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Conclusion: Bringing the Outward and Inward Focus Together

Throughout *Change Leadership*, our main premise has been that leaders must understand and bring together the challenges of both organizational and individual change to successfully lead improvement processes in schools and districts. We have structured the core chapters in a way that suggests these two fronts are two learning tracks, with an outer and inner focus, parallel to each other. In this chapter, we clarify how the inner and outer changes are two sides of the single coin of school improvement. We discuss the implications of this integrated curriculum for a new kind of improvement leadership in our schools and districts.

You should by now have a personalized, fully elaborated four-column immunity map that shows a private, personal learning challenge (an inner focus) tightly bound up with some public, shared expectation or understanding of what is called for from you to succeed with the work (an outer focus). For example, you may genuinely want to be a better delegator and create a more collaborative form of leadership in your school or central office. Everything you've read about school improvement suggests that the kinds of changes you and other superintendents or principals want to bring about cannot be achieved through the heroic efforts of a single leader alone, no matter how inspired, tireless, or charismatic, and you

strongly believe this yourself. Yet your four-column immunity map has also surfaced another kind of belief, one that is more personal and that you do *not* find in the things you read about school reform. This belief is headlined in your Big Assumption. Let's say you uncovered a belief that you may not experience your work as fulfilling enough if your job becomes more about enabling others rather than yourself being in the center of the action, the hero of the work. However genuinely committed you are to being a better delegator, this belief—if it remains unsurfaced and unengaged—is going to undermine your ability to improve. We trust that you now see how your own four-column immunity map expresses *one* vital intersection of the outward and inward foci.

Every one of the outward changes we have been suggesting needs to occur, for successful whole system improvement has a similarly challenging inward dimension for any individual or team that is having a hard time bringing that change about.

In fact, we believe that every one of the outward changes we have been suggesting needs to occur, for successful whole system improvement has a similarly challenging inward dimension for any individual or team that is having a hard time bringing that change about. Chapters Two, Four, Six, and Eight have each worked on sharpening an aspect of our outward attention—clarifying a focus on instruction, generating increasingly effective collective energy for change, thinking more systemically, acting more strategically. Although each of these ideas has an inner demand (discussed in Chapters Three, Five, Seven, and Nine), some of these outward agendas tend to generate personal learning challenges more frequently than others. We look at a small number of these now to illustrate the critical interconnection between individual and organizational change.

- We must hold high expectations for all our kids.
- Building and central office level administrators need to get more involved in instruction.
- If we have many improvement priorities we actually have none; so we must choose a priority and stay relentlessly focused on it.

- We must foster a widespread feeling of urgency for change.
- We need a new kind of leader, one whose expertise is more invested in helping a group create the shared knowledge necessary for sustained improvement than in being the certain source of the answers and solutions.
- We need a new kind of administrative team, one that can take on two jobs at once—running the school or district we have, and leading an improvement process to create the school or district we must become.

We have found that these ideas strike the many hundreds of school leaders with whom we have worked as eminently sensible. These school leaders are all smart and conscientious people. So if these ideas make so much sense to bright, caring people, why aren't they put into practice? We've presented a wealth of answers to that question. One overarching response would be to say that the ideas involve a host of adaptive challenges. If we actually knew how to put the ideas into practice we would have, long ago.

Recalling Heifetz's distinction,¹ technical challenges are those for which the knowledge to solve the problem already exists (as is evident in tried-and-true procedures, effective tools, and established means of training). The challenge may be complicated, and meeting it may be very consequential, so technical challenges are not trivial. (Removing someone's inflamed appendix and landing a jet airplane are technical challenges.) Adaptive challenges are those for which the necessary knowledge or capacity to solve the problem must be created during the work of solving it. The individuals or organizations undertaking these efforts must themselves change—they must adapt. They must not just use the available knowledge (as in meeting technical challenges) but create new knowledge. When we describe the job of remaking our schools so that no child is left behind as similar to trying to rebuild an airplane while flying it, we are talking about an adaptive challenge. There need be no embarrassment in acknowledging that we don't yet know exactly how to do this.

But we do need to be at work learning how. A big part of learning how, in our view, is by coming to see that although any list of organizational "should-do's" may shine brightly in its clarity and reasonableness, we are only looking at half of the picture, at the illuminated side of "the moon of school improvement." We need to also shine a light on the usually unseen side—the inner dimensions, demands, and assumptions. What is it like to travel through that same sensible list, via paths that cross into the dark side of the moon?

HOLD HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL OUR STUDENTS

Two of us recently worked with the leadership team—the superintendent, an assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, several school principals, assistant principals, a few lead teachers—of a hard-working district in Southern California (SoCal District). Its student body was over 80 percent Latino; the professional staff was over 80 percent white. The majority of students came from families needing financial assistance. We asked this group to try constructing a four-column immunity map, only we asked them to do it together as a leadership team and to construct a single, collective picture, which is depicted in Exhibit 10.1. (A form for doing this with your group is included in Appendix A.)

As shown in Exhibit 10.1, the group had no trouble identifying a shared first-column commitment that felt important to all of them. Although it was a less comfortable experience filling out the second column (designed to answer the question, “What do we do or not do that works against this?”), they arrived fairly quickly at their answer, indicating, “We do not hold high expectations for ELL or SpEd students.” As is usually the case, they found the third column (the hidden, competing commitment) to be the most difficult and ultimately their biggest learning opportunity. At first, they identified concerns about the new kinds of work they would have to take on if they were really to hold higher expectations for the ELL

Exhibit 10.1			
SoCal District’s Four-Column Immunity Map, in Process			
1	2	3	4
Collective Commitment	Doing/Not Doing	Collective Hidden/Competing Commitment	Collective Big Assumption
<i>We are committed to accelerating the rate of academic achievement of ELL and SpEd students.*</i>	<i>We do not hold high expectations for ELL or SpEd students.</i>	<i>We may also be committed to not having to revise what we teach and how we teach our ELL and SpEd students.</i>	
*ELL = English Language Learners; SpEd = Special Education			

and SpEd students—the need to create new kinds of curricula and supports for the students. Although the third-column commitment they settled on technically created a picture of an “immunity to change,” the exercise did not seem to produce much energy for the group or usher in some productive, new vantage point. It was late in the day and we decided to adjourn until the following morning.

The next morning, an agitated assistant superintendent came to find us at breakfast. “I’ve been thinking about that exercise since we ended yesterday. I thought about it last night, and I dreamt about it. We are not telling each other the truth about what should really be in that third column!” We asked him what he thought was going on.

“The hardest thing for us to really talk about, in this mostly white group,” said the assistant superintendent, who was himself Latino, “is race. We all get along, and we are all people of goodwill, and we are all committed to helping these kids—but that may be exactly why we can’t say what really belongs in that third column.”

We asked him what he thought should go in the third column.

“If we were honest, it should say something like, ‘We are also deeply committed to preserving a *povrecito* culture.’ But I’m not sure I can say that to this group.” He explained that a “*povrecito* culture” (“*povrecitos*,” or “poor little ones,” is a term of endearment) was full of protective concern and sympathy. “It’s a stance that says, ‘These kids are already facing so many obstacles, bearing so many burdens, how can we possibly increase their suffering by holding them to rigorous academic expectations?’”

We kept talking, and eventually he concluded that he owed it to the group to suggest a revision of their third column. “If I can’t raise this, who can?” He decided that, however difficult it would be for him, “it would be impossible for one of the white administrators to raise it. They would fear they’d end up looking racist, or offending us, or damaging the spirit of goodwill on our team.”

When he brought this to his team that morning, “it was like putting a match to dry tinder,” he said. It was as controversial as he’d expected it might be, and although not every member of the group was immediately willing to accept the new picture, they all agreed they had taken an important next step in their joint leadership. The four-column immunity map they came up with is shown in Exhibit 10.2.

