



THE PRINCIPAL'S PURPOSE

***A PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO MORAL
AND ETHICAL
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP***

Leanna Stohr Isaacson

An Eye On Education Book

The Principal's Purpose

A Practical Guide to Moral and Ethical School Leadership

Leanna Stohr Isaacson

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My Stetson University students in educational leadership classes provided field-testing opportunities for the identified concepts. As I observed them working through the process I realized the importance of training potential school administrators at the university level in the practical application of understanding moral, ethical, and purposeful leadership when developing school mission, vision, values, and goals.

The first line of conversation, suggestions, and editing begins with my son Greg. He sees issues from the perspective of a lawyer, and head of the English department of Olympia High School in Orlando, Florida, where he teaches. He provides insight and identifies issues surrounding high school administrators, teachers, and students. The impact of moral, ethical, and purposeful leadership on teachers and principals comes alive when listening to my grandson, Destin McMahon. He and his friends provide a thoughtful per-

spective through the eyes of middle and high school students. He translates teacher actions into student perception. My daughter Lara, his mom, provides insight into the world of educators from the perspective of a parent. Their questions become important points of reference. I am indebted to them for their patience and support.

I have a rare opportunity to return to the role of “recycled principal” in the upcoming months while the principal of my former school takes maternity leave. Then, I will recycle again to her husband’s school so he can take paternity leave. During that time I will become retrained while back in the trenches after two years away. To Laurie and Kevin Storch, and our Area Superintendent Judy Cunningham, I extend my gratitude.

As I return to the principal role, once again, I will practice what I preach by using the strategies and processes identified throughout this book. In this way I will become a better teacher for potential administrators at Stetson University.

A final acknowledgement goes to my brother and his wife Stan and Pam, their children Morgan, Jon, and Lance Stohr; Kristen and Rick Kuykendall for their continued support and encouragement throughout this writing project.

About the Author

Leanna Stohr Isaacson is a veteran educator who has worked as a teacher in several districts, at all grade levels (including exceptional education), and as a principal in both the Northwest and the Southeast. She has studied and lived the challenges of the principalship from a rural and urban perspective inner-city and suburban schools, high diversity, and high-stakes environments.

Dr. Isaacson is a frequent presenter at national and international conferences. Most recently, her presentation topics have included the challenges and practical application of issues faced by principals and assistants who enter leadership positions for the first time. Additional topics relate to strategies for practical application of university coursework into the field of school leadership.

She received her BA and MEd from the University of Montana and, in 2004, received her PhD in interdisciplinary studies (curriculum and instruction; educational leadership) from the University of South Florida. She currently serves as a visiting assistant professor in educational leadership at Stetson University in Celebration, Florida.

She is the author of *Smart, Fast, Efficient: The New Principal's Guide to Success* (2005) by Eye on Education.

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Preface

Who Should Read this Book?

- ◆ School leaders who want to stop for a few minutes, examine their real purpose, and think about the morals, ethics, and values that become the core of schools they lead. This provides the foundation upon which to build their mission, vision, values, and goals with school stakeholders.
- ◆ District or central office staff members responsible for supporting the principal of the future while directing principal training programs.
- ◆ Professors who teach courses in educational leadership preparation programs specifically classes targeting courses that focus on the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards 1, 2, and 5.
 - Standard 1: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
 - Standard 2: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
 - Standard 5: A school administrator is an education leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

This book responds to the literature that indicates educator preparation programs, including master's degree courses most often taken by aspiring principals and superintendents, offer limited training in ethical decision-making (Beck & Murphy, 1994). And yet, the way leaders understand and use ethical reasoning and decision making impacts virtually every decision they make and every action they undertake. Ensuring that leaders are prepared to make such types of decisions is key responsibility for leadership preparation programs (Edmonson & Fisher, 2006).

This book is meant to answer two questions: What is the practical application to identify and understand moral, ethical, and purposeful beliefs,

when implementing the mission, vision, values, and goals for the school? What process would facilitate discussions that engage students in educational leadership classes and school leaders and their faculties, concerning these important concepts? Further discussion would include moral and ethical dilemmas that confront school administrators.

