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The Touchstone

Standard Bearer and Institutional Anchor

During our conversations with principals, it became apparent that many viewed themselves as leaders with a clear mission to develop exemplary schools by nurturing adult and student learning. The *Touchstone* archetype represents leaders recognized for their experience, expertise, and reflective nature. As symbols of stability, reliability, and trust, Touchstone leaders acknowledge that learning communities must embrace change in order to excel as contemporary organizational cultures.

A number of leaders with whom we spoke created metaphors that resonated with the Touchstone archetype. The *Quiltmaker* is an elementary school principal who viewed her work initially as the eye in the center of a hurricane with a multitude of school issues spinning off and around her. Yet as she continued to play with metaphor, she realized that the essence of her leadership was best characterized by the notion of putting patches together to create a large quilt that represented the school. Her perspective was to look holistically at the full dimensions of her milieu and to fashion from that fabric a mosaic of attitudes, skills, and commitments she adeptly wove into a common vision and sense of purpose. Subsequent to her interview, the Quiltmaker was energized and felt compelled to create an acrostic poem that enhanced her leadership metaphor while simultaneously connecting the patchwork of behaviors that defined her work:

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Simmering like a pot of stew—always thinking

Undulating like a snake—constant motion—stretching the limits—
moving sideways and then forward

Zesty like a spicy cinnamon stick—challenging minds

Ably facilitating

Nurturing like a mother—allowing her children to venture with
the knowledge that school, like home, is a safe harbor

Contrast the Touchstone archetype with a middle school principal's metaphor as the *Public Piñata*. "While I see myself as an agent for change," he says, "I recognize the responsibility inherent in accepting criticism when moving us forward." His focus is encouraging new ideas, allowing safe risk-taking with curriculum development and grant writing for technology integration. He points proudly to a number of curriculum innovations that have inspired his teachers and students. A Fresh Pond unit created opportunities for teaming that led to additional interdisciplinary planning and instruction. A new literacy collaborative with a local university also informed pedagogy at his school.

While he is keenly aware of his critics from the community, the Public Piñata understands that it's his job to serve as a heat shield, to protect his staff from the distractions of pervasive community disapproval for educational initiatives he views as addressing the needs of both his students and his faculty. Rather than reacting to the pressures of dissatisfaction, this principal recognizes the transient nature of his community's initial distrust of educational innovation. As a Touchstone archetype, the Public Piñata understands that "positive educational change often takes time."

The *Leader of the Lesson of the Geese* characterizes himself as an over-achiever who focuses on accomplishment through change, "one kid, one parent, one teacher at a time." His military background instructs his sense of responsibility as a junior high school principal. "I've made staff changes, space changes, and program changes," he acknowledges proudly. "My goal is to develop a climate of achievement and success, to change the image of our school." As the new leader of the school, he is adept at identifying a pervasive attitude among staff that the status quo is OK and doesn't require improvement. "Good enough always has to be better," he states. His vision is to change adult expectations of themselves and their students, and he draws on the theory of the geese to drive his point home.

As a 20-year army pilot, he likens his new work to the formation of a flock of geese. He admits there's a paradox with the image. "While I believe

leadership should be shared, it's my job to be the one leading the way. If someone falls out of formation, it's my responsibility to make sure they get support. The formation of the geese means everyone steps up to take the lead because we all know the vision." As a Touchstone archetype, this leader is invested in change that focuses on shifting people's views of themselves and inspiring a more community-based mission and sense of school pride.

The *Climate Design Engineer* is an elementary school principal who acknowledges his strong spiritual belief about the inherent value of people. He points to a list of the school's core values posted on the wall in his office. Under Community it states: "We believe our lives are richer when we are part of a community. That community can be as small as our family or school, as large as our country or world. Our community is strengthened when we cooperate, respect community standards, include everyone, resolve conflict and give of ourselves in a spirit of service."

Spiritual values are at the heart of this leader's intrinsic beliefs. He is a devout Roman Catholic who prepared for the priesthood prior to becoming an educator. "Each human being is a reflection of God's love," he says. "That's how I see every person." This personal credo underscores the school vision. It's what led to the establishment of the school's core values. He confides that his predecessor was controlling and created distrust among the staff. Conflicts arose between groups within the school and frequently characterized the interactions between faculty members. Cliques evolved in response to the former principal's directives.

When the Climate Design Engineer became principal, his primary aim was to unite the staff. "I discussed with teachers what I would do to change the atmosphere in the building and elicited from them what they would also do. From those discussions, people began working more collaboratively." He discussed a variety of accomplishments that demonstrated the new sense of unity and pointed to an evaluation rubric he and the faculty developed as an example of his sense of shared leadership. "By showing people I cared about them personally and professionally, we developed a level of trust that has allowed me to move our school in a more positive direction educationally and institutionally. It's my responsibility to ensure none of us waver from that purpose."

EXEMPLARS OF THE TOUCHSTONE ARCHETYPE

To understand more profoundly the dimensions of the Touchstone archetype, we have provided two essays by principals willing to share their perspectives with our readers. We felt it was important to listen to the voices of those leaders in our schools who model reflective thinking about their work and who have discovered metaphor as an informative language for

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exposing the spiritual values and personal myths that have influenced their professional journeys and accomplishments.

The *U.S. Ambassador of Change* represents perhaps the most powerful illustration of the Touchstone archetype. This middle school principal continues to be informed in best instructional and administrative practices. She is reflective about her role as an institutional leader. She is admired for her sensitive consideration of student and adult needs. Her leadership style reflects a commitment to provide clear direction, remaining steadfast and devoted to the change process in the face of resistance. During challenging and confusing times, the U.S. Ambassador of Change is undaunted. She exudes confidence that problems can be creatively addressed when viewed as opportunities for learning and growth. Her ability to describe the relevance of her metaphor to her professional work represented for us an inspired piece of writing and an insightful reflection for readers to consider.