The idea that reduced expectations could come not only from a place of discrimination or disregard but from love and concern brought a previously unilluminated side of the group’s operations into plain view. The team now sees

Exhibit 10.2
SoCal District's Four-Column Immunity Map, Revised

1	2	3	4
Commitment	Doing/Not Doing	Collective Hidden/Competing Commitment	Collective Big Assumption
<i>We are committed to accelerating the rate of academic achievement of ELL and SpEd students.</i>	<i>We do not hold high expectations for ELL or SpEd students.</i>	<i>We may also be committed to not having to revise what we teach and how we teach our ELL and SpEd students.</i> <i>We are committed to preserving a "povrecito" culture.</i>	<i>We assume if we really did push our students they would not succeed; they would be crushed; we would feel defeated.</i>

more deeply and accurately how they work against their own genuine commitment to their ELL and SpEd students. They now can address the core question of whether pushing these students will always lead to failure and suffering, as they had unknowingly assumed. And they create the possibility for revising this assumption, for coming to see that they *can* succeed with their ELL and SpEd students—and that their ELL and SpEd students can succeed. (Chapter Nine describes the process through which the team could go about overturning their immunity to change.)

INVOLVE BUILDING AND CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS IN INSTRUCTION

Over the last several years, school improvement advocates from many quarters have called for a dramatic reconstruction of the role of school principal—from capable building administrator to chief instructional officer. The old role is that of a plant manager who is buried in the office with concerns about bells, busses, and building maintenance, succeeding or failing on a set of criteria having little to do with the unique core enterprise of the school—teaching for learning. The new role is that of principal educator, the school's leader in directing the attention of all the

school's participants to its central function and enhancing their capacity to engage it. This is the image of a principal who is out of the office and observing in classrooms, convening ongoing conversations about what constitutes good teaching and how we can have more of it.

However compelling this new picture may be, and despite ever mounting evidence of the critical value for student achievement of principals playing this new role,² it is enormously difficult for principals to make the shift from building manager to chief instructional officer. A recent study from *Education Week Research Center*, polling nearly 10,000 principals, found that only 27 percent spend part of each day guiding the development or evaluation of curriculum and instruction, whereas 86 percent say they spend part of every day managing the school facilities and maintaining security within their buildings. Only 53 percent can report spending at least some time every day facilitating student learning; and 55 percent of 56,000 teachers polled strongly disagree or somewhat disagree that their principals talk with them frequently about their instructional practices.³

Conditions, Culture, or Adaptive Challenge?

When Gerry House came on as the superintendent of the Memphis schools, she was appalled at the number of broken windows in many of the school buildings. She could have said to the principals, "You are not doing as good a job as plant managers as I'd like. The state of these windows sends a terrible message to everyone inside and outside your school. Get on this." Having the principals clean up the "broken windows problem" could have been seen as a strong stand for improving the culture of the Memphis public school system. It might have sent the message that "We care about your kids and we care about the places where we educate them. A lot is broken around here, and we are going to start fixing it, right away."

But if Dr. House also wanted to support the new cultural value of principals shifting their priorities from plant managers to instructional leaders, it would have been a costly way to send this good message. So instead, she hired an outside contractor to coordinate window repair throughout the district. She got the first message across ("We care about your kids . . .") and she did it in a way that also said to the principals, "We care about you, too. Your time is better spent as leaders of our central enterprise. I'm not here to add one more management function; I'm here to get you out of one business so you can take up the other."

Of course, there are many places to look for the sources of difficulty in making this shift—conditions and culture play major roles—but we believe a main reason for the difficulty is that the challenge is not only a technical one, but an adaptive one. Even when the conditions have been altered and the culture is saying that our number one priority is learning, it turns out that many, many principals have a hard time making the shift, a sure sign that there is a major part of the moon in shadow. We can almost hear Einstein whispering at times like these, “Get a better grasp of the problem before moving to the solution.”⁴

David, a candid principal in one of the districts with which we have had a multiyear relationship, gave us a rich example of his version of why this shift is difficult and what can lie on the other side of the moon. His superintendent has demonstrated that he means it when he says he wants to support every principal to become an instructional leader in his or her school. And David will be the first to admit that—as much as he himself is committed to making this shift—it isn’t going very well.

As Exhibit 10.3 shows, David’s first-column commitment is perfectly aligned with his superintendent’s goal. When David took the “fearless inventory” required to complete column 2, he said: “Two things especially stand out. I have long believed in an open-door policy for my faculty, but the result is that I am continuously drawn in to providing advice and counsel on a whole host of personal issues, personnel disputes, life counseling. You can’t believe all the kinds of things people want to come in and talk to me about! And the other thing is that I did a weeklong tracking of where my time goes, and I realized that monitoring the lunch periods every day, which I have always done, ends up taking a huge amount of time when you add it all up.”

Considering what he would least like or would be most concerned about were he to do the opposite of what is in column 2 catapulted David from the illuminated to the unilluminated side of his terrain. David realized that even though his open-door policy and lunchroom monitoring distract him from his primary goal, he really *likes* what he gets from the roles he plays as a warm, friendly, open, and available presence for both the faculty and the students. As he contemplated really making these things “peripheral” (in the language of his column 1 commitment), his demeanor became visibly subdued. It was clear that much of the joy he derives from his work is associated with what it means to him that faculty trust him enough to bring their problems to him, that they experience him as someone who is giving them something they clearly value, that the students feel emotionally attached to him and he to them.

Exhibit 10.3
David's Four-Column Immunity Map

1	2	3	4
Commitment	Doing/Not Doing	Hidden/Competing Commitment	
To make "Instructional Leadership" the predominant center of my work as principal and limit the time and energy that I spend on peripherals.	Open-door policy with faculty leads to many conversations not directly related to instruction; daily monitoring of cafeteria is huge expenditure of my time.	I am committed to being the Good Shepard, Father Confessor, amateur therapist, Friendly Mayor of the school, loved by and accessible to faculty and students alike. I am committed to not having conflictual relationships with faculty.	

"And I'll tell you something more," David said, with a groan and a wry smile, warming to the opportunity to have an even better look at the dark side of the moon, "I can see it's not just that I would hate for the students or the teachers to start feeling I was inaccessible. I start to think what I would be doing more of with the teachers if I wasn't being their benevolent Father Confessor. I'd be riding their rear ends about changes in their instruction, and I know there'd be a lot of strife and struggle in all of that. Things are on a wonderfully even keel around here these days, and I can see a big part of me wouldn't be thrilled about giving that up."

At the very least, David now sees that for him the work of truly becoming an instructional leader carries a broad set of learning challenges, including some internal ones. He is now aware that his success will depend, in no small measure, on his willingness and ability to grapple with his various assumptions about what he would have to give up and what he'd need to start doing. With his current beliefs

and assumptions, David can't yet imagine how satisfying and meaningful he might find it to be an effective instructional leader. But over time, he may find that the strife and agitation created in the short run actually lead him—and others—to deeper satisfaction in the longer run.

By doing this inner work, David will have a much better chance of delivering on the outer work of being an effective instructional leader.

CHOOSE A PRIORITY AND STAY RELENTLESSLY FOCUSED ON IT

It's true that if we have many improvement priorities, we actually have none. We must choose a priority and stay relentlessly focused on it. So why don't we? We regularly see districts in which everyone is "dancing as fast as we can," heroically expending energies on an impressive variety of initiatives, any one of which, on its own terms, may make all the sense in the world. No one can fault the effort, or the sincerity, of all this hard work. But in most cases no significant progress is made. This is a costly situation on multiple fronts: the leadership team fails to get traction toward its present goals, and it becomes increasingly difficult to enlist people's energies in future efforts. "Look how hard we tried last time, and we still didn't get anywhere," goes the logic. "So what is the use?"

Trying harder may be an effective strategy for technical challenges. But for adaptive challenges we need a way to step off the dance floor and move to the balcony, away from the crowd and its frenetic pace, to have a look at the bigger system that is preventing us from doing the "relentless focusing" we know we need to do.

