

Preface

Superintendents and other educational leaders rarely talk about what motivates them to do the difficult work that they do. Day in and day out, you fight to create the schools that your children need and deserve, but rarely do you talk about the values, beliefs, and principles that guide and inform your work and that sustain you in difficult times. When people say they are glad they don't have your job, they mean it. So, why do you do the work you do? The reasons, of course, are complex.

At a fundamental level, your work is an expression of who you are at the core of your being. You care about other people, especially children. You believe in education and its value to our society and to the children you serve. You thrive on helping others and on unleashing the potential in your staff so that they, in turn, can unleash the potential in children. Many of the values, beliefs, and principles that guide and sustain you have underlying spiritual roots. The more in touch you are with those spiritual roots, the more enlightened your leadership becomes and the more effective you are in leading others to a better future.

Given the complexities of the issues educational leaders face, it sometimes seems as though you need the wisdom of Solomon to determine the right course of action. The best way to think about the spiritual dimension of leadership is that it is based on wisdom. Where does this wisdom come from? It comes from within you. It is the divine spark that guides you as you live your own life and lead others toward a brighter future. Enlightened leadership is grounded in spiritual principles, and because of this, it brings out the best in you and in others. Not only do enlightened leaders know the right things to do—and how to do things right and at the right time—but also they do them for the right reasons.

There is much to be said for the difference between making a living and making a meaningful life. Far too often in our culture of consumption and being consumed with material things, people lose sight of those things that are truly important—friends, family, feelings, and faith. You may often find that you are so busy in your day-to-day life that you forget to live in accord with your inner guidance system.

Likewise, for leaders, the temptation is to be so caught up in the day-to-day challenges of the organization that you forget that organizations are made up of people and that to lead people, you must stay connected to that which is basic and constant. Both of us have spent our careers leading a series of complex organizations. We have been on the firing line of leadership virtually our entire adult lives. When you lead an organization, you dwell in the rarefied air of the mountaintop. It becomes easy to forget how your actions may impact others. You are also faced with the dilemma of taking care of the organization while knowing that you are constantly taking actions that may hurt some of the people in it. There is also the challenge of having to react to events as they fly at you, without having the luxury to take the time to step back and think about what you should do or why one path may be better than another and what values you might be ignoring in the process.

We started out as professional colleagues, school superintendents in school districts not far from each other. We came to know each other well as we attended a series of summer programs at Harvard University aimed at superintendents. As we talked about our challenges, our frustrations, and our victories, we found that most of the time, we weren't talking about education or even leadership per se—we were talking about our spiritual values and the underlying connections between who we were at the deepest level and what we did on a day-to-day basis. These discussions started us on a joint expedition of the soul that has led to a 20-year conversation on what it truly means to be a human being and the implications of that awareness for our work.

We came to identify 42 principles that we felt guided us and our work, and we have no doubt that there are many more. This is an open ended, evolving body of work. We selected eight of these principles to focus on in this book, not only because they are a good place to start and resonate particularly with school leadership, but also because they represent various aspects of the energy of mind, body, and spirit, or what we think of as the energy of head, hand, and heart. To us, these principles are spiritual not only because they are life enhancing but also because they focus on the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of life at all levels. As with anything in the spiritual realm, our respective understandings of these principles are works in progress—as are all human beings. These principles are not something you can check off on your “to do” list. They are habits of mind and soul that can act as guideposts for the perilous and wonderful journey we call leading. They must be approached with an understanding that you are never quite there and that you will often fall short in your efforts to apply them. But try we must.

A chapter in this book is devoted to each of the eight principles. The chapters begin with a brief overview that highlights the key elements of the principle. To develop the content for each chapter, we engaged in an extensive dialogue to uncover our shared wisdom and truth, based on our collective life

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experiences and those of people we know, both professionally and personally; on our shared reading lists, including most of the books listed in our selected bibliography; and on our individual and collective intuition, insight, and inspiration. We have divided each chapter into a series of subsections to explore the depth and breadth of each principle. Although we have spent the major portion of our professional lives as superintendents in the field of education, we believe that this book will be useful and helpful to prospective and practicing leaders in all fields, including the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and government. In each chapter, there are short stories to help illustrate aspects of that particular principle. For the most part, these stories are drawn from our professional and personal lives; they are all true, but in some instances, names or gender have been changed to shield the identities of the people involved. With practitioners in mind, we have included specific “Suggestions for Action” and a brief “Summary” at the end of each chapter.

We have sometimes been asked, “How do you apply these principles in your day-to-day work?” One example comes to mind. Most leaders and managers have been taught that delegation is an important managerial tool. Leaders can’t do everything. They must enlist others in the work. This is managed through delegation. Few leaders, however, pause long enough to realize that if you can’t trust the person to whom you have given the task, believing that they will carry it out and forgiving them for not doing it the way you would have, a thousand seminars on delegation will not allow you to fulfill the leadership function. So to be truly effective, you must dive below the surface to find the spiritual principles that allow you to bond with others, to find the connection between your work and your deepest self, and to be guided by wisdom that has been given to us by spiritual leaders since time began.

As we have discussed our work with others, we have found that people have a deep hunger to understand more about it. Quite evidently, most people have come to understand that the talk and action of our secular world must be anchored in something deeper and more profound. At some level, everyone knows that success can’t be measured by the bottom line or by a test alone—it is written in your heart. So, even in the hard-headed world of management and leadership, there must be a sense that the “head bone” is connected to the “heart bone.” There must be a ballast that allows your ship to sail upright. This book is an exploration of some of the principles that can create that ballast for leaders and help you understand that you can enhance your life and the lives of others in the midst of making a living.

Because the principles that we have illuminated in this book are straightforward and easy to understand, it is easy to underestimate their importance, power, and depth. In the same way that things are easier said than done, these principles are easier read than done. These principles are like spiritual muscles and, like your physical muscles, they must be used regularly and exercised to

strengthen them and make them more agile. The more you embrace these principles and practice them, the greater the payoff will be, not only for yourself and for those you lead but ultimately for the world.

As you manifest the spiritual principles of leadership presented in this book: Intention, Attention, Unique Gifts and Talents, Gratitude, Unique Life Lessons, A Holistic Perspective, Openness, and Trust, you will find that you are becoming a more enlightened and effective leader—a leader who does the right things, in the right way at the right time, for the right reasons. Enlightened leadership is not an end in itself. It is a means of bringing more wisdom to you and to the organization you lead. And it is a means of shaping a better future for yourself, your children, and the world at large.

We have formed a center that will serve as an information network, a support network, and a forum for collaboration and training for people who are striving to become more enlightened leaders by increasing their attention to the spiritual dimension of leadership. If you are interested in learning more about the center and *The Spiritual Dimension of Leadership*, please contact us at: The Center for Empowered Leadership (www.cfel.org).

May we enlighten our own and each other's paths.