We also introduce David, a principal in his eighth year as leader of his school. David's representation as a Touchstone archetype provides a different context for how an individual relies on their unique blend of strategies to move their organization forward. In David's case, he attempts for the first time to use metaphoric reframing to expose an old pattern of negative responses to issues of change confronting his school. David introduces us to a metaphor not uncommon in many of our schools today: the victim mythology.

U.S. AMBASSADOR OF CHANGE

by Kathleen Laureti

Whether situational or physical, controlled or imposed, change is an inevitable ingredient of life. The benchmark of an effective school leader is often measured by her relationship *with* and *to* this evolutionary phenomenon. Indeed, no experienced administrator can negatively answer the question "While serving as a principal, has anything changed?" because the very nature of education is fraught with planned and unplanned, predictable and unpredictable occurrences.

Despite the body of literature that has been written about both leadership and the process of change, I have observed that the manner in which a school official *reacts to, promotes, plans, orchestrates, implements, and finesses* change is uniquely individual and embedded within the ethos of her culture. The manner is endemic to her core values about people, their dispositions, and their level of collaboration. And because education is a people enterprise, it is incumbent upon the leader to view change not as a maelstrom for admonishment but as an opportunity for

courtship. Hence a metaphor for school leadership: I have become an “ambassador,” because the connotation is synonymous with diplomacy.

Personal History

Recent life changes have given shape and substance to this philosophy.

Well into the adolescent phase of school leadership, having survived my six years of administrative infancy, I was suddenly faced with a life-threatening brain aneurysm in April 1999. It shook my world and forced me to stop, think, and consider. This life change imposed the issues of rest and soul-searching upon me. Prior to this event, I was far too busy for contemplation and self-reflection. Needing only caffeine and nicotine for energy, my metabolism allowed me to race through each day with the energy of an adolescent and embrace each evening with similar ebullience. My 15-week hiatus from the educational foray, however, created a dance for another day . . . something softer, more graceful and contemplative, perhaps a waltz rather than a jitterbug.

It was also during these weeks of rest and reflection that I was asked by the eighth grade class of 1999 to be their keynote graduation speaker. As this was to be my first venture outside my home since the surgery, my confidence level was extremely low, as was my choice for topics. I was convinced that the nuances of brain surgery were not appropriate for an adolescent celebration. Drawing upon childhood experiences, my relationships with my family, sibling jealousies, and our 13 moves up and down the eastern seaboard causing me to attend three different high schools, I settled on the topic of my Italian father’s rise to successful graduation from MIT as a fitting graduation speech.

While involved in the writing, I gave deep thought to my dad, his brilliance, and his determination, preservation, and devotion to education. Overcoming his own lack of confidence and poverty, he braved his frontiers and advanced in degrees, finally earning a PhD from MIT. Surely I too could overcome my lack of confidence and give the class of 1999 a speech robust with meaning and substance. I delivered a message to those students, parents, and faculty members for which many stood to applaud and some even shed a tear or two. After my speech I was sent immediately back to the couch for another five weeks of recuperation.

As I rested I continued to think of my father, who apparently had given me gifts I never even realized: quiet determination and a commitment to inspire people by recognizing their strengths rather than their weaknesses. During these weeks of contemplation the fog dissipated, and I became more focused, more visionary, and more in rhythm in both the personal and professional realms, for the connection between the two is virtually symbiotic.

They say that things happen in threes, and my life in 1999 exemplified this adage, for I first developed the illness, I later experienced an epiphany, and by midsummer I was offered a new principal position and a chance

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to dance, if you will, the dance of diplomacy. No time was more perfect. Still smarting from their brief but highly charged previous administration, the staff at my new school had abandoned ship in large numbers. One-third of the teachers had resigned, some for parallel positions elsewhere, others disillusioned and discouraged with the profession. Several remaining staff members were angry and felt betrayed that their new leader had stayed only one year, having concluded that there was a pathology among the teachers that was contagious and counterproductive to all reform efforts.

In a school functioning for 25 years under the same principal, the teachers, then finding themselves embroiled in the midst of imposed and radical reform for one year, were quite skeptical, and rightly so, of yet another new principal. Before unpacking my boxes, I drafted an introductory memo to vacationing staff members telling them of my appointment, my summer schedule, and my interest in meeting with them to talk "school." Many accepted my offer.

There seemed to be no end to their subjects of conversation, and most of their questions asked the same thing: "What is your leadership style, and how will you treat people?" Their message was crystal clear to me: would I choose to *pump them up* or *tear them down*? From the outset, I selected the former and listened to them with interest. I maintained a journal and actively recorded each conversation. Working from a template that I had designed, I documented the major points of each conversation and used this information to formulate my opening statements at the first faculty meeting on August 30, 1999.

Realizing that we *all* had been wounded either figuratively or literally, I focused my message on the needs of the middle school student. I was optimistic in relating our collective approach to students, yet cognizant of my need to be supportive and compassionate with staff while understanding the "magic" they perform each and every day. Weaving the words of Maya Angelou in her opening comments to the nation's educators at the 1993 ASCD Conference in Washington, D.C., into my speech, I told my staff that "working with middle school children is doing God's work, and each of you should be instantaneously canonized when your time comes."

With her inspiring words still ringing in their ears, my reluctant staff quite nervously began to express their passion, their experience, and their wisdom. It was a good way to begin a new year, and I felt excited to be able to relieve their anxiety and direct them toward a positive future. My exuberance was not unlike the feeling I had experienced just two months earlier while addressing the middle school graduates and expounding on the virtues of my father's determination, bravery, knowledge, and definition of self . . . or at least an idea of what my self could become.