We don't yet know *all* the possible hidden commitments that can make starting an abundance of initiatives seem like a brilliant strategy. Leaders must discover their own answer to the question, "What would be most troubling to you about achieving a laserlike focus?" especially if they have been frustrated in their honest efforts to focus. Their answers will reveal the personal and specific learning agenda they will need to adopt if they are to succeed in focusing. Choosing a priority and staying relentlessly focused requires that we first see the personal contributions that prevent us from such focus. Having done so, we can then explore and test our specific assumptions in order to free ourselves and our organizations from the grip of overinitiating.

Superintendents have sheepishly told us (with an expression that suggests they've never before thought it, let alone said it to others), "To be honest, I really

don't know which of these initiatives is going to work. It's like the idea of a 'differentiated portfolio,' where you spread out your risk. Or like fishing with many lines. I'm afraid to remove a line from the place where a big fish might swim. I'm afraid of putting all our capital into one stock." The irony is that this very strategy to avoid failure might, in the end, assure it.

Exhibit 10.4 shows three superintendents' contributions to a four-column immunity map illustrating their quite different hidden reasons for *not* prioritizing.

Why is it so important that these superintendents illuminate their hidden side? Let's take a minute to consider the implications of their not doing so. In a nutshell, each will continue to believe in the importance of focus and act inconsistently with that belief. Principals, in turn, will pick this up. They will hear how important focus is and get the message that focus isn't really a priority; everything has to get done. So although they may know and believe that their success in the eyes of the superintendent is to focus, focus, focus, they also believe that focus needs to happen in addition to all the other things already on their plates!

A principal's immunity map might then look something like that shown in Exhibit 10.5.

*The forms of our personal learning challenges
are not infinitely different. There is more
than one crater on the dark side of the moon,
but not an endless number.*

We see how the principal can repeat the same pattern as the superintendent and we can then imagine how teachers in that building will also not focus and prioritize. Without explicit messages from the principal about what they can let go of, or what they can loosen up on, teachers will understandably feel pressure to do it all too. Self-protection, in its varied forms, will cascade throughout the system. Focus will be absent. People will hedge their bets and do as much as they believe they need to do to avoid the dire outcomes their hidden worries and guiding assumptions predict. Yet if we all could see these worries and unearth our assumptions about the risks of focus, we would be in a position to radically alter our behaviors. For the first

Exhibit 10.4
Four-Column Map Reflecting Three Superintendents

1	2	3	4
Commitment	Doing/Not Doing	Hidden/Competing Commitment	Big Assumption
<i>I am committed to leading an improvement process that is relentlessly focused on a single priority.</i>	<i>I/We take on too many things at once, have a host of "balls in the air," keep adding without subtracting.</i>	<p>Superintendent A: <i>I am committed to not making a mistake, to not betting on the wrong horse.</i></p> <p>Superintendent B: <i>I am committed to not being bored, to feeling stimulated and energized by having a lot going on at once.</i></p> <p>Superintendent C: <i>I am committed to being responsive to the enthusiasms, needs, or expectations of internal and external constituencies.</i></p>	<p>Superintendent A: <i>I assume I will make the wrong choice. I assume an initial choice is not modifiable. I assume if I am shown to be mistaken I will lose all credibility.</i></p> <p>Superintendent B: <i>I assume that if I relentlessly focus on just one or two initiatives I will feel unsatisfied, restless, and turn into the kind of person I disdain.</i></p> <p>Superintendent C: <i>I assume if I do not respond positively to internal enthusiasm and external pressure I will lose my bases of support.</i></p>

time, we might be able to see, for example, the inevitable costs for students of our not focusing.

The *forms* of our personal learning challenges are not infinitely different. There is more than one crater on the dark side of the moon, but not an endless number. Being aware of the basic moon landscapes can help us see what we might be hiding

Exhibit 10.5
Principal's Four-Column Immunity Map

1	2	3	4
Commitment	Doing/Not Doing	Hidden/Competing Commitment	Big Assumption
<i>I am committed to focusing on a single priority.</i>	<i>I take on too many things at once, have a host of "balls in the air," keep adding without subtracting.</i>	<i>I am committed to not making mistakes by letting the wrong things go.</i> <i>I am committed to not putting myself out on a limb by not delivering the status quo.</i>	<i>I assume that if I let the wrong things go, it will be my fault, my job, and my livelihood here. I won't have the superintendent's backing.</i>

from ourselves. We can use that knowledge as a resource when, try as we might to imagine what we are protecting, we don't see anything noteworthy.

Over the last five years, we have seen hundreds of four-column immunity maps, bravely created by school leaders and teams of leaders working at educational improvement. The learning challenges that arise often share common features and forms and can therefore be grouped. As illustrated in Table 10.1, each of these challenges can involve new definitions or new tolerance for risk.

For example, Leader A assumes that "if I do not respond positively to internal enthusiasms and external pressure I will lose my bases of support." This personal learning challenge exemplifies the challenge of redefining and renegotiating relationships with others.

Leader B illustrates immunities in the top right quadrant. He is in the grip of a Big Assumption implicating his own self-definition, what he must expect of himself in order to feel fulfilled: "I assume that if I relentlessly focus on just one or two initiatives, I will feel unsatisfied, restless, and turn into the kind of person I disdain." To move past his immunity, he needs to change his self-expectations.

Leader C's immune systems were anchored in risk. She was committed to focusing on a single priority, and her Big Assumption led her to act inconsistently with this commitment because she could not risk making the wrong choice. As she

Table 10.1 Adaptive Challenges of Change Leadership

Personal Learning Required for the Adaptive Challenges of Change Leadership		
	New Work with Others	New Work with Self
New Definitions	<p><i>Renegotiating Relationships</i> (Leader A, for example)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disappointing expectations (for example, by not having all the answers) Giving the work back to the people Collaborating/mutual accountability/ being receptive to upward feedback Shifting loyalties to new reference group Pushing back or dissenting in new ways or with new people 	<p><i>Changed Self-Expectations</i> (Leader B, for example)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible to be a good and effective leader without having the answers, being able to solve it all oneself, knowing at the outset how to get from "here to there" New definitions of old roles (for example, from superintendent as public relations manager to getting people to look at hard realities; from principal as building manager to chief instructional improvement officer; from assistant superintendent of instruction to systemwide change leader) New sources of satisfaction in the work; new definitions of what it is to be personally "successful" That in addition to being masterful at X in my work, I am also an "emergent learner" at Y
	<p><i>Allowable Uncertainties for One's Group</i> (Leader C, for example)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness to lead a process that puts others at risk of failing (students or staff) Willingness to lead a process that puts others at risk of feeling overwhelmed Willingness to set out toward a destination without a clear map of how we get from here to there 	<p><i>New Self-Allowances</i> (Leader C, for example)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk learning what I "don't want to know" or find out (for example, that I can't do it; that I or others don't really believe all kids can learn to high levels) Risk not being in control of the process, or risk losing control Risk others' disapproval, loss of regard, respect, loyalty, affection Risk becoming more aligned with, or identified with, subgroups I had passionately regarded as "other"/not me Risk making a mistake, missing something valuable
New Risk Tolerance		

put it, “I assume I will make the wrong choice. I assume an initial choice is not modifiable. I assume if I am shown to be mistaken I will lose all credibility.” Her challenges fall in the bottom half of the figure: she needs to work on risk tolerance with others and with herself.

When you review Table 10.1, consider whether you see the hidden commitment you have identified in one (or more) of these quadrants. If nothing seems to fit, does trying on the various learning challenges described prompt any “ah ha” for you?

FOSTER A WIDESPREAD FEELING OF URGENCY FOR CHANGE

John Kotter, in *Leading Change*, says “allowing too much complacency” is the “number one error” change leaders make: “By far the biggest mistake people make when trying to change organizations is to plunge ahead without establishing a high enough sense of urgency.”⁵ But in explaining why, Kotter never gets to the leader’s own inner work. As an organizational theorist, Kotter’s focus tends to be on the complications of the organizational dynamics. He talks about leaders “overestimat[ing] how much they can force big changes,” or “underestimat[ing] how hard it is to drive people out of their comfort zones.”⁶ We believe Kotter is absolutely right about this part of the picture, but it is not the whole picture.

