

Chapter 3

Guidelines for Action

The starting point for what's worth fighting for is not system change, not change in others around us, but change in ourselves.

To be practical, two areas of action are required simultaneously. First, in the short and continuing long run, a higher proportion of incumbent principals must take charge. The question of what's worth fighting for must be addressed and acted upon immediately — today, tomorrow, next week. Second, and in the mid-run, school systems must take action to create, insist on, support and be responsive to the conditions for school-based action — not in isolation, but as part of a visible, interactive network of public commitment to actual and acknowledged improvement.

What's Worth Fighting For?

Block (1987) tells the story of consulting with a large supermarket chain in the United States in which one of the main goals was to shift decision-making to the level of store managers, much as some school systems have attempted to move toward greater school-based decision-making. The company had done a number of things (role clarification, training, communication meetings, and so forth) to try to shift power to the store manager and experienced little success. In assessing the situation, the common complaint was that the chain could not expect store managers to change their role without active day-to-day support of the district managers, whose role is comparable to that of education's area superintendents. Work with district managers was incorporated, but it too failed to make much of a difference. At that point, divisional managers, much like education's central office superintendents, were cited as creating or being a possible barrier. Division managers received attention with still only small improvements. A meeting was then scheduled with the President who might be compared to an education Director. While he had endorsed all the efforts to change, it was felt that perhaps he

as well, should be the target of change. His complaint was that he too was in the middle, because he found it difficult to please those above him who could be compared to a Board of Education because he felt helpless to influence on any scale, those below him. When all was said and done years of organizational development efforts across the different levels resulted in very slow movement toward the goal.

The point of the supermarket story is not that some organizations are better than others, or that everything is related to everything else. The story illustrates four very important issues related to our pursuit.

1. There is a tendency to externalize the problem, and to look for blockages at other levels of the system. Whether this is true or not in a given situation is irrelevant to the main point: waiting for others to act differently results in inaction and playing it safe.
2. There is an assumption that the entire "system" must be changed before improvements will occur — a chicken and egg stance which also immobilizes people.
3. Almost everyone perceives themselves to be in the "middle" in some way, in the sense that there are people above them expecting more, and people below them who are immune to influence.
4. Everyone has some power, most often used *not* to do things.

All of this is to say that the starting point for what's worth fighting for is not system change, not change in others around us, but change in ourselves. This is both more achievable and paradoxically is the first step toward system change because it contributes actions not words.

Ten guidelines for individual action can be suggested. It is essential that these guidelines be viewed in concert, not as actions isolated from one another.

1. Avoid "if only" statements, externalizing the blame and other forms of wishful thinking.
2. Start small, think big. Don't overplan or overmanage.

3. Focus on fundamentals: curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional culture.
4. Practice fearlessness and other forms of risk taking.
5. Embrace diversity and resistance while empowering others.
6. Build a vision in relation to both goals and change processes.
7. Decide what you are *not* going to do.
8. Build allies.
9. Know when to be cautious.
10. Give up the search for the "silver bullet."

Guidelines for Principals

1. Avoid "if only ..." statements

In most cases, "if only" statements beg the question, externalize the blame, and immobilize people. "If only" the superintendents were better leaders; "if only" the Board would allocate more resources to professional development; "if only" the State or Provincial Department of Education would stop issuing so many policy changes and so forth. All of these wishes for changes around us, according to Block, are expressions of dependency and foster a sense of helplessness. As Block sums it up, "waiting for clear instructions before acting is the opposite of the entrepreneurial spirit." (p. 16) Another way of putting it is, "What can I do that is important to me and those around me?" Guideline one, then, stresses the necessity for moving concretely in the direction of autonomy. In the first instance, what's worth fighting for is more of an internal battle than an external one.

2. Start small, think big. Don't overplan and overmanage

Striving for complexity in the absence of action can generate more clutter than clarity.

Complex changes, (and managing multiple innovations in schools does represent complexity), means facing a paradox. On the one hand, the greater the complexity, the greater the need to address

implementation planning; on the other hand, the greater the thoroughness of implementation planning, the more complex the change process becomes. I talk later (in item 3) about what to focus on and (in item 6) about the need for a vision of the change process, but at this point, it seems necessary to caution against overplanning and overmanaging. After a certain amount of goal and priority setting, it is important not to get bogged down in elaborate needs assessment, discussion of goals and the like. Striving for complexity in the absence of action can generate more clutter than clarity. Effective managers have the capacity to short circuit potentially endless discussion and wheel-spinning by getting to the action.