Five years hence I reflect upon my metaphor and why I liken myself to an ambassador. I think about the consistency I have brought to my school, the empowerment and latitude I have given teachers, the respect I have for their individual genius and collective brilliance. I think of the many changes we

have lived through . . . those we have embraced and others we have endured. I believe we are all stronger for having survived them.

Working Metaphor

It is fairly easy and very beneficial to extend goodwill and dance the “diplomatic waltz” when one’s staff members are feeling good about the work that they do and when public perception is positive and supportive. It becomes increasingly more challenging to offer ambassadorial feedback when people, programs, and policies are under attack. In the fall of 1999, public perception of our middle school was fairly positive. The previous administrator had put into practice many new policies and procedures for the betterment of students, and although internally staff members were still recovering from the myriad of changes, externally we were viewed as progressive, visionary, and far more student centered.

Given this upward trend in public perception, I thought I would continue to foster this forward thinking by embarking on a curricular mapping quest. As the new principal, I was curious to see our curriculum and the manner in which educators approached curricular issues. Utilizing the research of Heidi Hayes Jacobs, I ordered her book for everyone, presented workshops, and trained teachers. I provided opportunities for faculty to converse about *what* they teach and *when* they teach.

After much discussion and rich dialogue, I asked staff to analyze their results and draw some conclusions, hoping our conclusions would be similar. They realized there were areas within the curriculum that were duplicated and other sections of the curriculum where extreme gaps existed. As a united faculty we set out to right these wrongs, by eliminating all duplication and filling in the gaps; we also created assessment instruments that asked students to rehearse, apply, and extend their knowledge. We formed essential questions for each subject area and coordinated our work with the state frameworks. With most people sharing the vision and the purpose, we continued until we felt that many of our core curriculum areas were solidified and were ready to be integrated.

Teachers felt good about the work they had done. They were invigorated and excited to begin making the necessary changes for a spiraling curriculum that built on students’ previous knowledge and skills. As I reflect on the success of this endeavor, I am cognizant of the timing, structure, purpose, and balance of the initiative. Timing was important because people were ready to continue their upward trend under a new leader with a new agenda. Likewise, they welcomed a structure that valued research, provided resources and training, and created opportunities for experienced educators to dialogue with one another. Results were immediate, and remedies were quickly sought.

Through the ensuing years, I have had many opportunities to deal with the concept of change and to dance the dance of diplomacy. In those

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instances where I *controlled* the phenomenon of change, I could set the stage, choose the moment, prepare the staff, and orchestrate the initiative with minimum difficulty. I could delegate tasks and capitalize on the strengths of each participant. I could rely on previous successes and reflect on those journal entries to provide guidance and direction. Hence I could be the ambassador and extend a glad hand to those responsible for implementing change.

Stressed Metaphor

Unfortunately, there have also been many instances in which the metaphor has failed drastically, and the thoughts behind it, despite their good intentions, have faded into nothingness. Taking center stage are all the changes that have been imposed in an untimely and ambiguous fashion, those mandated by the state or federal agencies that have legal implications and tentacles that seem to multiply over time. I refer specifically to those unexpected and situational changes that leaders must massage and finesse as they create a path of least resistance.

The stress involved in this metaphor is often coupled with the realization that one cannot be a goodwill ambassador in every situation, for education is not a hard science, and despite the wealth of seminal research that abounds on every subject, most positions can be argued. Given the multitude of issues facing educational leaders in this new millennium—high-stakes testing, equal access to the curriculum, assessment, and community perception—seldom are we afforded the luxury to plan, strategize, market, and finesse each change that comes our way.

One particular example of a time when goodwill failed to motivate, inspire, or even encourage teachers was when I shared with my lead teachers the idea of reinstating a long-forgotten administrative policy. This policy asked students to evaluate their teachers twice a year using a well-crafted rubric. As a principal who advocates private and personal reflection, I did not require that the results be shared with me. Rather, I wanted teachers to listen to their students and value their input as a means of further improving their teaching practice. Student voices are powerful, and many educational leaders believe students, families, and the community serve as our customers; therefore they should be given an opportunity to state their opinions. As my present school exemplifies a community school, I expected that staff—in particular my lead or “master” teachers—would share my belief.

However, it was soon clear that my teachers were clearly not sharing my point of view and that my powers of persuasion and articulation were not working. After heavy dialogue followed by a heated debate, I mandated that all teachers have their student evaluations of themselves completed before checking out at the end of the year. I further stated that, in the future, *all* staff would have their first student–teacher evaluations

completed before the end of the first semester. Likewise, in an effort to model behavior, create equity, and restore balance, I mentioned that I too would value their feedback of my performance as their principal.

As I wrote these pages, reluctant staff members were beginning to conduct these evaluations. I had to resign myself to the fact that not all decisions are popular ones . . . similar to the manner in which L. Paul Bremer, the overseer of Iraq's reconstruction, must have been anticipating his post in Iraq. For although a skilled negotiator, his *goodwill* was not without limits, as he faced the challenge of creating the trappings of a democracy while ensuring that a fundamentalist Islamic government did not win control over the country. I was pondering just exactly what Mr. Bremer might have been willing to risk for the sake of modeling behavior, creating equity, and restoring balance, for as I believe the U.S. Ambassador is a doable and even valiant metaphor, over time any image becomes tarnished, and it is clear that leaders—all leaders—must revisit their relationship *with* and *to* this phenomenon of change to restore clarity of vision.

REFLECTIONS ON THE U.S. AMBASSADOR OF CHANGE

When words do not come easily to the page, some often start by examining words and word relationships. If you head to www.dictionary.com and type in *ambassador*, you'll see the familiar definitions. However, when you examine the word through a thesaurus, some interesting relationships are revealed. Under the entry *agent*, *ambassador* is listed as a synonym, and the only antonym provided is *principal*.

