
Preface

Why This Book? Why Now?

*Anything less than a conscientious commitment to the important
is an unconscious commitment to the unimportant.*

*. . . we get busier and busier doing “good” things and never even
stop to ask ourselves if what we’re doing really matters most.*

Stephen R. Covey, award-winning author

It’s easy for school administrators to lose their way in today’s tumultuous educational environment. There are so many diversions and distractions. So many problems, pressures, and conflicting interests. So many momentary crises. So many regulations. So much paperwork. So much red tape. (Have I left anything out?) It’s no wonder that school leaders find it increasingly difficult to stay on track and to keep in mind what really matters most.

How many administrators have you known who entered the profession, the principalship or the superintendency following a star—only to end up mucking around in the mud, lost in the mire of administrivia. None of us want that to happen to our careers.

All principals and superintendents want to keep the main thing the main thing. But like all leaders, school officials need an occasional pep talk or refresher course to rekindle their passion, renew their perspective, refocus on their priorities and revive their sense of purpose. That’s why this book was written.

We hear a lot these days about principle-centered leadership and value-driven organizations. But what principles? What values? What are the ideas and ideals that never change?

They are all right here in this single, compact volume. Each page is a wake-up call or heads-up reminding school leaders of the simple, guiding

truths and timeless values that made them want to become educators in the first place.

The only way to stay grounded is to remember—to recall what you're about, why you're about it, how it came about, and what it is all about—and, by remembering, keep your priorities straight, keep your head in the game, and do what matters most every day.

Ships need anchors most when seas are roughest. So do school leaders. This book is about anchors.

It is also about reawakening, renewing, refocusing, reconnecting, and recommitting. More important, it is a survival guide for the soul of every school leader. What principal or superintendent doesn't need a boost like that?

There are many books advising administrators about what to do and how to do it. But not many resources remind them of why they are doing it. Most books for school leaders are like tool kits. This one is more like a compass.

You may have heard the old joke about the airline pilot who came over the intercom and informed passengers, "We are lost; but we're making good time." Some schools are like that too. That's where this guide comes in. It is one of the few flight manuals available to help the pilots of the nation's schools avoid deviating from their original flight plan and becoming lost in the process. ("Where you're headed is more important than how fast you're going." —Stephen R. Covey.)

There is always a need for books of practical tips, techniques, and strategies. But there is also an important place for hard-earned wisdom and lasting truths. That's what this book has to offer that is different.

What Matters Most for School Leaders is a compact guide of 25 fundamental insights and baseline beliefs that never change. Basically, it is a primer on what is truly important for today's school leaders at all levels.

Each section showcases a different commonsense cornerstone principle or life lesson of school leadership, reinforced by real-world examples from successful schools and practical tips on how to concentrate on what counts and apply what's most important on the job every day.

This is a how-to book—not how to do the daily chores of school management, but how to stay focused on what really matters.

There is nothing much new in this little book. But there are a lot of forgotten truths—freshly viewed and packaged in modern-day terms—to help school leaders stay the course and stay on course.

What Matters Most for School Leaders is aimed at all school administrators who have ever felt lost and confused, feared they were wasting their time and their careers, or simply asked themselves, "What am I doing here and why am I doing it?" That's just about every principal and superintendent everywhere. If you are one of them, this book is for you. After all, you matter too!