Evidence in both business and education indicates that effective leaders have "a bias for action." They have an overall sense of direction, and start into action as soon as possible, establishing small scale examples, adapting, refining, improving quality, expanding, reshaping as the process unfolds. This strategy might be summed up as "start small: think big," or the way to get better at implementation planning is more by doing than by planning. Ownership is something that is developed through the process rather than in advance. Opportunities for reflection and problem solving are as important during the process as they are before it begins. In this sense, innovations are not things "to be implemented," but are catalysts, points of departure or vehicles for examining the school and for making improvements. "Ready, fire, aim" is a more apt metaphor for capturing the dynamics of nonlinear reform (Fullan, 1993).

For complex changes, tighter forms of planning and managing lose on two counts. They place the principal in a dependent role, however unintended, and they hamper the extension of autonomy to others. Shared control over implementation at the school level is essential.

3. Focus on fundamentals: curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional culture

Consistency in schools must be obtained at the receiving end not the delivery end.

Here we become involved in setting priorities and in questions of consistency. Priorities are generated through a mixture of political

and educational merit. The result, as we have seen, is overload. The best way for a principal to approach situations of impossible overload is to take the stance that "we are going to implement a few things especially well, and implement other priorities as well as we would have anyway, which is to keep them from getting out of hand. We will look for ways of integrating or aligning components that might otherwise be fragmented."

Thus, there is not a call for any new neglect. This guideline assumes that within the array of policy priorities, there are "some things" which can productively be examined and improved. It takes policies not as all things to be implemented, but as some things to be exploited. What's worth fighting for is to select one area or a few instructional areas of major interest and/or need, and intensely pursue them through implementation. For example, a serious attack on an important curriculum area for the school represents a strike for something that is close to the core educational goals of schools even if all potential priorities are not being addressed. Such a positive initiative can be pointed to as an example of commitment and accomplishment in spite of the overload that surrounds schools.

Moreover, there is much greater choice in what can be done than is normally acknowledged. In terms of ends, there are many policy priorities from which one can choose to emphasize. Within selected priority directions, the means of implementation can vary widely. For most policies it is more accurate to treat policy implementation as an opportunity to define and develop the policy further, than it is to conceive of it as putting into practice someone else's ideas. Principals, in effect, have enormous leeway in practice.

Consistency provides sustenance for setting priorities. The combination of overload and frequent, seeming shifts in policy results is de facto eclecticism. Consistency in schools must be obtained at the receiving end not the delivery end. Learning accrues in a school whose staff have "a constructed, continuous shared reality." Learning power comes from the consistent messages that students get about what it is to be an independent learner ... a problem solver ... a reader ... a writer, and so forth. Conversely, schools that are eclectic in their approaches to learning (and the "system" makes it easy to be eclectic) do poorly in terms of independent learning behaviors and achievement. It makes a lot of sense when you

think about it, that if the expectations are changed every year then strong, successful learning is not going to accrue.

In addition to concrete curriculum projects, the principal must pay attention to the professional culture of the school focussing on the interrelationship among curriculum, instruction, and assessment, through fostering a professional learning community. Much of this evidence and associated action guidelines are examined in our *What's Worth Fighting For? Working Together For Your School*. We know that professional cultures, with their openness to new ideas, their focus on what and how students are learning, their giving and receiving help, are strongly related to success in continuous improvement. Such collaborative work cultures foster greater coherence and consistency through their constant interaction and focus on what they are doing and on how well they are doing.

Newmann and Wehlage's (1995) study of over 800 schools engaged in restructuring is the latest of many research projects that demonstrate that "school-wide teacher professional community affected the . . . classroom pedagogy, which in turn affected student performance" (p. 32). Establishing such collaborative work, depends on effective school leaders who "can make a big difference through hiring, staff development, and establishing a supportive climate" (p. 37). Schools with strong professional communities "pursued a continuous cycle of innovation, feedback, and redesign in curriculum, instruction and assessment" (p. 38).

What's worth fighting for, then, includes fostering collaborative work cultures which create a generic capacity to manage change on a continuous basis.

4. Practise fearlessness

Sarason (1982) described how some principals were carrying out certain practices at the same time that other principals in the same system were saying it was not allowed. How do they get away with it? It is somewhat superficial to say, but nonetheless true, that "they just do it."