As our Ambassador is a diplomat or the highest-ranking official, it's interesting to note how she operates. Even in her style of writing, the Ambassador gathers and states the facts: "change is an inevitable ingredient of life." The Ambassador assesses the conditions of the environment and responds accordingly.

The Ambassador also chooses powerful words that have meaning and carry strength, words that cannot easily be misinterpreted. As she reflects on her gifts, she identifies the qualities of "quiet determination," "recognizing strengths," "visionary," and "focus." The Ambassador communicates from inner strength and conviction. There is never panic or put-downs. Even through a whirlwind of events and emotions, the Ambassador understands the endgame and navigates toward that end.

The Ambassador also inspires and listens. Through the use of words and the ability to trust and assess through observation, the Ambassador keeps a pulse on the issues, taps into common goals, and calls upon people's talents to achieve a desired outcome. The Ambassador uses a template,

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documents major points, and formulates a game plan to execute a diplomatic process for change.

The Ambassador realizes that curriculum alignment is needed in her school. Operationally, she brings a firm process to the situation: collect data, understand the lay of the land, educate, work, and change. This is the Ambassador at her finest, engaging participants to understand a process and work toward a goal.

However, being an Ambassador is not always easy. If anything, the Ambassador must have great nerve and fortitude. Many times she must negotiate diplomatically through waves of emotions and fears. But there is no moving the Ambassador from the fundamental objective, in this case, improving the quality of school. The Ambassador imposes a heavy hand. How will the staff respond? Change might not be what her staff wants right now, but we get a glimpse that, in the end, it will lead to improvement for all.

No doubt the reflections by the U.S. Ambassador of Change characterize a leader with vision for whom the complexities inherent in school leadership are daunting. Her quest to provide consistency and forward thinking within the prevailing context of change manifests her awareness of the challenges confronting all schools today. She is wise and simultaneously humble in accepting her mission to find the rhythm that creates personal and professional harmony. While her metaphor is synonymous with diplomacy, it's clearly of the passionate kind.

This Ambassador exemplifies the focal point that moves her organization with, as well as in spite of, faculty acceptance and support. As a Touchstone leader, she relies on a repertoire of skills and dispositions "cognizant of the timing, structure, purpose, and balance of the initiative."

The Ambassador sustains a commitment to control the dynamics of change by adeptly orchestrating appropriate introductions and preparations necessary to encourage her teachers' continued development individually and as part of a school culture. She qualifies as a Touchstone because she assumes a certain humility as a fallible leader. She's reflective and aware of her shortcomings. She's mindful and appreciative of her journey from administrative infancy to adolescence. And now she's approaching another milestone and reflective phase: administrative midlife.

Thinking back on her trials as an emergent leader, the Ambassador acknowledges mistakes and limitations, but she's not paralyzed by them. To the contrary, failure to the Ambassador and to a Touchstone leader represents a form of empowerment. It is permission to forge ahead to continued development for herself and her faculty, to find applications of personal and communal learning in undoubtedly new and unforeseen contexts.

Goertz (2000) conducted a study to determine the relationship between effective leaders and creativity. She used eight variables based on

an extensive review of research studies to characterize effective leaders who think creatively. It's interesting to note the Ambassador's behaviors in light of Goertz's leadership characteristics:

- **Passion for work:** The Ambassador demonstrated an unwavering conviction to championing the mission of her school. She was passionate in her commitment to children and adults and to creating a full community of learners. Her reference to the inspiring words of Maya Angelou in her opening comments to her faculty opened the doors to their expression of their own passion for teaching and an appreciation for their individual experiences and collective wisdom.
- **Independence:** While the Ambassador displayed independence of thinking, she was mindful of the impact her decisions had on her faculty. While she valued shared decision making in some instances, it was clear that the Ambassador reserved the right to forge a vision for the school and to move people in that direction in the face of opposition, anxiety, and resistance.
- **Goal setting:** The Ambassador was clear about her objectives and pursued them with vigor. She understood the complexities of school change but was not deterred from her mission. Throughout the unfolding of each event surrounding her desire for change, the Ambassador remained focused on her goals and continued to reflect them back to her staff. Note also how the power of her own metaphor is used by the Ambassador as a permanent anchor to her personal and professional mission: "I believe the U.S. Ambassador is a doable and even valiant metaphor . . . and it is clear that leaders—all leaders—must revisit their relationship *with* and *to* this phenomenon of change to restore clarity of vision."
- **Originality:** The Ambassador is devoted to considering ways for teachers to understand their level of effectiveness. She takes a risk by acknowledging that students' voices are powerful and should be heard. Therefore she mandates student evaluations of teachers against a wave of reluctance. Yet she's willing to walk the talk, and in an effort to honor equity and restore virtue, she encourages faculty feedback of her performance as well.
- **Flexibility:** Notice how the Ambassador deftly negotiated the faculty's assessment of their curriculum to identify problem areas long ignored. Notice how, through that looking together process, the faculty united around a commitment to create assessment instruments that asked students to "rehearse, apply, and extend knowledge." The process of developing and solidifying a core curriculum was enhanced when teachers shared a common vision and

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purpose. It was a dramatic example of a leader encouraging her staff to generate a variety of ideas to address curriculum challenges that implied everyone's need to adapt to change.

- **Wide range of interests:** The Ambassador thrived on rich dialogue and reflection with her staff. She understood the importance of accessing the perspectives and wisdom of her colleagues to develop solutions. Her phrases “individual genius” and “collective brilliance” characterized her perception of the faculty and her appreciation for the contribution they all made to improving the quality of their school.
- **Intelligence:** The Ambassador prided her leadership on intellectual curiosity by posing questions, taking risks, and developing a school community that valued dialogue. Her metaphor reveals serious thought about her journey as an individual and as a professional. She is conscious of her faults and failures and appreciates their purpose to provide lessons about the ways she leads. As an experienced educator and dedicated learner, the Ambassador models reflective practice and sense of purpose.
- **Motivation:** Is there any question that the Ambassador is a highly engaged and motivated individual? She exudes self-confidence to others while sometimes harboring self-doubt. She is enthusiastic and encourages her teachers to move beyond their comfort levels to seek improvement. The Ambassador is achievement oriented and determined to conceptualize and actualize ways to bring about change.

