Preface

Expectations: School board members, parents, teachers, and others look forward to a new beginning as a superintendent comes on board. A superintendent, parents, school board members, teachers, and students have high hopes when an assistant principal or principal begins his or her tenure in a school. Newly appointed educators anticipate a bright future as they sense the excitement in the air after their arrival. The expression honeymoon period captures the optimism of this marriage between those already in the educational setting and the newly appointed leader. And who wants to talk about possible problems during a honeymoon?

It is, however, a reality of today's society that individuals and organizations ignore widespread sociological and psychological trends—and do so at considerable risk to themselves and others. References to reforming, restructuring, and rethinking tell us that we are grasping for words to describe ferment and a more hopeful future in our schools and school systems. There is one political force that has greatly increased in emphasis since the first edition of *Staying on Track: An Educational Leader's Guide to Preventing Derailment and Ensuring Personal and Organizational Success* (1997), and this political force has created profound changes in the culture of schools and schooling: legislation mandating accountability in general and high-stakes testing in particular. Federal pressure in the form of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act triggered state, district, and school actions that significantly influenced the lives of administrators, teachers, students, and their parents. For many politicians and educational leaders,

measurement was no longer considered *one kind* of assessment: It instead replaced the word *assessment*.

Readers of the first edition of our book therefore urged us to revise *Staying on Track* with the new political realities in mind. We thus begin the second edition with a new chapter, titled "Accountability and High-Stakes Testing." It is our view that this political force influences all other factors facing educational leaders.

In the midst of this age of challenge and hope, a term has become part of our vocabulary as educational leaders—*derailment* (see Brubaker & Coble, 1995). This term is useful in two ways: (1) to keep you, the individual, on track with your career path goals and (2) to help others in your organization, for whom you as an educational leader are responsible, to stay on track, thus minimizing the waste of organizational resources. We would do well to remind ourselves that there is always interaction between the individual and the organization. It is this *transactional context* of interactive forces that helps us see that both individuals and organizations can derail. In short, derailment has both a personal and an organizational face (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1995), and by *organizational face*, we mean the face of the school or school system.

Our thesis throughout this book is that creative leaders use their talents to help others identify and use their talents within organizational structures (Brubaker, 2004). When this definition of creative leadership is realized, derailment can be prevented or dealt with in a constructive way to the advantage of both the person and the organization—the school and the school system.

It is obvious in talking to educational leaders in our school systems that there is a career path ladder with an accompanying reward system. The educational leader begins his or her trek with a dream: "I wonder what it would be like to be a school administrator." With the dream in mind, the potential leader enters into a preservice program, usually at a university, to acquire certification. Once certification is earned, the candidate uses his or her network of friends and acquaintances to get inside information as to how to apply for and get a position as an assistant principal. After serving as an assistant principal, most educational leaders

apply for a principalship. Some then move on to a central office position, in some cases an assistant superintendency. A few of these leaders apply for and are named superintendents of schools.

Our definition of educational leader derailment is concise and precise: An educator *wants* what he or she considers a better position but is not assigned the position by the powers that be. Or an educator *wants* to retain his or her present position and is demoted or dismissed. It should be clear from our definition that the educational leader's expectations are central to the concept of derailment. We make this point because of what has repeatedly happened during leadership seminars when we introduce the concept of derailment. One or more participants provoke a good deal of discussion, indeed debate, by making comments such as the following:

> When you use the term *derailment,* you are attaching moral judgments that associate higher value to higher status positions. That is, the principalship is better than the assistant principalship and the superintendency is better than the principalship. There are leaders who occupy so-called subordinate positions: They do a fine job, and they have no interest in positions held by superordinates.

We agree that there are persons for whom this is true and we affirm their value. We believe, however, that the term *derailment* applies to them if it is their desire to keep their present position and they are relieved of it. And if they don't want a position with higher status and pay—and aren't assigned to it—we can't say they have been derailed.

Our research on educational leader derailment has led to an interesting finding. Respondents can quickly identify the major reasons why educators they know have derailed, but when asked about their own derailment, they tend to balk. Blind spots in others are easy to identify; blind spots in one's self are given this name because they are literally true: We don't see them in ourselves. A common response to the question of derailment is, "Now that I have identified leadership flaws in others that have led to their

derailment, I won't make the same mistakes." We have identified this as the halo effect (Brubaker, Simon, & Tysinger, 1993).

Because of the difficulties in *knowing thyself* and identifying one's own blind spots, Chapter 2 consists of a self-assessment in which you are asked to respond to a derailment checklist. This may serve as a pretest before you acquire a knowledge base on derailment, and it may also be useful as a posttest after you have read and tried out ideas in the book. The self-assessment inventory is in two parts: Checklist A is for those of you who want to become assistant principals and those who are presently assistant principals and principals; Checklist B is for readers who are superintendents or want to become superintendents. Although there are some common items in the two inventories, the roles of principal and superintendent are sufficiently different to warrant two checklists.