Block (1987:178) claims that many people take "safe paths" in complex situations, such as believing simply in rationality, imitating others, or following the rules. He puts forward the idea that

improvements are made through "facing organizational realities" by "continual acts of courage." He suggests that if one is guided by vision-building, as outlined in item 6, three "acts" are necessary: (1) "facing the harsh reality," (2) examining "our own contribution to the problem" and (3) making "authentic statements in the face of disapproval."

The tough version of "acts of courage" entails acting on something important, in such a way that we are "almost indifferent to the consequences it might have for us." (p.182) Like most risk-taking, we have to be prepared to lose before we can win. Paradoxically, effective principals, as the research literature indicates, are men and women who take independent stances on matters of importance, and in most cases, are all the more respected for it. At a less dramatic level, I would suggest that fearlessness can be practised on a more modest scale. One need not start by publicly defying the superintendent! Three criteria for beginning might be to be selective, to do it on a small scale and to make a positive rather than a negative act of courage. So, for example, one might make it clear that the latest curriculum directive cannot be immediately addressed because the staff are in the midst of implementing another important priority. Then, the principal can demonstrate willingness to discuss the importance and progress of this other priority. Another example might be presenting a well worked-out plan, asking for modest resources to implement something important to the school and the community.

There is such a thing as occupational suicide and no doubt there are many courageous acts that could be classified as foolish. But given the cautionary tendencies described in earlier sections, it seems legitimate to suggest that an increase in selective acts of fearlessness in reference to a major school goal would be a good thing.

5. Embrace diversity and resistance while empowering others
Empowerment acts as a safeguard against being wrong and is essential for implementing serious improvements. Empowering others in the school has to form a major component of the effective principal's agenda. It is becoming clearer in the research literature that complex changes in education sometimes require active (top-down or exter-

nal) initiation, but if they are to go anywhere, there must be a good deal of shared control and decision making during implementation.

From their current research, Miles (1987) and others analyze the successful evolution of effective secondary school programs. In addition to several other factors, many of which are related to other items on our list, Miles stresses that while initiative often comes from the principal, "power sharing" is critical from that point onward. Successful schools were characterized by principals who supported and stimulated initiative-taking by others, who set up cross-hierarchical steering groups consisting of teachers, administrators, and sometimes parents and students, and who delegated authority and resources to the steering group, while maintaining active involvement in or liaison with the groups.

Three other points should be added to the concept of interactive power sharing within the school. First, this is not an individualistic exercise. It is a matter of creating groups responsible for and working on significant tasks. Such peer and hierarchical groups function to integrate both pressure and support to get things done. As it turns out, peer interaction represents a far more powerful form of pressure than traditional hierarchical forms because it combines support and pressure to get things done.

Second, empowerment means additional resources, such as time, money, and personnel. The principal must be able to deliver resources. Sometimes, but not always, he or she does this with extra money. Most times, it is done by helping to invent imaginative ways for freeing up time. Effective principals do the latter all the time, and in ways which other principals either would not think of, or would say could not be done. Another finding of the research is that a little bit of time and resources available regularly can go a long way.

Third, developing a new mindset about the roles of diversity, conflict and resistance is absolutely crucial. Homogenous cultures by definition have less diversity, but they are also more boring. Heterogeneous cultures contain the seeds of creative breakthrough. In addition to collaborative skills, conflict management skills are essential in diverse societies. Conflict is not just a nuisance; it is positively necessary in working out new productive solutions. It is

when conflict is mishandled or avoided that it becomes most destructive.

I have already illustrated in the case examples in Chapter Two that differences of opinion and "resistance" must be reframed as *inevitable and desirable* forces of change. Failure to listen to and appreciate points of view different from one's own actually increases resistance, creates fear and suspicion, and separates us from others. The alternative, albeit counterintuitive, is to "embrace" resistance, respect those who resist, and join with the resistance" to listen, understand and find common ground for new possibilities. (Maurer, 1996:54)

It is possible, indeed essential, to understand that this does not mean simply going with the flow. In *What's Worth Fighting For? Working Together For Your School*, we advised principals "to express what they value," as well as "to extend what they value." Having good ideas and strong images of the future means, in the words of Maurer, that one must "maintain a clear focus" over the long run. It is the combination of moral purpose, valuing diversity, listening and learning, persistence and intermittent consolidation through shared synergy, that makes the difference.