INTRODUCING DAVID

Phosphorescence! Now there's a word to lift your hat to! To find the phosphorescence, that light within, that's the genius behind poetry.

—Emily Dickenson

In his book *Squirrel, Inc.* (2004), Stephen Denning discusses the importance of storytelling by organizational leaders for coping with change and getting results in an increasingly complex world. Denning claims that “the ability to tell the right story at the right time can have a pivotal impact on the success or failure of any major change effort” (p. xviii). He discusses six positive results stories create in organizations: (1) they spark action, (2) they communicate who you are as a leader, (3) they get people working together, (4) they tame the grapevine, (5) they demonstrate the leader's knowledge, and (6) they lead into the future through rejuvenation and innovation.

To introduce David to readers, we begin with his decision to tell his personal story of tragedy to his faculty. As a leader, David has an intuitive sense that to move his veteran staff from complacency requires dramatic action on his part. He knows he wants to encourage risk taking and openness to change and realizes it's his job to model the desired behavior.

The faculty knew David lost his sight in one eye when he first became an administrator at the school. But they weren't aware of the root causes, the history of reflection David went through, and his discovery of former self-limiting beliefs that resulted from years of introspection.

The following story is what David shared with his faculty. It represented on one level a leader's attempt to create a spark for organizational and cultural change within the school. On another level, David's story symbolized a personal rite of passage by recognizing the significance of his healing and the subsequent acting on his newfound sense of self.

David's Story

In German my last name means looking glass or mirror. It's an apt metaphor for the ways in which I've tended to reflect on my life experiences and direction. My educational inclinations were influenced by personal experiences with Jean Piaget, Martin Luther King Jr., and Dr. Benjamin Spock. Although they helped shape the contours of my professional and personal development, the road I've taken to becoming a school leader has often been arduous and complex.

Gazing through the mirror of my life, I realize my professional and spiritual journeys were launched on an entwined and circuitous path 35 years ago. I was living in Hell's Kitchen, New York City, teaching at an elementary school in central Harlem. One morning as I was waiting on the subway platform, I noticed that the sight in my right eye was beginning to fade. Probably some minor irritation or infection, I thought. Within six weeks, however, the vision was gone. The doctors said it was retina bulbous neuritis, an inflammation of the optic nerve. They didn't tell me the condition was a precursor to something worse.

I continued to teach in New York until four years later, when I moved out of the city and purchased my "restoration project," a two-hundred-year-old farmhouse in Vermont. It was a good metaphor for me—my life was in reconstruction mode. Living in the country awakened a new connection to nature and a simpler way of living.

Life was good, I thought. I liked teaching in the country and felt like I belonged for the first time to a community. I was married and eagerly awaiting a call from the state adoption agency announcing the arrival of our infant son. Unfortunately, my euphoria was short-lived.

It was one of those raw, dreary days that chill to the bone during gray November. Hating to leave the comfort of my flannel sheets, I forced

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myself out of bed that morning and touched the side of the wood stove in our bedroom. I could see the waves of heat rolling off the stovetop, but for some strange reason I could barely feel the hot metal with my right hand. I noticed the worn floorboards felt cold and abrasive to my left foot, but the other foot couldn't feel a thing.

When my condition didn't change, I went to the local hospital a few days later. The physicians were as confused as I. During the next six weeks, they were unable to explain what was happening as I slowly began to lose control of the right side of my body.

Back in 1975, there were no MRIs to diagnose my condition, but when I mentioned my previous experience with lost eyesight, a lightbulb went on for my neurologists. They concluded the optic nerve incident was a precursor to having multiple sclerosis. They couldn't predict whether the disease would worsen or stabilize. Only time would tell, they said.

I sought therapy to address my anger, shame, and confusion. Therapy provided another lens or mirror for looking within. Gradually, I became acquainted with a darker and more compelling side of myself. It was characterized by the acceptance and integration of what my therapist called the victim mythology. Victims, she said, rarely take responsibility for the frequent pattern of crises in which they find themselves. Instead, they tend to blame others or fate, much like my reaction to MS and to my years of conflict with others in the workplace and sometimes at home.

During this period of gradual awakening, I became principal of a school in western New Hampshire. My health had improved. I no longer limped. I had full motion and dexterity with my right hand. The lost eyesight was the only physical remnant of past afflictions. But my epiphany didn't occur until a casual conversation with a colleague on the playground one day at school.

"I just don't get it, David," she said. "You're such a visionary as a school leader. Don't you find it strange the MS affected your sight?"

Her observation stunned me. This was a connection I hadn't made before. Later, when I reflected on her comment, I realized this was a provocative perspective that shed new light on my physical condition. When I reframed MS as an instructional metaphor, it evolved to a notion of "dis-ease" or discomfort with patterns in my life I was addressing in therapy. The metaphor "dis-ease" freed me from my previous mind-set as victim. I learned that on some level, I was accountable for the development of my "dis-ease" and therefore responsible not only for my healing but for avoiding future episodes of victimization in my life as well.

With the unexpected physical recovery I was making, I began to consider how metaphors can alter a person's as well as an institution's life view, direction, and health. In hindsight, it comes as no surprise that I eventually authored a dissertation exploring personal mythologies of women who principal schools.

That inquiry investigated core and often unconscious themes in three women's lives that influenced their professional purposes and behaviors.