Consider again the predicament of Corning’s Superintendent Don Trombley (discussed in Chapter Eight) or another CLG learning partner, Superintendent Mike Ward of West Clermont. For several years both men led districts considered by their communities to be highly successful. Their communities felt this way, in part, because many good things were going on in their districts, and, in part, because these superintendents were doing a very good job selling their constituencies the proposition that the districts were succeeding!

Anyone who has been a superintendent knows that a large part of the job includes managing public perceptions. There is nothing evil or corrupt about this. As Boston Superintendent Tom Payzant has told us, “The kind of leader you want, someone who is closely tied to the improvement of instruction, is exactly what we need. But if a school or district head is not also a good politician, it doesn’t matter how much they know about instruction. They might not last ninety days.”⁷ Yet the public relations dimension of leadership can make it exceedingly difficult to generate sufficient urgency.

Sometimes a superintendent brand-new to a district can more easily stand up and talk about the urgent need for things to improve because doing so casts no shadow on the quality of his or her own prior work. It is also easier to sound the alarm in a troubled urban district. (It is also, unfortunately, commonplace for a new superintendent to be brought into an urban district as a hero to clean up a mess perceived to be the product of his or her predecessor, who, two years earlier, was likely ridden in on the same white horse.) Although the prior superintendent may not have talked about it, district and community members are not surprised to hear that their urban district needs significant improvements. But most superintendents are not new superintendents. Most, like Ward and Trombley, understandably feel enormous reluctance to publicize their own district's problems and launch an initiative calling for systemic improvement.

"After standing up, year after year, telling the good people of my community what a great job we are doing," began Mike Ward, "how do I now say, 'We are not doing a good enough job by your children. We must and we can do better?'" Most leaders do not make this clear declaration. At best, they may borrow the frame suggested by Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great*;⁸ as Arthur did, saying, "We have been a very good district, but now we must go from good to great." Such a frame appropriately does not find fault; however, it can also fail to generate sufficient urgency. "If we are doing well," people say to themselves or out loud, "and it is going to take an extraordinary amount of work or expense to do a little better, is it really worth it?" "Are we letting the Perfect be the enemy of the Good?" "If it ain't broke, why fix it?"

But Ward and Trombley each made a clear declaration. They found a different kind of frame that also had the merit of making the present situation no one's fault. They talked repeatedly about the way the world has changed. Trombley made dramatically visible how many kids were not reading at grade level and what this meant for their futures in a changing economy. Ward practically made a mantra out of "'Good enough' is no longer good enough for our kids." "We are ordinary people," he would say about everyone working to reinvent the district, "who are going to do extraordinary things."

What Ward and Trombley did took courage and required a willingness to disappoint expectations, to renegotiate relationships (see Table 10.1). In other words, what they did often requires overturning one's own immunities to change. It is not just the leader who wants to say, "everything is fine"; followers want to hear this

from the leader as well. Superintendents feel this expectation from the community, from parents, and from their boards. Many superintendents believe they must continue to tell the public that things are fine or getting steadily better in order to maintain the political and financial support both they and their district need for survival. And although we have seen public support for superintendents and their districts actually *increase* when superintendents are more open and honest about the challenges that educators face, there does exist a powerful, persistent cross-cultural preference for the leader or teacher as reliable authority.

Some theorists attribute this preference to the psychology of early childhood relationships. Others seem to want to take us back further to our cross-species inheritances. (Heifetz, for example, evokes the image of the silverback gorilla whose signals the others continuously track.⁹) Whatever the source of the gravity, it is a difficult orbit to escape. It takes enormous courage to defy social expectations.

Social psychologist Stanley Milgram, best known for the infamous “simulated shock” experiment, once designed a study to test the difficulty of defying social expectations under even the thinnest of conditions. He directed his doctoral students to stand on crowded New York City subways and simply ask sitting passengers for their seats. The students found the task enormously stressful despite the fact they were talking (or just considering talking) to complete strangers they would never see again. They wanted to claim they were ill (and thus not really in violation of the norm or expectation). People did usually surrender their seats, no questions asked. Many students reported, after claiming the seats, they actually did begin to feel ill, as if reflexively they needed to create an internal condition that would preserve the norm!¹⁰ If it is very hard for us to disappoint others, even when they are complete strangers, imagine how much more difficult it will be for us to disappoint those with whom we have worked for many years. To overturn a third-column commitment not to disappoint others’ expectations, we need to expose and then modify Big Assumptions about the dire consequences of doing so (as we saw in Chapter Nine).

ENCOURAGE A NEW KIND OF LEADER

We need leaders whose expertise is more invested in helping a group create the shared knowledge necessary for sustained improvement than in being the certain source of the answers and solutions. We find the difficulty in “leading from behind” is that not only is it hard to disappoint others’ expectations of the

good leader as the authority but also that it is much harder than we realize to convince ourselves of a new definition of leadership. We can quickly agree that our schools and districts are not going to improve because of the heroic service of a charismatic leader working alone—that we must build teams (and build them not simply so there will be an army to follow our orders and pursue the plans we have masterfully created ourselves). Rather, we need a kind of team that can work together at “rebuilding the airplane while flying it,” a team that can share the work of deciding, assessing, and revising on a path to improvement that is almost never a straight line. As with a first-column commitment, we say we believe this because we actually do; it makes sense to us. But we may not realize how powerful and how deep-seated are our countering beliefs (third-column commitments).

This is no different from the challenges teachers often face in successfully enacting a learner-centered pedagogy. In recent doctoral dissertations on teacher education, Jennifer Berger¹¹ and Jim Hammerman¹² each found that teachers (preservice teachers in a teacher preparation program, and veteran teachers in an intensive summer institute, respectively) espoused genuine, well-considered intentions to teach in the more learner-centered ways they learned in their programs. Yet they don’t. In some cases, they do not even know that they don’t. Within the teacher education field there is a growing body of research that documents how the powerful, and usually unrecognized, beliefs teachers hold (about the teacher-as-authority) counter the beliefs they may enthusiastically embrace in their programs. The teachers they become are much more a function of the former than the latter.¹³

As leaders, we are no different. A few years ago we conducted an “immunity to change” workshop with a group of urban high school principals, each of whom received Annenberg grants for school improvement. Along with approximately fifty principals and assistant principals, there were a dozen or so representatives of the foundation. One of the participants generously volunteered to “go public” with her developing “immunity map,” speaking elegantly and passionately about her aspirations for her high school in her first-column commitment: “I am deeply committed to leading an improvement process that will make our school a place of learning and self-respect for all of our kids.” She said it with such conviction that the group broke out into applause.

When it came time to hear examples from the second column (“doing and not doing”), she was less boisterous but no less dedicated to honestly speaking her

truth: “I am not pushing for results. I am not eliminating dysfunctional processes that slow down the change process. I am not really actively ‘campaigning’ for the changes.”

When we got to the third column, which reveals why all the obstructive behavior makes sense, she rose up from her chair. With a voice that resonated with the same deep conviction, and now with a half-smile, she proclaimed, “I am also committed to dragging my heels and keeping things from moving forward a single inch!” This was met with gasps and laughter, as people thought about their foundation benefactors in the room. “I am damn well committed to not being the one who takes my people out into deep water and then lets them drown because we don’t know how to get to the other side!”

Although the group was hearing a declaration of stuckness from one of its most inspiring colleagues, they broke out into spontaneous applause and laughter in appreciation for the sheer authenticity of her words. Later one of her colleagues mentioned that he thought it was a particularly brave thing for her to admit, given all who were in the room. “Yeah,” another said, “I thought one of those Annenberg people was going to come over and take back your check!” “Well, the thing I was most struck by,” said a third, “was that the Annenberg people were among those clapping the loudest.”