6. Build a vision relevant to both goals and processes

An organization, to be effective, needs both a vision of the nature or content that it represents, and a clear vision of the processes it characteristically values and follows.

Vision-building feeds into and is fed by all other guidelines in this section. It cuts through the tendency to blame others; it provides a sense of direction for starting small but thinking big; it provides focus; it checks random fearlessness; it gives content to empowerment and alliance discussions; it gives direction for deciding what not to do; it eschews easy solutions. Above all, it permeates the enterprise with values, purpose, and informs both the "what" and the "how" of improvement.

Block provides examples of guiding beliefs or visions: we act as partners with our customers; we choose quality over speed; we want to understand the impact of our actions on our customers; we

want consistency between our plans and action; we value high standards and expectations in our board; we support the decentralization of decisions as close to the point of implementation as possible; and so on. These basic values guide specific priorities (such as, every child in this school will concentrate on good writing) and are translated into consistent day to day actions over time.

The vital role of vision appears in every book on educational and organizational excellence. It is not an easy concept with which to work, and I have cautioned elsewhere to avoid short cuts and premature visions that have no depth or communal meaning (Fullan, 1993). An organization, to be effective, needs both a vision of the nature or content that it represents, and a clear vision of the processes it characteristically values and follows. Vision is not something that someone happens to have; it is a much more fluid process and does not have to be — indeed it must not be — confined to a privileged few. In a real sense, implementation of any policy will be superficial unless all implementers come to have a deeply held version of the meaning and the importance of the change for them.

To start with the leader, Bennis and Nanus (1988) make it quite clear that top leaders in their study had, but did not invent, visions for their organizations. Indeed, these leaders were more likely to be good at extracting and synthesizing images from a variety of sources:

All of the leaders to whom we spoke seemed to have been masters at selecting, synthesizing, and articulating an appropriate vision of the future ... If there is a spark of genius in the leadership function at all, it must lie in this transcending ability, a kind of magic, to assemble — out of all the variety of images, signals, forecasts and alternatives — a clearly articulated vision of the future that is at once single, easily understood, clearly desirable, and energizing. (p.101)

Vision must be something arguably of value. It should be somewhat lofty or uplifting. It should have some concreteness. Block emphasizes that “creating a vision forces us to take a stand for a preferred future.” (1987:102) Vision also must withstand the marketplace, and

therefore has to make a contribution to what is important for significant others. Focussing on the clients, parents and children, and connecting with others in the organization to formulate an image of what we want for the future, begins the process of transcending the present.

We normally think of vision as something in the future, but we do not necessarily think in terms of how to get to that vision. When we do address the “how,” it is often formulated in a top-down manner — form a task force, clarify the vision, communicate and train it, assess it, etc. etc. As we now turn more directly to the aspects of process, a number of other dimensions must be introduced. Working on one’s own vision is the starting point. The extension of this position is that it is the task of each person in the organization, to a certain extent, to create their own version of the vision of the future. Obviously, interactive professionalism and collaborative cultures will result in commonalities. Visions will tend to converge, if the guidelines in this section are followed. This will sometimes result in sharper differences, but the more serious problem seems to be the absence of clearly articulated visions rather than a multiplicity of them.

The dialogue about vision, according to Block, should strive to achieve three qualities: depth, clarity, and responsibility relative to the vision. Depth is the degree to which the vision statement is personally held. Clarity comes from insisting on specific images. Vagueness, says Block, “is a way of not making a commitment to a vision.” (p. 124). Responsibility involves moving from helplessness to active ownership: “... the primary reason we demand that people create a vision statement is to reinforce the belief that all of us are engaged in the process of creating this organization.” (p. 124)

It cannot be overemphasized that this guideline incorporates commitment to both the content of vision and to the *process* of vision-building and implementation. It is in fact a dynamic and fluid relationship in which the vision of the school is shaped and reshaped as people try to bring about improvements. It is a difficult balance, but commitment and skill in the change process on the part of organizational leaders and members is every bit as crucial as ideas about where the school should be heading.