Their personal myths emerged from discussions about their favorite fairy tale characters. Interestingly, the principals in the study were able to recast their fairy tale protagonists as metaphoric representations of themselves: the Badger, the Gypsy, and Everybody's Mother.

I realized that the investigation into the unconscious forces that motivate and inspire school leaders represents no less a shift of mind than what is at the heart of a learning community, namely, a turn from viewing problems as consequences created by someone else or some other forces to accepting how our own actions often contribute to the problems we encounter.

My doctoral studies represented a way to bridge my personal experiences with MS to my work as a school leader. I learned that, throughout history, myths represent metaphors for imaginative explanations of social conditions and human behaviors. Metaphors have a way of reconciling the empirical with the intuitive.

When I completed my doctoral studies and returned from my sabbatical, I began to consider ways for our faculty to look through another lens to address our school system's negative myths. At the time, we were bogged down in district conflicts over contract negotiations, unpopular school board mandates, and complicated curriculum restructuring. I felt that without learning new strategies—changing attitudes, values, and behaviors—our faculty wouldn't be able to take the adaptive steps necessary to thrive in the prevailing environment. On some level, I felt that the sustainability of change depended on having people at our school internalize the change process itself.

We needed a new and resilient scheme for reframing our work context as educators in a system of continual and sometimes destructive change. The more I reflected on my personal experiences and doctoral research, the more convinced I was that metaphoric reframing could be used as a valuable tool for analyzing and producing unique insights about generally complex and often paradoxical trends within our school culture. So eight years after becoming principal, I decided it was show-time for metaphors!

DAVID'S EVOLUTION AS A LEADER, PART 1: CONFRONTING THE VICTIM MYTHOLOGY

The next phase of David's story saw him embark on a new professional journey. He was excited to get back to his school after a yearlong sabbatical. His doctoral thesis had examined the many ways myths influence organizational behavior, and as if by some stroke of coincidence, upon his return, David was confronted immediately with one of the most prominent institutional dysfunctions he had studied and experienced as a veteran administrator, the *victim mythology*.

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Prior to the start of the school year, a new contract was negotiated with the teachers' union. A provision in the contract guaranteed all teachers one daily planning period. There was just one problem. While agreeing to the planning time, the school board budgeted for four special coverage teachers when five would now be needed. Up to then, students at David's school participated in physical education twice a week, music and art once a week. These "special" classes allowed teachers time for preparation.

When David convened his first faculty meeting in August, teachers were angered by the school board's failure to fund for the additional coverage. They demanded an immediate resolution. If there was not one forthcoming, they threatened to file a grievance.

During the meeting, David assured the teachers that he supported their need for a daily planning period. When he asked for suggestions to address the issue to avoid a conflict with the board, the only proposal offered was to hire a roving aide to cover the fifth period for each teacher. David acknowledged that this would certainly resolve the contractual issue, but two concerns reflected his rejection of the idea.

David was an instructional leader who always tried to base the impact of organizational decisions on improved student learning. He reflected on the roving aide proposal and doubted that this would ensure a continuation of learning for students. "Having an aide in the classroom to supervise a study hall once a week doesn't provide for the continuous engagement with curriculum for all students. All it does is create an interruption to the steady flow of learning we've come to pride ourselves on."

But David didn't stop there. It was time to put into action what he had spent years investigating and writing about in his dissertation. David reflected on the faculty's customary response to similar issues. Typical of the way labor problems were addressed in their school district, teachers and the school board would get mired in conflict, assume adversarial positions, and ultimately arrive at settlements that usually satisfied only one of the parties. David characterized this behavioral pattern as the victim mythology. "You see," he explained, "the victim is always someone or some group who feels they've been wronged in a grievous way."

David provided examples that described the district's prevailing victimization. There was the adoption of a new curriculum by the board a few years before over the objections of teachers who claimed that there was no connection with the state's mandated frameworks. Rather than provide alternative perspectives for the board to consider, the teachers insisted the curriculum was unrealistic in scope and continued to complain about the issue for years.

Then there was the time the district mandated technology integration in all subjects. Rather than propose strategies and training to instruct

teachers about effective practices using technology, teachers argued that they had no time in their school day to meet the new requirement.

“In each of these cases,” David concluded, “teachers as well as administrators cried foul but failed to respond proactively with alternative and meaningful proposals that aligned with best instructional practices. We swallowed the bitter pill the board offered and made no attempt to accept any ownership with the outcome of those decisions.” What they were left with both times, David reminded them, were failed opportunities to educate the board through dialogue and mutually designed proposals that ensured common purpose and direction.

David called upon the faculty to reframe their thinking about institutional problems. He suggested a new mythology for their consideration. “Think of the heroine or hero in many of the myths and historical events our students study,” he said. “Those individuals, whether real or imagined, overcame obstacles by accepting humility and finding positive ways to resolve their problems. They appealed to strong beliefs about fairness, social justice, equality, and ethical values. I propose that we follow their model of heroism for this and future institutional challenges.”

While many of the teachers in the room were willing to consider David’s suggestion, a core of saboteurs, as David liked to call them, snickered and rolled their eyes in derision. David knew this was a key moment in getting the faculty to move from an old behavioral pattern to trying something new to solve an important problem. So he asked the teachers if there was a time that they remembered when the faculty acted like heroines or heroes to address a problematic issue at school.

After a brief silence and holding his breath for what David felt was an eternity, one teacher recalled the chronic deterioration of the teachers’ room years ago. “I remember you asked us to consider ways we could improve staff morale, and we decided to take on the horrible condition of our faculty room.” Suddenly teachers smiled and began recounting an assortment of horror stories about the poor conditions that had characterized the faculty lounge. The floor had been disfigured with broken tiles; the bare walls needed spackle and paint; the sink area was always left with lunch trays caked with leftover food; the refrigerator collected remnants of snacks, drinks, and half-eaten meals that looked more like science experiments; and the furniture was old and in disrepair.

