Preface

LEADERSHIP FOR ORDINARY FOLKS

Not only does leadership matter, it is second only to teaching among school-related factors influencing student achievement, according to a 2004 report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). By setting clear direction, developing people, and creating conditions that support, rather than inhibit, teaching and learning, high-quality leaders work vicariously through others to move their organizations forward.

It is widely recognized today that educational leadership is more than 24 units of coursework and a master's degree. In the broadest sense, leadership has been described as

> the process wherein an individual member of an organization influences the interpretation of events, the choice of strategies, the [arrangement] of work activities, the motivation of people to achieve objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships, the development of skills and competence, and the enlistment of support from people outside the group. (Yukl, 1998, p. 5)

The question that remains is, how can contemporary leaders zero in on what is necessary, what is nice, and what has got to go?

The canvas of school leadership is painted with many names and faces. Words like *instructional, moral, participatory, servant, ethical, distributed,* and *transformational* capture the different approaches for getting the job done. Unfortunately, so many labels can take leaders off course in search of a magic formula for success. Trying to match one particular method to good leadership hides the more important themes inherent in doing what is right, irrespective of a given style or attribute. Thankfully, effective practices are now defined with empirical data to help leaders keep their eye on learning.

Educational leaders are keenly aware of the important work that must be done to provide a strong foundation for young people so that they leave

high school equipped to lead productive and fulfilling lives. The difficulty lies in establishing boundaries to stay healthy and resilient in carrying out this momentous charge. One imposing obstacle comes from all the gadgetry that keeps busy executives connected to their jobs around the clock. With the cyber world taking over the workplace like a fast-moving comet, it is tough to know when we are actually on duty and when we are not. Like disposable lighters, some of us continue to burn until our flame runs out. Going unplugged now and again gives administrators the chance to catch their breath.

Whether you are a superintendent striving to visit schools regularly, a principal struggling to get into classrooms more often, or a central office manager waiting for things to slow down to take a vacation, administrators are hesitant to leave their offices because doing so parlays into additional work when they return. Adding to the dilemma is the reality that there is always some distraction that beckons people away from meaningful activities toward less important—yet seemingly urgent—matters. *Setting Leadership Priorities* is designed to provide readers with the courage and wherewithal to either (a) step back from the fray, (b) ask, "Who is better equipped to handle this problem?" or (c) say "no thank you" without feeling guilty about it. When leaders take a time-out, they invariably come back with a fresh perspective.

As ordinary folks, it is time to draw a line in the sand by simplifying more and anguishing less. Contrary to what has been said about superhuman expectations and growing shortages of qualified candidates, a career in school administration is for regular mortals. Setting your sights on retaining what really matters, refining what needs tweaking, and relinquishing what has become obsolete create the power and potential to achieve your goals. Clearly, you cannot be all things to all people. Therefore, these pages are intended to help you make informed choices about what you are and are not going to be!