data gathered from students each day. All day long, you'll be making decisions that affect the environment and culture of your school. Be thoughtful and take time.

When you approach decision-making, you need to ask yourself these questions: *Are my decisions good for students? Am I helping teachers understand the WHY behind my decisions?* In

Figure 1.3 Strategies for Developing a Student-Centered Environment

Principal's Student Leadership Opportunities	Teachers' Student-Centered Instructional Practices
Create an appointed student leadership council.	Differentiate instruction with an emphasis on choice.
Have an elected student government.	Use learning style inventories.
Train a student news team.	Use flexible seating negotiated between the teacher and students.
Create student mentoring opportunities.	Negotiate deadlines.
Develop peer mediation programs.	Retake and redo opportunities.
Promote community service opportunities.	Evaluate grading based on mastery.
Organize a National Honor Society program.	Do self-evaluation and peer editing.
Create a student ambassador program to assist with after-school functions.	Include genius hour opportunities.
Provide opportunities for students to work on the school's yearbook and literary magazine.	Offer project-based learning.

a student-centered environment, you make decisions that are in the best interests of students. Here's a classic example that occurs during testing time. Do you design the schedule for students' success? Or do you design a schedule that appeases faculty by keeping planning periods intact? A student-centered school adopts Sergiovanni's (1992) position, and you and teachers collaborate to make decisions that are best for students. In Figure 1.3, you will

find some student leadership options and instructional practices you can consider when working with staff to develop a student-centered environment. However, if your staff need to transition from teacher-centered to student-centered, you will need to provide ongoing professional learning for this change to occur.

By now, I'm sure you see similarities when comparing a classroom to a school. A rigid classroom and a flexible learner-focused classroom both impact learning, as well as the school's environment and culture. In general, compliance, strict rules, rigid grading systems, and limited instructional methods define rigid school structures. In contrast, student-centered schools embrace collaborative ways of learning, are inclusive, creative, innovative, and emphasize the importance of instructional knowledge.

THE SIXTH PILLAR: INSTRUCTIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be ignited.

—Plutarch

Instructional knowledge includes strategies teachers can use to engage and motivate students in their learning. There's a wide range of instructional strategies that work across the curriculum, such as inquiry learning, discussion groups, book clubs, integrating technology to enhance learning, and offering choice in reading, projects, and writing topics. These are but a few, and it's your responsibility to ensure that teachers have a range and depth of knowledge of instructional strategies so they can integrate them into lessons. If not, instruction will mirror their personal experiences.

I was a great history student—at least, this is what I thought of myself every Friday when I was in high school. The year was 1983. Each week was the same in my class: notes on Monday and Tuesday with accompanying lectures; Wednesday was worksheet day; and Thursday we played games to prepare us for the Friday multiple choice test. Some students did well, and some did not. But each week ended with a test, and the following Monday we moved forward.

Thirty-five years later was my first year as principal of my current school. There I was, in a history classroom, doing an observation of a revered veteran staff member. Notes, lectures, and (as I learned during our post-observation meeting), tests every Friday—no different from what I experienced more than thirty-five years ago. All school leaders need to understand our students deserve better.

If your goal is to light the fire of learning among students in your school, you need to embrace ongoing learning for yourself and your staff. The principal as instructional leader and a staff of followers can never be as strong as a school where the principal encourages instructional leadership among all staff. Carrying the weight of being the only instructional leader or the "expert" on instructional knowledge is too large a burden, and it does not empower others to grow. Seek out ways to share leadership by growing capacity in others. Moreover, by committing to the growth of your staff, you empower them to have a positive impact on students.

According to Michael Fullan (2010), "Successful principals develop others in a way that is integrated into the work of the school" (p. 14). You hold the power to create a culture in which you are the leader among leaders or among followers

and resisters. As an instructional leader, your primary goal is to develop the instructional capacity of every teacher through conversations, observations, professional learning, and staff sharing what works for them. It's the principal's job to have pedagogical knowledge but also to inspire staff to become ongoing learners. The question to reflect on is *How does the principal accomplish this?* My suggestion is to continually assess your school's performance, look at data indicators, and have conversations with staff to determine instructional needs. To reach this goal each school year, I suggest you develop with staff a coordinated professional development plan that addresses the needs of your building. This has to occur annually since needs will change.

As your school's instructional leader, it's key to always address and improve the state of the six pillars. If the six pillars are strong and you inspire staff to improve and refine their craft, then they will most likely accept the additional effort required to improve instruction. Here are a few suggestions for targeted professional development based on the needs of your building. The suggestions that follow can enable you to achieve the goals you and staff developed and can be scheduled during scheduled faculty meetings, professional development days, and team and department meetings:

- Engage a professional consultant over a period of time to provide support in your building to your staff. Doing this means everyone receives training.
- Form expert groups among your staff so people can learn from each other.

- Organize books and/or professional article studies with discussion, reflection, and application opportunities.
- Encourage and model how professional learning networks through social media can enhance professional learning.

The principal and administrative team should attend all building-level professional learning and send the message that improvement, learning, and change are for all school staff. In addition, it's crucial for the principal and other administrators to have a deep understanding of instructional changes so they can purchase materials and know what to look for when visiting classrooms.

At the end of the day, you want to develop teachers who bring something unique to your school. You might think like this: If you have a dinner party and each person is asked to bring something, some will bring a great homemade dish, others will purchase a side of coleslaw, and a few won't bring anything.

Closing Thoughts

You want people on your team who bring something special to your table, your school. And those who bring little? You will need to think hard on this because what others see you as tolerant of gives them permission to do the same. When you work with staff to integrate the six pillars into every aspect of school life, you create a positive, consensus-building school culture.

The six pillars are the foundation for *The Ten-Minute Principal* and our journey together.

10-MINUTE REFLECTIONS ON OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

- How does your leadership style include some or all of the six pillars?
- Can you pinpoint an area that you can work on with staff (such as being more inclusive, improving communication, etc.)? What might be your first steps?
- Are you and staff thinking with a student-first mindset? Are there changes that can occur through conversations and planning together?