The Annenberg people knew that leading change was not simple. They in fact were feeling increasingly frustrated by the lack of results they were seeing overall. But they recognized that the principal was bravely getting down to her role in the matter, maybe for the first time. They did not doubt for a moment that she meant every word of her first-column commitment, but they must have intuited that human beings comprise multiple truths, and they appreciated that she was now expressing not just one, but two of hers.

Her bigger story, which came out in her fourth column, was that she had been coleading this improvement process with a mentor who had come out of retirement to be a “bench coach” with her. A trusted advisor, who had lately decided he needed to return to retirement, his departure left the principal feeling very uncertain that she had what it takes to bring off the changes they were working on. She wrote, “I assume I cannot do this alone. I assume I cannot lead without being clearer how we get from here to there.”

These Big Assumptions led to other assumptions. “I assume *someone* must know exactly how this is going to go.” “I assume no self-respecting leader will set off

toward a worthy destination without knowing how to get there.” “I assume if I cannot do it alone, the only course of action is inaction.”

Her “change immunity” reminds us of Arthur’s, whose journey we have chronicled throughout this book. His earlier reluctance, like hers, to take real steps forward may teach us that no matter how easily we acknowledge the limits of a traditional command-and-control conception of “the good leader,” most of us, should we take on the hard work of school leadership, will discover its vestiges still have a hold on us. This conception may be better suited to leaders facing technical challenges rather than adaptive ones, for which it is never possible, even for the very best leader, to know everything needed before setting out. Like Columbus’ exploration, the voyage inevitably requires us to revise our own mental models (from a flat world to a global one) in the process. This is the learning work of remaking our own self-expectations and self-conceptions (see Table 10.1).

We know such learning happens. Mike Ward, the Ohio superintendent, is just one example. Ward understood that meeting adaptive challenges in reinventing West Clermont’s district required both outer and inner work and that he needed to model being a learner on both fronts himself. In August, two of the authors attended the district’s annual start-of-the-new-year, multiday leadership retreat. At its conclusion, when people had a chance to say how they’d experienced the meeting, several people made comments like these: “I’ve been to many of these annual meetings, and many with Mike. To be honest, they have always had a similar quality for me: you come in, already feeling a little overwhelmed thinking about everything that has to be done to be ready for the start of school, and then the superintendent comes in and adds to your stress by giving you this year’s set of additional marching orders. You walk out feeling even more overwhelmed. The meeting this year was a unique experience and I am walking out with a kind of energy I have never had before!”

What made such a difference? Along with the fact that the “marching orders” this year were collaboratively created during the retreat, instead of being “handed down,” a turning point in the meeting came early on, when Ward decided to share his own four-column immunity map. He began by telling the team that he was committed to further developing a more collaborative, distributed form of leadership. This came as no surprise, and they expected him next to tick off the initiatives they knew about that demonstrated that commitment. Instead, he took them through his second column, naming the variety of ways he was actually holding

back or undermining his own commitment. This got their attention. He then told them he realized he still had very strong commitments to retaining various kinds of unilateral control that actually contradicted his first commitment and that he probably held a Big Assumption like, “I assume if I really do lead in this new way *you all will screw things up!*”

On paper, this might look like a bizarre way for him to be communicating with his team. At the least it could seem rude, and at worst it could seem to severely damage bonds of trust between the leader and his group. But in reality, it had a very different effect. First, all members of the group, some time before, had gone through the exercise of creating a four-column immunity map themselves, both individually and collectively, so they understood the kind of “bigger picture” it creates. Second, they deeply appreciated that Mike was making clear how their new work together was a learning challenge for him, too. And, finally, they experienced his first-column commitment as much more “real” when it was paired with his understandable worry that they might “screw things up.” They laughed when he said it—and they began to take more seriously the way he was counting on them.

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When we get rid of our idea of a leader as the source of all answers and solutions—the sure-and-certain, command-and-control, top-down authority—we don’t replace it with a picture of a lost, inept bumbler, serene in his cluelessness. Instead, we picture a highly capable “leader-learner,” someone with the courage and capability to learn, and help those around him learn, as they collectively create a path toward a previously unattained destination. Becoming this kind of leader is a long process for any of us, a kind of work that inevitably calls on us to be learning more about ourselves at the same time we are learning more about our organizations.

DEVELOP A NEW KIND OF ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

One of our strongest invitations throughout *Change Leadership* is for school or district leaders to develop a new kind of leadership practice when they are taking up the work of complex, long-term, whole system improvement. We believe that the team needs to learn to take on two jobs at once—running the school or district they have, and leading an improvement process to create the school or district they must become. Our concept of leadership practice communities (LPCs) is meant to signal that educational improvement or transformation cannot be seen as merely one more big initiative taken up by the administrative team as it currently operates.

In our work with district leadership teams, we have noticed that a critical moment in the early evolution toward an LPC occurs when the team decides that:

1. It needs one meeting time for doing its accustomed administrative work and another for leading the improvement process (often prompting the idea that perhaps we do not have all the right people for the second kind of regular meeting as we are currently constituted).
2. It needs to change its name (suddenly, it no longer seems quite right for a team to keep calling itself something like the “Administrative Council,” even though this name has never felt problematic before).

These seem like spontaneous realizations of what it means that “we are taking up a second, different kind of leadership work” (not more important, but different). To do this work well, teams must give themselves the opportunity to develop over time a new form of practice appropriate to this different kind of work.

However leadership groups do it, this new form of practice must steadfastly maintain a dual focus to internal learning and external leadership (that is, it is not just a professional development space; it needs to *get things done*). This new practice must also enable the group to reconstitute itself from a collection of conscientious, semiautonomous operatives (each of whom is tending to his or her particular leadership responsibility in the system) into a genuinely collaborative team that is collectively assuming responsibility for a whole system improvement effort.

Leadership Practice Communities: A Personal Learning Challenge

Better understanding of what a leadership practice community looks like is quite different from actually being able to bring one about. The LPC is one of our

favorite ideas; in a sense, this whole book is meant to be a resource for it. The LPC is therefore one of those “should do’s” about external organizational change that burns even more brightly—is perhaps more “illuminated”—than any other. And we are beginning to learn that bringing an LPC about may require us to turn inward as well, to meet individual and collective personal learning challenges. So again, there is a less illuminated side of the picture. We do need to bring into view a fuller picture of the moon in order for an LPC to be more than a first-column commitment (a good intention), but a reality.

The ideas that “we need to be more of a team,” “we are all responsible for the improvement of each part of the system,” and “we are at work on this together” frequently live alongside other, hidden, competing commitments that will undermine the LPC if they are not exposed. Despite all the goodwill, friendly banter, and even effective cooperation a leadership group may exhibit, very often its members are isolated from each other in many important ways. Even when a typical district leadership team begins to meet with the explicit intention to form an LPC, its members are not typically leaders *in the life of this meeting*.

We do not mean they behave unprofessionally or irresponsibly. They are more often followers, typically of the superintendent, or they are going to be leaders of their particular “franchises” (“X High School,” “Y Middle School,” “the SpEd program”), carefully weighing the proceedings relative to the needs, opportunities, or vulnerabilities of “their” turf. The meeting then is more like an assembly of subgroup leaders: the superintendent may need to coordinate these subgroup leaders; a member may need to advocate before the group or the superintendent on behalf of the needs of his or her subgroup. The district-as-it-is-now can be run this way. The district-we-want-to-become cannot be realized this way.

To be a leader in the life of the leadership meeting (rather than only a good steward of one’s separate leadership realm), each member has to develop a second identity and loyalty. We refer to this as the ability to “wear two hats.” (One high school principal said he felt relieved to hear us phrase the need this way, because it had seemed to him, when he was first trying to do it, that it felt more like having to “grow two heads.”) Imagine that you are a principal of one of the high schools. There may well be times in the meeting when you are listening and reacting predominantly as the leader of that subgroup. But you also have to have the ability, as needed, to put on your other hat, not as the X High School leader, but as a coleader of the district improvement team. In that role you

might, for example,

- Consider positions that will not be popular with your constituents back in the high school.
- Take positions concerning something going on in a colleague's school that normally you would consider none of your business.
- Be willing to respond to colleagues whose queries about something happening (or not happening) in your high school you might normally feel was not really their business.
- Make demands on colleagues to take actions or modify behaviors that have no direct relationship to your high school.
- Take an active interest in, or critique the work of, a colleague in an elementary or middle school.