Chapter 3, "What Causes Educational Leaders to Derail?" discusses ways in which you can get off track. Examples of derailment have been culled from survey responses completed by assistant principals, principals, and central office leaders. In our original study, prior to the first edition of *Staying on Track* (1997), we surveyed 250 school and school-system leaders across the United States, with 150 current and aspiring superintendents keeping journals that yielded important information and attitudes (Brubaker & Coble, 1995). One hundred central office leaders (excluding superintendents), principals, and assistant principals were asked to answer the three following questions in writing:

1. Please keep in mind an assistant principal you know who has derailed. In your opinion, what was the primary reason for his or her derailment?

2. Please keep in mind a principal who has derailed. In your opinion, what was the primary reason for his or her derailment?

3. Based on your observation of others who have derailed, what are your concerns about your own derailment potential?

The following definitions of derailment were provided on the survey instrument. Assistant principal derailment: An assistant principal *who wants* a principalship does not live up to the expectations of the superintendent, the school board, or both, and therefore plateaus or is assigned a lesser position. Principal derailment: A principal *who wants* a so-called better school does not live up to the expectations of the superintendent, the school board, or both and therefore plateaus or is assigned a lesser position.

The first wave of research was followed in the new millennium by a series of individual and small group interviews, feedback from discussion groups, and leadership seminar participant responses. Practitioners who participated were included from the following states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Ohio. The responses came from K–12 administrators who served in small and large schools; rural, urban, and suburban districts; and both racially diverse and not so racially diverse populations. In other words, these responses came from a cross section of administrators who represent schools as we know them in America.

The original questions were expanded to include the following queries:

- Why was the administrator who derailed a success in the first place?
- What do you consider to be potential accountability/high-stakes testing derailment factors?
- What strategies have you considered for avoiding derailment associated with accountability/high-stakes testing?
- What skills do you think are most important for enhancing data-driven decision making, improving student achievement, and increasing test results?

Respondents' answers to these questions are contained in Chapters 3 and 4 of this second edition of *Staying on Track.* You, the reader, will probably find it interesting to compare and contrast reasons why you think educators derail with causes of derailment cited by those we surveyed, and your responses to the self-assessment checklists in Chapter 2 will help you to do that.

Once you have read about major causes of derailment in Chapter 3, you will probably feel challenged to identify and implement antiderailment strategies, the focus of Chapter 4. This chapter begins with an assessment of what you have already done to avoid derailment, perhaps without giving much attention to it. Strategies others have used successfully will also be discussed. One of the major findings in our staying-on-track seminars is that there are a number of assistant principals, principals, central office leaders, and superintendents who can profit from our ideas even though they may never derail. They are not in enough trouble to derail, yet they can become significantly better leaders than they presently are. Their professional growth and development in our seminars is most heartening to themselves and us.

Your more general understanding of derailment strategies will be followed by Chapter 5, "Professional and Personal Plans for Development." The tools in this chapter will help you formulate a specific plan that will serve as a map for avoiding derailment or dealing with it if it happens. We strongly believe that professional development is a promising vehicle for reaching school and school-system goals. Educational leaders have to *get* at a high level in order to *give* at a high level, which is another way of saying that the learning of school leaders is as important as the learning of students (Sarason, 1972).

It is interesting to note that superintendents acknowledge that professional development is important, yet they need considerable help in giving attention to it. A comprehensive study of Ohio superintendents' perceptions supports this conclusion: "Thirty-six percent (36%) of the superintendents indicated that 'Staff Development' was something they should be doing but didn't have time to do" (O'Callaghan, 1996, p. 130). It is our intent to provide ideas and materials that will help superintendents, other central office leaders, principals, and assistant principals meet the challenge of giving quality attention to the professional and personal development of leaders.

Chapter 6, "Preparing Teacher Leaders for Tomorrow's Leadership Positions," focuses on an important matter in today's

schools: shared decision making that gives teacher leaders an important role in the shaping and maintenance of school culture. We will give attention to the changing context in which educational leaders make their decisions. We will project ourselves into the future with an eye on barometers for change—those changes in schools that tell us something about changes in the larger society (Sarason, 1996). It is the transactions between schools and other institutions in our culture that are most telling. We will argue that proper attention given to teacher leader education today will pay rich dividends tomorrow.

Chapter 7, "The Seasons of an Educational Leader's Career," is a capstone chapter designed to help you, the reader, revisit where you have been in your career with an eye on where you want to be and can be in the future. Career path stories of practicing administrators will guide you on your journey. We urge you to draw upon understandings gained in the first six chapters of this book to plan your future in education.

The reader will note that the Prologue to this book is a cautionary tale about a school and school-system administrator who makes his way along a challenging career path. His story may be particularly useful to you in considering your past and planning for your career path in the future.

Before we list our references, we include a number of resources to help you deal with the derailment issue. They may be used in the following two major ways: (1) for you as an individual as you read this book and (2) for you as a staff development leader in a number of large- and small-group settings. One section of these resources takes the form of case studies, which may be thought of as the next best thing to being there. The format for these cases is as follows: A provocative case will be followed by a selection of alternative responses, after which the best possible rationale for each response will be given. We will also give what in our judgment is the best answer. You are urged to revise this format in any way that meets your creative impulses, thus making the cases your own. The reader is advised throughout the book to refer to particular resources relevant to ideas in the text.

We are interested in what you experience when you read this book. Please write us at the following e-mail addresses: dlbrubak@uncg.edu and lrrycble@bellsouth.net