The continuous process of vision-building in an organization requires a number of skills and qualities. Two-way communication skills, risk-taking, the balancing of clarity and openness, the combining of pressure and support, integrity, positive regard for others, and a perpetual learning orientation, all figure in the dynamic process of developing a shared vision in the school. In Miles' (1987) terms, the process involves issues of *will* (such as risk-taking and tolerance of uncertainty) and *skill* (such as organizational design, the support of others, clear communication, the development of ownership). The shared vision, in short, is about the content of the school as it might become, and the nature of the change process that will get us there.

Consider the result of shared vision-building. You and others in the school become the resident experts. You know what you are doing. You know more about the program than any outsider. You can demonstrate and explain the program. You are in a better position to deflect unwanted demands because you can point to something substantial. You have critical criteria to serve as a screening mechanism for sorting out which demands to act on seriously and which opportunities to seek. You are, in a word, in a better position to act fearlessly.

7. Decide what you are not going to do

The principal's job is to ensure that essential things get done, not to do them all himself or herself.

If the principal tries to do everything that is expected, he or she expends incredible energy with little or nothing to show for it. Therefore, one of the most neglected aspects of what's worth fighting for is how to say "no" and yet maintain, indeed enhance, one's reputation and the respect others have for that individual.

There are two features of principals' work which present them with aggravation. One is the endless stream of meetings and new policy and program directives, already described. The other is a daily schedule which consists of continual interruptions. There are plenty of studies of the individual work days of principals, and they draw the same conclusions: principals' work days are characterized by dozens of small interactions. The research literature has come

to label the work of principals as involving brevity, variety, and fragmentation.

Principals, above all, are "victims of the moment." Because of the immediacy and physical presence of interruptions, principals are constantly dragged into the crises of the moment. These include telephone calls, two students fighting, salespeople, parents wanting to see them, calls from central office to check into something or to come to an urgent meeting, etc. etc.

Dependency on the moment is not inevitable, however. Four strategies for maintaining initiative and control are: maintaining focus, making your position clear to the superintendent, managing time accordingly and saying no.

Vision-building is central to selecting and maintaining focus. To simplify the matter, two issues are of first order of importance; instructional leadership and public relations. Instructional leadership means working with teachers and others to decide on the most important needs of the school, whether it be English as a Second Language, language and writing across the curriculum, primary/junior science, or whatever. Responsiveness to the community is part and parcel of needs assessment and maintaining focus. Consent, and in some cases, involvement of parents, are essential. The priority, in relation to the community, is instructionally-focused public relations, not random communication.

Making one's position clear to the first line superintendent is ideally an interactive process. The emphasis should be on the principal taking charge. The principal, in effect, is saying to the superintendent that instructional leadership is his or her number one priority. The particular priorities arrived at may be done in full cooperation with the superintendent or in a more distant manner; in either case, the principal makes it a point that the superintendent understands the priority and the flow of actions being taken. The basic message is that if there is an instructional activity in his or her school, and there is a meeting which conflicts, he or she cannot attend the meeting but will send someone else. This is not a matter of being stubborn or rigid. Without such protection, a principal's time would get totally eaten up by unconnected activities which amount to nothing. By explaining one's position in terms of specific

instructional activities, it turns out that very few meetings are so important that they cannot be missed. Many superintendents would value such a focus and stance, but let me say some would not. This is where selective fearlessness comes in. A little assertiveness in the service of a good cause where you have teacher and community backing may be necessary. There is nothing wrong with saying "no."

Managing time is related to both attitude and technique. Protecting priority time, sometimes fiercely, is a must. Staying focussed might mean, for example, setting aside a morning to plan a professional growth session for staff, and then sticking to it. It can be made clear that "nobody is to interrupt" during that time. Exceptions may occur in extreme situations, but telephone calls, even aggressive ones, can be handled by a secretary, delayed or scheduled in.

A second aspect of managing time is how to handle central office events. A principal might make a choice not to attend meetings which are purely informational. Acting as a filter for unproductive requests is another important component. If the principal tries to respond to all central office requests, the school will get pulled in too many different directions. If the meeting is truly important, the principal can attend or send someone else who may be more centrally involved with the item being addressed. I will not reiterate the earlier discussion that the principal has no choice if the superintendent is doing the requesting. There is an element of risk-taking, but not as much as is assumed when positive instructional focusses are what drive the principal.