Definitions for Change

Developing a second identity and loyalty can stir up exactly the kinds of learning challenges suggested in the upper quadrants of Table 10.1—the need to alter your own self-definition and the definition of your relationships with others. One means of shifting from how we typically relate (as a group of separately enfranchised advocates who are followers of one or two leaders on the district team) to more of a team of coleaders is through making Team Agreements¹⁴ and taking the time to discuss with each other what each agreement actually means. In these discussions, people have the opportunity to clarify their particular “dark side” learning challenge as it relates to being in the group as coleaders.

For example, we worked with a district leadership group in the Northeast that wanted to function more as a team. They thought this would improve their internal work and that it would improve their stature with their external clientele (they knew they had a reputation for not being a very cohesive group). Asked to identify a single agreement among themselves that could go the furthest toward improving matters, they came up with something they called the Fight-in-Private, One-Voice-in-Public Agreement. They valued their ability to take diverse positions and their superintendent's appreciation for the benefits of “spirited debate.” They didn't want to lose that. However, they did see that their tendency to carry these fights outside the door, to make these differences known, even after the group had come to a decision, was not conducive to strengthening their own team.

Often groups can come to an agreement like this one fairly quickly. When they do, we invite group members to test their understanding of what the agreement actually means. This test is key because often when people make an agreement quickly, it will later turn out they each were comfortable with their own version of the agreement. We ask people to think of situations that are likely to arise, and how they might handle them, in keeping with the agreement as they understand it. This gives us a chance to ask, "If Ellen actually did X, would she be keeping the agreement as you understand it?"

A school principal on this team, Bernie, had a situation he wanted to test: "If my own leadership group at the high school and I have come up with our position on an issue I know is going to come up at a district meeting, and I come here and argue our view, and this group decides the other way, ordinarily I'd go back to my people and say, 'I gave it every shot, but you won't believe what those bozos decided this week.' [Hooting and hollering.] Okay, I realize this would not be in perfect keeping with our new agreement and I wouldn't say that. But let's be real. How can I really be 'One Voice in Public' with my own crew when they already know my position? I won't call you bozos, but I'm probably going to tell them I gave it every shot. I'm probably going to tell them what I said. Would I still be keeping our agreement?"

This led to spontaneous combustion, with six people talking at once and then a very lively conversation. Some people thought Bernie made complete sense and that he would not be violating the agreement. Some people thought it would violate the agreement, and that once a district team decision had been made he had to stand with the district team. His own team would know, of course, that he had taken a different position, but they also had to experience Bernie as a member of both groups. They would ultimately respect the district team more for witnessing that Bernie kept a kind of integrity with this team, too. "They need to see your other hat, Bernie!"

Other people said Bernie's issue made them think that they all should anticipate such situations. Maybe it was not a good idea in the first place to come to such a fixed position with their own teams before heading into the district team. That made them into advocates for their franchise and didn't really allow them to play a full role on the district team.

Other people wanted to go off on a related but more general issue: Is it okay to tell others outside the group just what your own position was concerning a contentious issue around which the team had rendered a public decision? "Isn't that just freedom of speech?" The group was divided about this, too. Some thought they ought to have this right and others said, "How can we possibly be keeping an

agreement about 'One Voice in Public' if we are making known our dissenting view all the time? Isn't that basically what we are doing now?" We asked the following question of those who thought they should be able to make their views known to others outside the team: "Since you all seem to agree it would definitely be a violation to tell someone outside the group what someone else's position was [to which they all agreed], why would you think it would be any different to share a different part of the team's private conversation—namely, what you said?"

The group eventually saw what all these conversations are really about: they suggest the beginnings of a new organism taking shape, of a living entity with its own integrity. They suggest the possibility of collaboratively preserved boundaries that begin to make the leadership team a true space of its own, with conversation that all members own (rather than a place for "free speech" and advocating for one's subgroup). They suggest how weak or porous the current boundaries between this group and the rest of the system have been; how much more rooted in and loyal to their subgroups, to their separate franchises, many of the leaders have been. They suggest a group beginning to do the work that may be required to reconstitute itself as the kind of team needed to be an effective, cohesive agent of systemwide change.

In effect, they are beginning to do this work by manifesting their competing commitments. They may genuinely want to be a more collaborative team, but in getting into the details of how they would have to conduct themselves differently, outside the group as well as inside it, they are coming to terms with the power of their commitments to preserving a certain autonomy within the system and preserving a loyalty and identification with their subunits. If the team is to cohere as a group of coleaders who collectively plan for and tend to the adaptive work of reinventing the school or district, they will need to surface their individual immunities and work to overcome them.

SHINING A BROADER LIGHT ON CHANGE

In *Change Leadership*, we have urged a number of significant visible changes in the ways schools and their leaders should operate. In this chapter, we have taken an unusual tour through the most prominent of these changes, focusing on the systematic nature of the less visible, personal learning challenges that may be a part of enacting any of them. Our goal has been to sketch this usually "dark side of the

moon” much more broadly than the one example you created for yourself in the earlier chapters. We took this tour to bring to life the proposition with which we began: every one of the outward changes that we suggest needs to occur for successful whole system improvement has some kind of similarly challenging inward dimension; any individual or team that is having difficulty bringing that change about must address the inward dimension.

Enlightening this side of the picture suggests a number of implications for leaders. In keeping with our recommendation that leaders form an improvement team that functions as an LPC, in Appendix A we provide a groupwide exercise for diagnosing immunity to change.¹⁵ This process can be most useful in helping a team see its “dark side of the moon” if they get stuck making progress on any critical “outer” change. This, as you’ll see, is a close relative to the individual immunity tool we’ve asked you to engage throughout the book. Conducting this group activity can create a space for a new kind of group conversation. Issues the group has not before been able to discuss (either because it was not aware of them, or did not know how to bring them up constructively) should now be more discussable (such as the example earlier in this chapter about the inappropriately protective environment of the “povrecito culture”). The emphasis on clarifying a contradiction not between different factions within the group, but contradictory beliefs held by the group as a whole, allows the group to look deeply at itself without individual defensiveness.

The process allows the group to rather swiftly bring out hidden commitments and assumptions that have often never been voiced because it would feel too risky for any one person to be associated with them—such as the idea (which commonly arises in the third column) that we may also be committed “to *not* changing,” or “to preserving the status quo,” or the idea (which commonly arises in some form in the fourth column) that “we assume all children *cannot* learn at high levels,” or that “it is actually impossible to leave no child behind.” If we hold these beliefs (along with our more hopeful ones) but must pretend we do not, they continue to exercise their influence, and we have no chance, individually or collectively, to explore them. If we cannot talk about them in a safe and private space because they are “unacceptable,” then all our learning, problem solving, and school improving will deal with only a piece of what needs to be engaged.¹⁶

A group should not be afraid or ashamed to discover it is bedeviled by a contradiction. Every adaptive challenge is beset with contradictions that require us to

adapt. A contradiction is not a fatal flaw. Potentially, it is a rich resource for the group's learning and greater effectiveness. It gives the group an additional change strategy, besides merely trying to "fix" the limitations it identifies in its second column.

The groupwide immunities exercise invites leaders to dig deeper into the causes of the limitations before trying to "solve" them, especially to consider why these "limitations" may actually make complete sense. If every system is brilliantly designed to produce exactly the results that it does, then perhaps before we try to improve our system, we need to better grasp its current "brilliant design." If this "brilliance" escapes us, so likely will any lasting solution.

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Finally, the group needs the opportunity to consider "where do we go from here?" with the new ideas and insights the exercise has generated. In some cases, this can lead to the group equivalent of "testing the Big Assumption," as described in Chapter Nine. What kinds of "experiments" can the group (or its delegates) conduct that will generate information on the Big Assumption?