Professors and school leaders who need a summary of the concepts to serve as a visual representation can refer to the Appendix. This page contains statements that would generate further discussion. Definitions and descriptors occur for moral and ethical behavior with explanations of values, purpose, mission, vision, and goals.

Chapter Summaries

Introduction: The introduction describes the rationale behind this book. A brief review of the literature is included. The work of authors and researchers provided portions of the background used to express issues, concerns, and recommended strategies. A definition of terms gives the reader a practical summary of the concepts of morals, ethics, and values.

Chapter 1, “The Moral, Ethical, and Purposeful School Leader,” describes ways to look into your own purpose. A *job purpose* identifies a subset of *life’s purpose*. It examines the moral and ethical issues that surround your inner core. Once you have a clear understanding of your own purpose you are better prepared to identify the additional and foundational pieces that exist in the school community. Frequently missing from the development of an effective principal and assistant is the support needed to understand yourself and your purpose so you can identify and understand the motivation and talents of those around you.

Administrators must understand their own moral and ethical beliefs. Once leaders understand their own values, they are better prepared to take a proactive stance, placing themselves in the position of others when making decisions.

Chapter 2, “The Moral, Ethical, and Purposeful Administrative Support Group,” focuses on strategies to arrive at a common belief system to build the mission, vision, values, and goals of the school through the lenses of moral and ethical leadership. In this way the school principal becomes surrounded by supporters with a shared purpose. In turn, the principals help others work toward a common goal.

Chapter 3, “Training a Purposeful Faculty Problem-Solving Team,” focuses on strategies to use when a select group of master teachers become trained to facilitate problem-solving groups of other faculty members. In addition, this chapter discusses the additional roles a faculty problem-solving

team can assume to support the administrator and become the flag bearers for the school mission, vision, values, and goals.

Chapter 4, “Schoolwide Purposeful Mission, Vision, and Goals: Beyond the Template,” provides specific strategies to bring together an entire faculty. The chapter identifies each step the school leader takes when engaging all stakeholders as they create the mission, vision, values, and schoolwide goals through the lenses of moral, ethical, and purposeful leadership. The leader models the importance of faculty support when going beyond the often imposed standard template of improving standardized test scores. In this way everyone understands how goals are determined and why they are important. In this way all stakeholders know the direction of the school.

Chapter 5, “Purposeful Individual Goal Setting: Finding the Needs,” examines goal setting based on the specific developmental level of the staff member. Goals become either individualized or in combination with others with similar needs to improve their professional skills and talents.

Chapter 6, “Differentiated Staff Development,” will focus on the real world of instructional leadership when individualizing the needs of the staff. The chapter describes in detail ways to differentiate staff development. Varieties of teachers exhibit varied levels of competence from the novice to the master teacher. Particular attention is paid to challenging the master teacher.

Not all ideas or suggestions within this book fit every situation. Each of this book’s topics addresses real issues in the world of the school administrator and can be adjusted according to individual needs.

Principals and assistants want to create an organization where the quality of instruction, the development of a strong professional learning community, and high-level problem solving lead to continuous improvement in leader, teacher, and student performance. Throughout this book strategies and suggestions become part of the bigger picture.

“Final Thoughts” summarizes key issues for school leaders who demonstrate moral, ethical, and purposeful leadership with their school environments.

How Is Each Chapter Organized?

1. Chapters are organized according to a sequence that fits into the individual time schedule of the school. Each chapter stands alone to help administrators pick and choose from the information most relevant to individual needs. University students would benefit by going sequentially through the book.

2. An **introduction** precedes the topic and provides the reader with background information concerning the purpose for selection of individual topics.
3. Identified topics contain the following explanations under key headings: **When Do I Begin? What Should I Do and How Should I Do It?**
4. **Short anecdotes** from principals at all levels provide insight from the real world of principals who tell their stories.
5. **Questions and Answers** expand on areas where the reader may need clarification.
6. **Survival Tips** are listed to highlight important issues that could save an administrator from unnecessary grief and perhaps avoid some school landmines.
7. The end of each chapter provides a summary to assist the reader in selecting the chapters of greatest interest.
8. **Questions for reflection** complete each chapter. These are intended to give reader-guided reflection or to generate discussions in university or principal training programs.
9. **Supporting literature** is located in the reference section of the book.