Delegation, the third aspect of time management, is an orientation and skill that only a minority of middle managers have mastered. It amounts to the advice to try not to do anything that someone else in the building can do, because principals need to spend their time on what others in the building are not in a position to do. For example, why should a principal plan track and field days when teachers can do it better because it is for their students? Why should a principal collect and count trip money? Why should a principal fill out straightforward statistical reports, do the paperwork for teacher absence, and the like? Training office staff is a related and much undeveloped skill. Delegation does not mean absence of com-

munication. The principal's job is to ensure that essential things get done, not to do them all himself or herself.

Saying "no" is a summation of the advice of this guideline. Principals spend too much time on things that are not essential. There are few things that absolutely must be done, cannot be delayed or cannot be delegated. Only a small proportion of what principals do is apparently centrally related to instruction. Diversions, of course, also plague principals who have an instructional focus. But, they have learned to say "no." Otherwise, the whole day would be spent running around with nothing to show for the effort except stress and with no sense of accomplishment other than short term survival. Principals must get more in the habit of saying "no," or of rescheduling things for a time when they can be addressed more efficiently. I stress, as I did at the outset, that this is not a matter of letting the principal "off the hook" under the guise of autonomy. The focussed, interactive, interdependent principal is a socially responsible being, working avidly on the improvement of the school. The effective principal is more public than private. Without question, however, what's worth fighting for is saying "no" to tasks and activities that do not contribute, in a sustained way, to the betterment of the school.

The focussed, interactive, interdependent principal is a socially responsible being, working avidly on the improvement of the school.

8. Build allies

It is foolhardy to continue to act fearlessly if you are not at the same time developing alliances. One of the most encouraging developments over the last decade is the presence of more and more potential allies who seem to want to support and move in the direction of greater school-based implementation. Criteria for promotion tend more and more to emphasize curricular leadership, capacity for working effectively with others and ability to lead interactive forms of development whether they involve coaching, performance appraisal or curriculum implementation.

With this potential, the principal should seek alliances, through specific projects and activities, with at least five groups — senior level administrators, peers, parents, teachers, and individuals who

are external to the system (in the Ministry of Education and Training, faculties of education, innovative networks, and so forth).

Peers — other principals and vice-principals — can also be significant sources of support in the short and long run. It may require some initiative and risk-taking, but principals who go out of their way to work cooperatively with other principals on a curriculum project, and who share information and resources, develop both a reputation and a set of relationships which serve them well at points of critical decision.

Alliances with parents are much more tricky. One runs the risk of getting involved with splinter groups and/or offending important political forces on the board. Sticking with valued curriculum priorities can be one safeguard, because work with the community is intended not to block something, but to implement something considered to be valuable. We also saw in our school council case example earlier that there is now a much greater knowledge base for working with parents and communities. The complexities of doing these require school leadership that embodies the kinds of guidelines expressed in this chapter.

Guideline 5 listed earlier stressed empowerment. Such empowerment is reciprocal. Teachers, for example, already have and exercise power *not* to do things. Building a trusted, empowered relationship with teachers usually means that the principal can count on teachers to help implement policies that the principal holds to be important. This relationship puts the principal in a position to be responsive to ideas coming from teachers.

There are, of course, skills involved in negotiating relationships across the groups just described. Block (1987) talks about the critical skills of negotiating agreement and trust. He complicates the matter, realistically, by noting that such negotiations must be undertaken with both allies and adversaries. He outlines a number of steps for dealing with each of the following situations: high agreement/high trust (allies), high trust/low agreement (opponents), high agreement/low trust (bedfellows), low trust/unknown agreement (fence sitters), and low agreement/low trust (adversaries).

This is not the place to delve into these issues, but two conclusions may be made. First, at least some allies in each of the five

groups should and can be established. In addition to power bases, such a network serves as a source of ideas, critical feedback, and the like. Second, as Block states: "... people become adversaries only when our attempts at negotiating agreement and negotiating trust have failed" (1987: 144). Our *What's Worth Fighting For Out There?* (*forthcoming*) contains many additional ideas for building productive alliances with diverse groups in the environment.

9. Know when to be cautious

Since people exert so much caution naturally, this section can be brief. Block mentioned four circumstances which dictate caution: when we don't know the situation, when survival is at stake, when we are in times following periods of risk and expansion, and when we are in a zero trust environment. (1987: 17-18) Risks can also be reduced by starting small (and thinking big), and trying out ideas on a small scale initially and/or with smaller numbers of people. However, if we are experiencing states of continuous, ever-increasing caution, that is a sign that either we ourselves should change, or move elsewhere to a less repressive organization.