“We were mostly concerned that people on our staff took no interest in keeping the faculty room clean,” remarked another teacher. “All we would do was either sit around and complain about the slovenly and depressing conditions of that room or just avoid going there.”

Even one the “saboteurs” remembered how the staff had created a committee to develop a plan for a refurbished faculty lounge that would

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provide comfort for staff members, furnish professional articles and journals, display artwork by staff, as well as post a sign-up sheet for members to accept a role in maintaining the upkeep of the room. "It was great," she admitted. "We got all fired up. David found funds in the budget to carpet the room and hire someone to build new cabinets. The district electrician and plumber installed new sinks, a lavatory, and lighting."

David smiled and began to breathe easier. "I'll never forget our celebration breakfast when the room was finally finished," he said. "The room sparkled and so did everyone's eyes when we walked into the lounge that morning. It was a terrific morale booster, a wonderful example of how we took responsibility for a problem and accomplished something absolutely outstanding.

"The thing about victims," David concluded, "is that they tend to be blamers and narrow thinkers. Rarely do they accept ownership for their predicament, and as a result they fail to create meaningful solutions that are positive and conflict free. That's why our faculty lounge existed for so long in such a terrible state."

"Actually," one teacher reflected, "our faculty room was a good metaphor for how we were feeling as a staff at the time. Contract negotiations were stalled, an entire family had committed suicide and devastated all of us, and then there was that group of angry parents who were complaining about school discipline."

David suggested that by adopting the mind-set of a heroine or hero, the faculty would be able to overcome obstacles in a more humane fashion while ensuring the integrity of their school's instructional goals and mission. Furthermore, they would create a model for their school district by implementing a healthier process for problem solving and decision making.

When they began discussing proposals to resolve the planning time issue, David acknowledged that the faculty could file their grievance and surely win. "But what guarantee do you have that the decision in your favor would enhance and improve student learning?" he asked. "I believe we can settle this dispute, embellish our curriculum, and provide a new context for integrating conceptual understandings from the main subject areas. And in so doing," he added, "we would also establish a standard for resolving educational as well as labor issues in our district."

David asked teachers if they would be willing to try this new approach. While some of the chronic resisters remained silent, most of the teachers who had worked with David since the beginning of his tenure trusted his passionate commitment to instructional best practices and his sensitive treatment of children as well as staff. After reaching consensus

on his proposal, David divided the faculty into four groups and sent them to different locations for an hour to develop a solution to the planning period issue.

When they reconvened, two groups proposed a dramatic arts instructor while the other two groups suggested a foreign language teacher as the special coverage educator. David congratulated his teachers on their efforts, and after subsequent discussions with the superintendent and the faculty, he and the teachers decided to propose the drama position.

At the faculty meeting prior to the school board presentation, one of the teachers asked David what would happen if the board rejected the proposal. David smiled. "That's easy," he said. "On one level, it doesn't matter, simply because you acted professionally by standing up for the ideals that resonate with our vision of what's in the best interests of students. Worst case scenario is that you file your grievance and most probably win. But what's most important is that we agreed to a new standard for how to address future problems within our school community. No board can take that away. We will have acted as true heroines and heroes."

That evening David and members of the faculty presented their proposal to the school board. David spoke about their effort to find a more meaningful way to address institutional issues without resorting to confrontation that often resulted in dissatisfaction and negative feelings. He complimented the faculty and hoped the board would acknowledge their efforts and welcome the spirit of their professional response.

After some discussion, the school board applauded the teachers and David. They voted unanimously to accept the proposal for a dramatic arts teacher. Everyone was pleased with the positive settlement of this issue. At school the next morning, David and the school spirit committee hosted a celebration breakfast to commemorate the new path they had chosen for teachers, students, and the school.

REFLECTIONS ON DAVID AND THE VICTIM MYTHOLOGY

Name It

There are many different ways to look at David's actions as principal and as a Touchstone archetype. For instance, one of the first strategies David used was to *name the endgame*. David had seen all of this before. A contractual issue, union gets involved and files a grievance, board takes action. The grievance is resolved by definition, and some change is imposed. The solution often disrupts the school more than it helps; the board can say the issue is resolved, it costs some money to resolve

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the issue, and the end result is that no one is happy or satisfied with the resolution.

Stage 1 of Reframing: Reflecting on the Old Storms

David's strength lies in getting the attention of his faculty. He does this by first *naming the negative process*. Then, he offers another view. In this case, by tapping into his doctoral work. David suggests reframing the issue through the eyes of the hero or heroine. Here was a perfect example of a leader offering a new process and demonstrating some passion about it. The faculty was willing to give it a try, albeit skeptically.

We also catch a glimpse of David's guiding principle: David was an instructional leader who always tried to base the impact of organizational decisions on improved student learning. As a Touchstone principal, he saw the bigger picture. (Our experience also tells us that David must have "walked the talk" many times before for the faculty to "buy into" the notion of a staff of heroes and heroines!)

David uses data. Look at the past issues, he says. What can we learn? What does your experience as a faculty member tell you about our shared experiences with similar problems? Do you really believe following the same process over and over will get you new results? He knows the history of the school and uses it deftly to navigate the faculty toward new but unforeseen horizons.

David knew the existing practice wasn't grounded in the improvement of student learning; rather this was about power and politics between school board and teachers' union. As a Touchstone principal, David was well aware that "power and politics" was a very difficult venue in which to create significant change.

Stage 2 of Reframing: Informing a New History

David then calls on a past experience, a successful endeavor in which the staff had been active participants. The event: refurbishing the faculty room. From the faculty's perspective, this issue was something they cared about. They wanted change and could see a direct benefit for their efforts. But how does this impact student learning? How is David acting as an instructional leader here? This issue proved to be the fundamental cornerstone of David's leadership as a Touchstone principal. He was able to establish trust.