In many cases, a more productive next step is continued and deeper conversation: a group might drill more deeply into the implications of its Big Assumptions. If its Big Assumption is, "We assume if we do try to do it we will fail," has the group discussed what "success" and "failure" mean in the context of a large, long-term initiative like the one it has just begun? Does the group need to clarify (and perhaps be relieved of) worries about who will make this determination? Or when? Or on what grounds? And with what consequences? Do group members assume they are supposed to already know how to do everything that will be required of them to succeed ("We assume if we do discover the problem is us it shows we are

frauds”), that they are not allowed to learn “on the job” when taking on an adaptive challenge?

When the exercise is done in a multigroup format, often the next steps become self-evident once all the groups have reported. A warning to leaders: the experience of getting so much useful and revealing information all at once can be intense. The subgroups of one district team came back and reported contradictions that showed why the leaders of each subgroup were not advancing the change initiative. In every case, there were third- and fourth-column entries reflecting a desire not to get the superintendent in trouble with his board, or not to risk disappointing or angering the superintendent by focusing on a small number of priorities. (Despite the fact that the superintendent was specifically asking them to focus on a few priorities, they weren’t sure he really meant it.) The results were a revelation for the superintendent, who then made clear the need for conversations that would help the group members take new risks.



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHANGE LEADER: TOWARD ADAPTIVE WORK

The work of organizational change inevitably runs smack into the work of personal change no matter what direction one turns. Yes, it is vital for schools and districts to be relentlessly focused on instructional improvement; for leadership teams to think systemically and act strategically; for leaders to generate the energies for change through increased collaboration, co-ownership, and urgent priorities. *And to succeed in these worthwhile activities, we may need to reexamine previously hidden beliefs, assumptions, or mental models that could stand in the way of our doing so.* This fundamental idea carries with it a variety of implications for the change leader. In this section, we briefly consider five: leaders need to embrace the fuller picture, set an example, encourage others to take up their own personal learning work, welcome contradictions, and create organizations that increase personal capacities. We describe them as a set of stances for change leaders to consider.

Embrace the Fuller Picture

Embracing the fuller picture may be the least visible and the most important stance. It doesn’t involve necessarily *doing* anything. It is about an inner disposition. It means acknowledging the existence and importance of the “fuller

picture”—or at least taking seriously the possibility that success may depend on cultivating both a stronger outward and inner focus. We know this is not an easy thing to do. We know it makes new demands on leaders cognitively and emotionally.

From the cognitive side, the change leader’s arena may be more complex than customarily described. If this has been one of your reactions, please know that you are not alone. How should you regard this suggestion that the work ahead may be harder than previously understood? Perhaps a brief story will suggest one kind of answer.

“The driving ideas here,” the Gates Foundation evaluator wrote, “are complex. But school reform has always been difficult, and we have tried many easy ‘fixes’ before. The ideas are complex, but then so are the schools and the adults working in them.”

Four years after the Gates Foundation awarded a grant to launch the Change Leadership Group at Harvard, it hired a third-party evaluation team, a group that had no prior need or potential advantage in rendering a verdict in one direction or another. These assessors interviewed people in the districts where we consulted, talked to people who attended our trainings, read or listened to the ideas you’ve been exposed to in this book, and tried to understand the use people made of the tools we have provided you throughout these chapters. Although the evaluators had a great many favorable things to say, the central conclusion they drew was that the framework we presented, and the work we did with district leaders, was “complex.” What interested us especially was the stance they took toward this complexity. In their report to the Gates Foundation, they wrote: “The driving ideas are complex . . . but school reform has always been difficult, and we have tried many easy ‘fixes’ before. The ideas are complex, but then so are the schools and the adults working in them.”¹⁷

This last sentence brings us back to thoughts of Einstein, who said: “No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it.”¹⁸ We may need a

more complex way of thinking about educational transformation because the schools and adults working in them may be more complex than we have given them credit for.

And we know that adopting a stance that stays mindful of the “dual focus” is emotionally demanding. When Superintendent Mike Ward said, “We set out to work on our schools, and discovered that, in order to really succeed at it, we had to work on ourselves, as well,” the expression in his voice had as much to communicate as the words themselves. Having begun to see the results of his work, there was undeniable exhilaration; but the wry tone also reflected the fatigue and the anxiety that have been an equally undeniable part of the journey. Growing is hard work, made all the harder if we continue to believe it is the primary province of the young—that “grown-ups,” especially those in leadership positions, are supposed to have done all the growing they will ever need to do to successfully carry out their work.

Set an Example

If we, as leaders, deny ourselves the opportunity to “grow on the job,” how likely is it that those around us, those who work for us, are going to feel genuinely entitled to the same right themselves? The second stance recognizes that actions speak louder than words. If we want our colleagues to identify and engage those personal learning challenges that stand directly in the way of accomplishing goals to which they are genuinely committed, we are asking them to make themselves vulnerable. We are asking them first to name ways in which they are currently less effective in their work!

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entitled to this same right themselves?*

What has been so remarkable and inspiring to us is the courage we have seen teachers and administrators display in their willingness to take on this work. Even when the “boss” makes his or her own learning challenges more visible, those who

work for the boss are still taking a risk (“We can’t fire *you* for *your* limitations”). But we have certainly seen that the leader’s willingness to model the stance of “learning while leading” goes a long way toward fostering a community of personal reflection.

But what kind of “community of personal reflection” is the leader trying to foster? What is the optimal kind of example for the leader to share? Modeling the dual focus does not mean demonstrating that, along with the organizational changes one is trying to bring about, one is also willing to participate in and promote self-reflective activities of any sort, which may or may not have tight connections to those very organizational changes. A genuinely dual focus is not interested in personal reflection or personal disclosure for its own sake. However bravely undertaken, however personally illuminating the journey, personal learning among school professionals that is not tightly joined to the organizational changes designed to transform the quality of teaching and learning is not a dual focus; it is only a parallel focus. Improved teaching so that all students can develop the new skills required for them to succeed must be visibly connected to our individual learning agendas. The optimal example for the leader to share should clearly demonstrate a personal learning goal that, if not accomplished, will put at risk the collectively owned improvement priority, or the ability to carry out a publicly understood strategy for accomplishing that priority.

Encourage Others to Take Up Their Own Personal Learning Work

We have yet to meet a single teacher or administrator participating in an ambitious whole school or whole district transformation effort for whom *no part* of their work presents an adaptive challenge. Nor do we expect to meet such a person. Adaptive challenges require provisions for our own growth. Trying to meet adaptive challenges through technical means is the most common error Heifetz sees.¹⁹ Not bringing everyone into the dual focus (providing a kind of professional development for many, for example, that tries to input new skills without considering the way people may need to change in order to own and implement the new skills) is essentially an invitation for people to commit this error.

Each leader will find his or her most comfortable way to encourage others to take up their personal learning. This stance does not suggest that leaders should encourage their colleagues to make a “personal learning program” out of every challenging aspect of their work. This is unrealistic, unnecessary, and impossible.

We encourage an apparently more modest but actually quite transformational stance: Are you helping the people with whom you work identify even *one* good learning problem that neither you nor anyone else expects them to solve overnight?

And what is a good learning problem? It has the following traits:

- It is directly related to the work one needs to get better at, in order to succeed with the public, organizational improvement goal. In other words, it connects in a direct way to the challenge of improving teaching and learning.
- It is a problem one is personally very interested in working on.
- Its exploration (via the four-column immunity map or by any other means) should reveal both previously hidden contradictions in one's commitments and any Big Assumptions in need of testing.