10. Give up the search for the "silver bullet"

Earlier I criticized the tendency to seek solutions in the latest management techniques, not because the latter are useless, but because there are no shortcuts or panaceas. Management techniques do not have a good track record in business either. They come and go like so many fads, leaving little residue except for false hopes. It could not be otherwise. The complexities of postmodern environments are not amenable to single solutions.

Once we realize that there is no answer, that we will never arrive in any final sense, it can be quite liberating. Instead of hoping that a new technique will at last provide the answer, we approach it differently. Leaders for change get involved as learners in real situations of reform. They craft their own theories of change, constantly testing them against new situations. They become critical consumers of management techniques, able to sort out promising from empty ideas. They become less vulnerable to and less dependent on external solutions. They stop looking for solutions in the wrong places.

Guidelines for School Systems

Err on the side of autonomy over dependency.

This publication is for and about principals, so that the advice for school systems will not be elaborate. Clearly, risk-taking in principals will be inhibited if it is not also a characteristic of superintendents. This is so in two ways. Senior level managers who engage in focussed risk-taking both provide good role models, and create the conditions of pressure and responsiveness for school-level leaders to act similarly.

There are four guidelines which I would highlight:

1. Cherish empowered managers when you find them;
2. Understand the paradoxically simultaneous "loose-tight" relationship between schools and school systems;
3. Concentrate on, and make visible, selection criteria;
4. Establish short- and long-range leadership development plans to produce "willed and skilled" school leaders.

The first guideline is straightforward — err on the side of autonomy over dependency. Superintendents should value, indeed should cherish, the independent, initiative-taking principal who has energized the staff and the community into working on an instructional issue of importance. Superintendents should do this even when they might not fully agree with the particular priority. Empowered principals are not closed-minded, just focussed. Openness is maintained through the highly interactive process described in Chapter Two. Put another way, the principal's priorities are shaped and reshaped through interaction with teachers, parents, consultants and superintendents. The superintendent can be more influential in this kind of relationship than in a more traditional one, because the latter relationship generates superficial conformity at best and resistance at worse, while the former results in action.

Second, understand, conceptualize, and reinforce the paradoxical "tight-loose" relationships required for modern organizations to be effective. It is not a choice between a "top-down" system and

isolated autonomy. Just as the principal must foster autonomy and empowerment of teachers, so the central office must do the same in relation to schools. Generally, this means decentralizing decision-making within a framework of priorities, on the one hand. It means staying in close contact throughout the process, which involves approving plans, coordinating resources, facilitating networking, reviewing progress and discussing procedures and policies, on the other hand.

Louis (1987) captures this essence of the necessarily delicate balancing act in her discussion of "loose-tight" district management, in a study of effective secondary schools. She makes the helpful distinction between "coupling" and "bureaucracy," arguing that they are two different dimensions of the relationship:

By coupling I mean a relationship which has some shared goals and objectives, reasonably clear and frequent communication, and mutual coordination and influence. By bureaucracy I mean control through rules and regulations. (Louis, 1987:161)

Drawing on case studies, Louis describes typical and ineffective school districts as evidencing highly bureaucratic but largely decoupled systems. Says Louis, "in a decoupled but regulatory system the district/school system becomes nothing but an irritating set of constraints and conflicting demands." (p. 24) Strongly-coupled, regulatory, or rule-based systems, fared no better, and were characterized by mistrust on both sides. By contrast, Louis found that "the only clearly positive district contexts are found in cases ... which are *tightly coupled and non-regulatory* ... Essentially, the picture is one of co-management, with coordination and joint planning ..." (p. 25-26). Our own discussion of school level-central level co-development is similar. (Fullan, 1993). It is imperative, then, that superintendents understand that closeness does not mean control, and that autonomy does not mean neglect.

The third and fourth guidelines are closely related to each other and the third refers to the critical need to establish explicit selection criteria and procedures for promotion. This makes it crystal clear that only people who have already demonstrated initiative-taking, curriculum leadership, professional development (interactive forms)

leadership, and the like need apply. Nothing conveys the message with greater force, as well as builds a critical mass of mutually-stimulating leaders, than decision after decision in which instructionally-oriented and skilled people are promoted.

