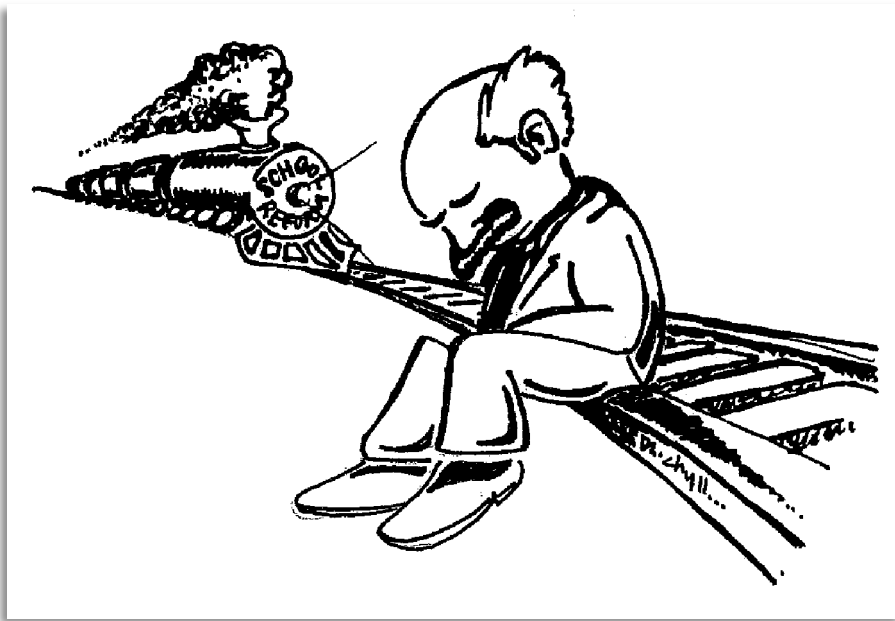# Preface

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

—Will Rogers (American Humorist)

This book is intended for use by practicing school administrators and those preparing for such roles. Its central purpose is to help provide these leaders with the knowledge and means to cultivate the personal qualities and characteristics that will enable them to lead their schools to greatness. The prime focus of the discussions and strategies that follow is on the site leader, although the maxims and principles presented are applicable to all leadership positions in educational administration.

There are many fine, well-researched textbooks on educational leadership currently available. As authors of this book, we do not intend to add another textbook to the list. Rather, we have created what should be considered a practical "how to" book meant to assist practicing and aspiring leaders in acquiring the personal leadership characteristics and qualities of the best school leaders. These personal characteristics and qualities are identified in our research and presented in *From Good Schools to Great Schools: What Their Principals Do Well* (Gray & Streshly, 2008).

A UNIQUE FOCUS ON GREATNESS

This book takes up where the first book left off. It provides the reader with sound, tested strategies for developing the personal competencies associated with highly successful leadership. We debunk the widely held belief that truly great school leaders are born, not made. Our in-depth conversations with these dynamic leaders tell us that the indispensible qualities and dispositions of highly successful administrators *can* be learned.

The strategies and activities suggested in each chapter of this book can be taught formally as part of an administrator preparation program, or they can be used by the individual reader to independently learn—and practice—the qualities, characteristics, and dispositions of great leaders. Each chapter, for example, contains case studies, personal leadership activities, and reflections on leadership that constitute rich resources for a credential program instructor's class preparation or for independent study.

This book is not a comprehensive discussion of the school administrator's job. There is virtually no mention of school law, educational finance, curriculum management, instructional organization, or other technical aspects of our school systems. Instead, this book focuses on those personal forces that make all the other parts work well.

RESEARCH ON HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL LEADERS

This book is also not a compilation of craft knowledge. We agree with the researchers who have identified the skill of the CEO or the principal as a prime factor in the success of a business or school (Collins, 2001; Fullan, 2008), but we reject the various compilations of state and national standards based on surveys of practicing administrators in the field. Most of these are simply guesses about what seems to make sense and are validated by the same people who made the guesses in the first place (English, 2005). In contrast, other research projects, such as the one directed by Collins, have scrutinized very successful operations in the private sector in order to learn what makes them great. Collins' best-selling book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, points to the personal leadership characteristics of CEOs as the catalytic agents kindling corporate greatness.