On the surface, redesigning a faculty room may not seem like an important event. But from a learning perspective, this event had all the elements of a successful classroom experience: There was motivation (desire to have a quality place to eat, talk, interact with peers); there was a process (the faculty

formed the teams, committees, and workgroups to reach their objectives); and there was a measurable outcome (the redesigned faculty room and the use by staff). What came of this? A celebration organized by many to commemorate an end result that benefited all.

Success breeds success. As David developed trust, he also allowed his staff to build a shared vision around an issue that was important to them, their workplace. Staff morale would be crucial to creating a successful learning environment to improve student learning. By recalling this experience, David is further reminding the faculty that there is a successful process that can be utilized to get desired results. This would become a mantra the faculty would hear again: *We've done it before; we can do it again!*

DISCOVERING YOUR TOUCHSTONE

Conceptually, a Touchstone leader is both a rock and a rocker. As a rock, he or she is firm and solid in his or her beliefs and vision as a leader. As a rocker, he or she knows how to shake, move, and sway others steadily. Touchstones are reference points for their organizations. Touchstones set the measure for the quality of work that is expected from all members of the institution. They manage change in a positive way by focusing their energies on outcomes while skillfully dealing with elements that distract or confuse.

In practice, Touchstone leaders are committed to novel approaches to instructional and organizational change. They possess the skills and strategies necessary for shaping a sustained focus on their institution's vision. Touchstone leaders model reflective practice by continuing to be informed about best practices in administration and teaching. They are highly regarded by their colleagues and the local community as deft and proactive problem solvers. Exhibiting steadfast devotion to student, teacher, and organizational growth, Touchstone leaders are respected as passionate and forthright anchors for their schools.

Identifying the Touchstone leader in you may seem easy, but this is not about routine or management, it's about leadership. Use the following questions to help identify the Touchstone qualities in you.

1. Name three qualities your staff, community, and students would identify as the values and beliefs characterizing your leadership. Are these management qualities or leadership qualities?
2. How do your Touchstone qualities compare with the vision of your school, district, or organization? Are they aligned?

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3. On a scale from 1 to 10, how does your school or organization respond to change? What are the processes and strategies you use to create a culture of change?
4. How do you deal with resistance to change?
5. How are you a “rock” for your institution? How are you a “rocker”?

On the following pages we provided reflection activities that ask questions in different and more provocative ways to elicit deeper understandings about your leadership dispositions. When you’ve completed them, we invite you to turn back to this page and compare your responses to your answers to the five questions above and to consider how they might have illuminated a new perspective about your work as a leader.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Leadership Self-Assessment

1. Here are the ISLLC (Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium) standards for school leaders that are being adopted by most states for certification of school administrators. (See Resource for more comprehensive descriptions.)

ISLLC Standards

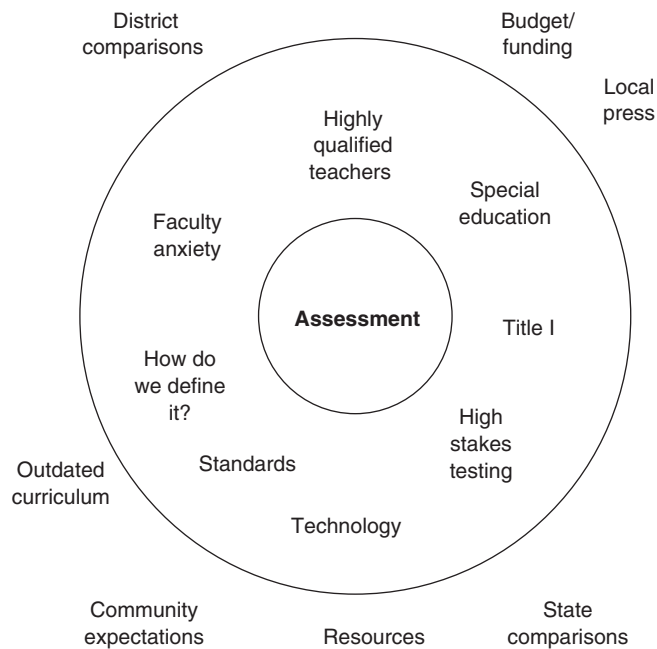
- I. The Vision of Learning
- II. The Culture of Teaching and Learning
- III. The Management of Learning
- IV. Relationships with the Broader Community to Foster Learning
- V. Integrity, Fairness, and Ethics in Learning
- VI. The Political, Social, Economic, Legal, and Cultural Context of Learning

Based on the standards, which ones reflect the Ambassador’s expertise and weaknesses? How would you compare your ISLLC rating of the Ambassador with yourself?

2. Consider Goertz's eight leadership characteristics that were used to assess the Ambassador's behaviors. Rate yourself based on those variables. What did you learn?

Organizational Development: Reframing

3. Using the **circle map** on the next page (Hyerle, 1996), consider an issue of change you are currently addressing. Name it. Put a frame around it, and in the frame write whatever words come to mind. These words reflect your frame of reference about the issue you are addressing. They are the lenses that influence how you view the issue and what you bring to it based on your experiences and perspectives. Notice who or what is missing from the frame (see the following example on **Assessment**).



Now create a metaphor for your issue. This is called *reframing*.
Assessment in our school is like a recipe with some missing ingredients.

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4. In the example you can see the reframing of the issue as a metaphor: “Assessment in our school is like . . .” Reframe your issue. Try this activity with the faculty in small or large groups. Choose the same issue and ask each group to reframe the issue by creating a metaphor after they complete the circle map. What information is gained by looking at the multiple metaphors? Is there a common theme or pattern to the metaphors? How can this information be used to move your organization forward on the issue?

Circle Map—Template