Short-term and long-range leadership development programs make up the final essential component. School systems must invest in the mid- and long-range development of potential leaders, and in the continuing professional development of appointed leaders. Internships, short-term secondments and apprenticeships both within the system and external, such as to other boards, the faculties of education or the Ministry of Education and Training, are important. Mentoring and other structured peer-related approaches would be especially effective. For example, a newly-appointed vice-principal in one school can work with an experienced principal in another school, assisting the latter principal and teachers in assessing program implementation, or in designing and carrying out a professional growth program.

We see the powerful effects of this systemic approach over a period of years in the Durham Board of Education, which recently won the prestigious Bertelsmann Prize from Germany for being the most innovative school system in a world competition. In 1987, Durham was one of the least effective school systems as assessed in a government review. Less than ten years later, the Board was assessed as a model of effectiveness on the Bertelsmann criteria which included: innovation; innovative school leadership; participation of students, parents and other partners; evaluation and quality assurance. (Fullan et al, 1996). They accomplished this through the systematic, sustained use of the four guidelines just outlined.

Closeness does not mean control, and autonomy does not mean neglect.

The theme of this book, however, is not to wait for "system" solutions. To do so is to externalize the solution, risking further dependency. Principals, as moral change agents, cannot afford to wait for school systems to attain this level of involvement. Or perhaps more accurately, systems will only reach this level, through the day-to-day activities of individuals pushing in the other direction.

Perpetual Learning

Managing in a nonrational world means counting on our own selves.

The ultimate safeguard against empowered managers going too far off track is that they are perpetual learners. When it comes to learning, effective leaders are greedy.

Bennis and Nanus (1985) identified a number of common characteristics in their interviews with highly effective leaders. Those interviewed discussed a number of things they do, "but, above all, they talked about learning." (p. 188) Bennis and Nanus continue:

Nearly all leaders are highly proficient in learning from experience. Most were able to identify a small number of mentors and key experiences that powerfully shaped their philosophies, personalities, and operating style . . . Learning is the essential fuel for the leader, the source of high-octane energy that keeps up the momentum by continually sparking new understanding, new ideas, and new challenges. It is absolutely indispensable under today's conditions of rapid change and complexity. Very simply, those who do not learn do not long survive as leaders. (Bennis and Nanus, 1985:188)

Kelleher, Finestone, and Lowy (1986) provide further insights into "managerial learning." In a study of 43 managers, they were able to divide the group into high, medium, and low learners based on an index of seven factors. They found interesting patterns of situations related to high learning — in particular, a combination of freedom, stress, and support. To highlight a few of the factors found in the study, the extent to which the manager was in a situation of expected innovation and latitude, supervisory support and supervisory pressure was correlated with higher learning. Kelleher and his colleagues also found that high learners experienced more stress.

Block describes the relationship between learning and stress as "moving toward tension."

Almost every important learning experience we have ever had has been stressful. Those issues that create stress for us give us clues about the uncooked seeds within us that need our attention. Stress and anxiety are an indication that we are living our lives and making choices. The entrepreneurial approach is to view tension as a vehicle for discovery. Dissatisfied customers teach us how to do business. People who do not use our services teach us how to sell. (Block, 1987:191)

Too much stress is a bad thing, but so is too little. Joy and stress not only can go together, but always coexist in high performers. (Hanson, 1985)

The advice for principals, in a nutshell, is to get into the habit of and situations for constant learning. Skill and know-how are as important as attitude. This means access to new ideas and situations, active experimentation, examination of analogous and dissimilar organizations, reflective practice, collegial learning, coaching in relation to practice and more. (Schon, 1987) Principals, as perpetual learners, are constantly reaching out for new ideas, seeing what they can learn from others and testing themselves against external standards.

Principals can make even more long-lasting contributions, by broadening the base of leadership of those with whom they work — teachers, parents, students. The other two books in the trilogy provide a series of guidelines for principals and teachers to establish wide-ranging leadership capacity which will make the goal of continuous improvement more reachable.

Organizations do not get healthy by themselves, and we all would be extremely lucky if our organization got healthy through someone else's efforts other than our own. Managing in a nonrational world means counting on our own selves:

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy; I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I

rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations (from Shaw's *Man and Superman* quoted in Bennis and Nanus)

Paradoxically, counting on oneself for a good cause in a highly interactive organization is the key to fundamental organizational change. People change organizations. The starting point is not system change, or change in those around us, but taking action ourselves. The challenge is to improve education in the only way it can be — through the day-to-day actions of empowered individuals. This is what's worth fighting for in the school principalship.

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