The leaders of the district in the Northeast we discussed earlier (see p. 30) provide us an example of a “good learning problem,” applicable to nearly every member, as each sought to work more collaboratively. Even when we divided them up into their role-alike subgroups (all the elementary principals; the middle school principals and vice principals; the high school principals and vice principals; the central office people) and had them work through a four-column map around their common commitment to work together more collaboratively, they each discovered myriad ways in which they did not, *even within their own role-alike groups!* (1) The problem—working collaboratively—is clearly related directly to their success in leading a whole-district improvement process. (2) It is a problem they were each interested in working on (in fact, they found it maddeningly interesting, especially when they discovered it was not just about factions *between* the subgroups, but just as difficult for them to bring off with their own peers). (3) Its exploration easily led them to contradictory commitments (for example, to protecting one's turf; to leading the top elementary school) and constraining assumptions (for example, the belief that no matter how much superintendents talk about the need for collaboration, they will be judged only on their individual accomplishments).

Welcome Contradictions

At the very least, the ideas in this chapter might encourage leaders to take a more expansive and generous stance toward colleagues and subordinates who may

not be delivering at the fastest pace or in the most desirable fashion. Might we less readily conclude the individual was not on board with the change in the first place or lacked the skills to perform at the level we expect? Is it possible there are “hidden commitments” and obstructive Big Assumptions at work here? Even if we bring this bigger picture only to our own thinking about another’s work and never share it explicitly with the other, might we find a greater set of choices about how next to be helpful? Or work with a less “made-up mind” about the other’s capabilities?

Imagine how much more benefit might be derived if there were a more widespread “friendliness” toward our contradictions (and the possibly limiting mental models or Big Assumptions that fuel them). Contradictions can be a rich resource for generating good problems to grow on—a curriculum, so to speak, for individual and collective change. As we describe in the group immunities tool in Appendix A, leaders can take the position that collective contradictions are inevitable (and not a shameful sign of their own inadequacy or the fatal dysfunction of their group) and ultimately valuable because they help a group bring to the surface possible distortions in its shared thinking. When leaders make clear that such contradictions are not “grounds for firing,” but new opportunities for learning, it makes it much easier for everyone to bring this “fuller picture” into conversations and considerations about one’s own work, and that of one’s subordinates or supervisees. The question, “What ‘hidden commitment’ might you or I hold that makes these ineffective behaviors ‘brilliant?’” becomes now, not punitive, but an invitation for valuable and prized learning.

Create Organizations That Increase Personal Capacities

We believe leaders and leadership practice communities have a better chance of success when they develop what we have called here a dual focus—a simultaneous attention to cultivating both a greater organizational savvy and a more effective habit of personal reflection. One reason for this success is that a dual focus tends to increase personal capacities, a critical condition for meeting adaptive challenges. As people have a chance to expose and rethink limiting mental models, beliefs, and assumptions, their behavioral repertoire expands. They see a wider range of choices and possibilities. They don’t simply redefine their working relationships or their self-expectations; they do so in a fashion that makes them more effective.

Of course, our schools and districts do not exist for helping the adults who work within them grow; they exist for helping our children and youth grow. But we may

need to accomplish the first to accomplish the second—the adaptive challenge of helping all our young learn new skills at new levels. Writing over seventy years ago, educational sociologist Willard Waller said a similar thing: “It is necessary to consider the personalities of *all* who are involved in the social settings of the school, for it is not possible . . . to liberate students from present inhibitions without also liberating teachers.”²⁰ To that we add that other adults in the schools must be liberated as well.

We have tried to be honest, both in our workshops and in this book, about the ways in which this leadership work is difficult. Significantly altering the quality of our schools is very hard work. But it is equally true that very deep satisfactions are also possible in a kind of leadership that supports the ongoing growth and development of all the people who are spending important parts of their lives in our schools—children and adults alike.

Research shows that the greatest cause of burnout comes not from simply having too much to do, but from being too long in a place of work without experiencing one’s own ongoing development.²¹ Conversely, the increase in energy and morale generated from experiencing one’s work as personally expansive is geometric. And no one benefits more from this enhanced morale than our children. As Roland Barth has written, “Probably nothing within a school has more impact on children, in terms of skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behavior, than the personal and professional growth of teachers.”²² (Naturally, we add administrators as well.) When the adults in the school, says Barth, “individually and collectively examine, question, reflect on their ideals, and develop new practices that lead towards those ideals, the school and its inhabitants are alive. When [the adults in the school] stop growing, so do their students.”²³

CONCLUDING . . . OR COMMENCING?

We want to suggest that you have patience with yourself and your colleagues as you work to develop this new way of seeing. This dual focus—attention outward and attention inward—takes time. The temptation to drop one focus or the other (perhaps, most often, the inward focus) is powerful. If it feels too hard or unfamiliar, it can gradually fall into disuse.

We may have to be on our guard not to become like the man who is looking for his lost watch under a lamppost. “Do you think you dropped it here?” a companion asks. “No,” says the man. “I actually think I dropped it across the street, a ways

from here.” “Then why are you looking for it here?” asks the companion. “Because here,” replies the man, “the light is so much better.”

If one focus is so much more familiar to us, so much more illuminated, we may pour all our energies in that direction. We can be hard at work, with the greatest sincerity and devotion. We can support those around us to work tirelessly as well. We know we are all doing “all we can,” so we are especially dismayed and discouraged when all this hard work seems not to be making the difference we are hoping for. The changes do not penetrate the classroom door. The achievement gap does not lessen. Children are still left behind.

Our work in learning to develop the dual focus may itself best be seen as taking up the ultimate “immunity to change.” You genuinely want to sharpen both an outward and an inward focus (column 1). The more you work with *Change Leadership*, the more you will learn the ways you tend to undermine this genuine commitment (column 2). If you then take the time to work out your own hidden commitments (column 3) and Big Assumptions (column 4), you may help yourself, over time, develop your own version of the dual focus to which you (and we) aspire.

Our hope is that you can use this book to shine more light on those previously unilluminated places where you may also need to be looking to find what is missing. If your progress is slowed or stuck, consider that your light needs to shine more broadly, not more intensely; use the lessons we’ve provided to illuminate both sides of the street. We hope you will use this book as a “renewable resource” that you can return to over time, rather than something that is read through once and “finished.”

The work of change leadership suggests a new kind of administrator and a new kind of administrative team. Although the language and enterprise of “leadership” has lately been vested with dignity and promise, the label and role of the “administrator” unfairly retains a gray, uninspiring pallor. The following words, attributed in the original to the Chinese poet Du Fu, from the Tang Dynasty more than a thousand years ago, cast a different light on “administration,” and give us the chance to end by wishing you the strength to continue swimming against the tide:

It is not that I lack the desire to live beside rivers and among hills,
Hearing the wind scatter leaves, watching the rain breed fish;
But the thought of disproportion in public affairs
Offends my sense of rhythm, and disposes me

To expend the passion that normally takes form in song and painting,
On matters of administrative interest.
Knowing that all things have their intrinsic nature
I imitate the whale
That perpetually aspires to change the currents of the sea.
Torn by contradictory thoughts, I drink deep.

Drink deep—within the work, and within yourselves. Please know how much we admire what you do, and how important we believe it to be to the quality of our children's futures. We have no illusions that the work of transforming education has its source at Harvard University or Washington, D.C. It has its source in your classrooms, in your schools, in your district offices, and in the work you are doing each day.

Endnotes

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14. See Chapters Six and Nine in Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).
15. The concept of group-level "immunities to change" first appears in Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey, "The Real Reason People Won't Change," *Harvard Business Review* (November 2001): 85–92; and Constance M. Bowe, Lisa Lahey, Robert Kegan, and Elizabeth Armstrong, "Recognizing Organizational Contradictions That Impede Institutional Change," *Medical Education* 37 (2003): 723–733.
16. This is akin to treating a patient's chest cold as energetically and conscientiously as we can while ignoring the patient's cancer, because cancer (as it once used to be) is a disease that cannot be discussed. (When the patient dies we are then perplexed because we were working so hard and so well on the chest cold.)
17. The evaluators continued, saying, "In all probability, our best chance for success will be found in coaching organizations like the Change Leadership Group." J. Fouts and Associates, *Learning to Change: School Coaching for Systemic Reform—An Evaluation of Programs Prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation* (Mill Creek, Wash.: Fouts & Associates, LLC, 2004).
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