



HEAD OF DEPARTMENT'S Pocketbook

3rd edition

A pocketful of tips,
tools and techniques to
help teachers manage
their departments or
curriculum areas effectively

Brin Best & Will Thomas

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3rd edition

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How to use this pocketbook



This book is for heads of department and curriculum leaders working in schools and colleges. It will be of value to the newly appointed, to those already established in the role, and to those aspiring to such posts.

Heads of department carry out a critical role in the management of schools and learning. The Department for Education (DfE) has rightly championed the role and formalised the standards that those carrying it out should reach. The National College for Teaching and Leadership in its former incarnation as The National College for School Leadership proclaimed middle leaders 'the engine room of change'.

In recent years there has been an even sharper focus on middle leaders driving the quality of learning and teaching in classrooms. The use of data to raise questions about the performance of teachers and learners has been brought to the fore and middle leaders are expected to play an active part in coaching and mentoring colleagues to perform. This is coupled with a reduction in the average number of teaching years that professionals have under their belts before they take on leadership roles. Overall the demands on middle leaders are probably the highest they have ever been.



How to use this pocketbook



But how do you make sure that you and your department/curriculum area are playing a full part in transforming teaching and learning at your school? This book aims to give you the practical advice that will allow you to do this and thereby become an even more effective head of department.

A key message throughout this book about improving your management and leadership skills is the need to make time to **reflect** on what you do in order to improve. The current pressures in schools do not make this easy, but valuing reflective time is an important rung on the self and department improvement ladder.

As well as encouraging you to be reflective about your current practice, the book contains a wealth of tried and tested practical strategies and techniques that get results. The self-evaluation at the end of the book provides a structured path to improving your department.

How to use this pocketbook



Whether you are new to the leadership role or an established head of department, we hope that you will find fresh perspectives and approaches. The book is designed to help you view the issues in your department from different angles, challenge the norms and traditions and ask the question: just because it's always been done this way, is it the best way? There is nothing more certain than change, especially in the teaching profession. As attitudes towards education change, so we need to adjust the way we do things. The old becomes the new once more; the new becomes the old.

If you are a **new** head of department, be excited by what is possible and build a programme of personal development around innovation. Challenge established practice and create fresh perspectives – tread new ground. Your role has **WAY** more influence than you may think.

If you are an **established** head of department, remember that appropriate change keeps people fresh and vital. Things you tried in the past that didn't work so well may just be worth re-examination. Challenging received wisdom in your superiors is a part of your role, but it can be very hard to do. This book offers you tools to approach these kinds of challenges. The courage, of course, must come from you.

How to use this pocketbook



The need for optimism closely coupled with pragmatism

A head of department finds many twists and turns in the road to success. Staff absence, a low budget or a particularly troublesome student can stretch your physical, mental and spiritual resources to their limits and the expectations placed on middle leaders these days are stratospherically high.

Both authors have lived the middle leader role and thrived in it. We've also worked alongside thousands of leaders as coaches, trainers and mentors and assisted them to develop skills, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that bring out the best in themselves and their teams. Everything in this book is tried and tested. However tough the challenge, there are always at least three secret choices. Will calls them 'The CIA':

- C** **Change it:** those things around you that you have the power to change, including your own thoughts
- I** **Influence it:** use your influencing skills to persuade others to do things differently, change policies, etc
- A** **Accept it:** accept what cannot be changed or influenced, and move on to C and I

Exceptional teachers have the **wisdom** to differentiate between these three choices.

How to use this pocketbook



There is no 'right' way to use this book, but we offer the following suggestions to help you get started and make the most of it.

Tips for using the book

- Think about and record the **current** position in your department before reading the relevant chapter. The self-evaluation tool at the back of the book can help you do this in a semi-quantitative way
- Plan to work through the book a **chapter** at a time, sharing your thoughts with another head of department at your school as you do so
- Work through topics in the book with a **coach/mentor**, focusing first on those that matter to you most
- **Share** the ideas in the book with others, including members of your team, to promote discussion

Finally, be **realistic** about what you can achieve in the timescale available to you. It will take many years to implement all the ideas in this book successfully, so identify your priorities first.



Introduction



**Managing Your
Department**



Effective
Documentation



Maximising
Student
Achievement



Raising the
Profile of Your
Department



Self-evaluation



Further
Information



Managing Your Department

The developing role of the head of department



The Responsibility Triangle is a neat way to look at your role as an academic leader and focus on your development.

As a middle leader your role is to accept the responsibility for improving learner progress. This involves being accountable to your senior leadership team, parents, governors, and the learners themselves, whilst balancing the challenge and the support that you offer your team and yourself. Too much challenge and/ or too little support and colleagues can fail to make progress. Likewise, too little emphasis on accountability can lead to mediocrity.

This book sets out to help you '**raise your game**', whether you are an established or newly appointed head of department.



The department within the whole school



Targets for subject performance have become more demanding in recent years, and all examination subjects make a key contribution to the school's success. Measures of exam and test performances and value-added scores have all increased accountability.

There is a **balance** to be struck between the needs of the department and those of the school as a whole. Factors that might need to be considered in decision-making at middle leadership level include:

- The impact on **learners**
- The impact on the **department/ phase/ area**
- The implications for **other** departments
- The likely impact on the **school** as a whole and the school improvement plan
- The **public** implications – what will be seen externally?
- The **hidden** implications – what will go unnoticed or surface later?