In the original research for our book, *From Good Schools to Great Schools: What Their Principals Do Well*, we used Collins' in-depth, qualitative approach to identify the leadership characteristics of highly successful school principals. What ensued was a series of intimate and insightful conversations with a select group of principals representing some of the best in the country.

HOW THIS BOOK SUPPORTS AND DIFFERS FROM THE ORIGINAL GOOD SCHOOLS TO GREAT SCHOOLS

This book differs from our original book in that it focuses sharply on strategies you, the reader, might use to acquire those special personal qualities and dispositions that the research tells us have the most profound impact on leading an educational institution to true greatness. Our research process in this book included additional interviews with other well-regarded school leaders, including the principals of elementary and secondary charter schools. These activities honed our awareness that other personal characteristics may be advantageous to a principal guiding a faculty to greater achievement in various circumstances. Nevertheless, this book is about acquiring the essentials—the universal qualities and dispositions of great leaders. Chapters 2 through 7 are devoted to providing detailed strategies and activities for doing this. To assist you in your efforts to inculcate these leadership attributes in your personal behavior as a principal, the chapters begin with self-assessments designed to encourage reflection on personal leadership skills development (for example, see Chapter 2, page 10).

When we first began this project, we asked ourselves the question, "If we know what needs to be done to produce great schools, why can't we do it?" No one disputes that we have a large body of research and professional knowledge about the technical aspects of the school principal's job. We know how to develop curriculum, balance our accounts, manage our employee contracts, and complete most of the other tasks principals face. Why, then, do we fail? Why don't our schools lead the world?

The answer lies with the leadership skills of our principals. Chapter 1 of this book provides an introduction to Collins' research on private sector CEOs, which inspired our study of high-performing school principals. The chapter also presents a brief summary of the personal leadership qualities and characteristics we discovered our highly successful principals held in common. We were not surprised that many of the personal leadership characteristics of the high-performing private sector CEOs were found among our high-performing principals as well. The one exception to this was the quasi-political skill in building relationships.

Using a case study as a foundation, Chapter 2 reviews some of the pertinent research on building human relationships in organizations and presents ideas gleaned from our high-performing principals. Strategies for building relationships among members of a school's faculty and staff are outlined in three parts focusing on primary aspects of on-campus human relations: building trust, promoting healthy interpersonal communication, and managing constructive conflict.

Chapter 3 zeroes in on how to do what you know must be done while keeping your ego in check and maintaining proper humility. Upholding high standards steadfastly is the source of a great leader's inspiration. Personal humility, which includes crediting others in the organization for its success, is a hallmark of high-performing school principals.

Confronting brutal facts about your school's operations is the focus of Chapter 4. The emphasis is on planning and implementing actions to deal with weaknesses. In the final analysis, these become the opportunities for a great principal to make a positive difference.

A principal's human resources challenges are examined next in Chapter 5. Strategies are explored for getting the right self-disciplined people on your staff—and the wrong ones off.

Chapter 6 deals with leading your staff to success by marshalling its forces and concentrating efforts on accomplishing the school's primary mission. You will learn how to use the "Hedgehog Concept" identified by Collins for the private sector and modified to pertain to education in the *From Good Schools to Great Schools* study.

In Chapter 7 you will learn to put it all together. You will explore the sharing of responsibility and accountability. Strategies for building a culture of self-discipline will be described along with activities designed to help you execute these strategies.

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses what constitutes good preparation for school leaders. This chapter contains ideas about leadership training that should be considered by administrative credential candidates seeking high-level preparation. Also included in this chapter is a handy table containing 20 rules of conduct for the beginning principal—tips for success from the best principals we studied.

Valuable resources are included at the end of the book. Resources A, B, and C contain a summary of our research methodology, including interview questions; Resource D is a list of suggested readings.