

Book Review: *Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning: Tools for Achieving Success in Your School*

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Abstract

In the field of Educational Leadership, it is agreed that principals are important to student achievement but few individuals have identified exactly how they can make a positive impact on achievement. At a time when school leaders are being asked to do more to lead schools and increase student achievement, *Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning: Tools for Achieving Success in Your School* provides an important contribution to identifying leadership behaviors that will help develop successful principals and increase student achievement. The five chapter book written by Bryan Goodwin, Greg Cameron and Heather Hein (2015) focuses on three major themes: establishing a clear focus, managing change and creating a purposeful community.

Keywords: leadership behaviors, student achievement, balanced leadership framework, school change, purposeful community, school vision

With pressure for school reform coming from national, state and local sources, the principal is the person who is expected to answer the call for reform or in other words improve student achievement. It is the school building where students, teachers, and school leaders work together to make school improvement transpire and to help students increase achievement. The question then becomes how to help aspiring school leaders and practicing principals develop the leadership behaviors needed to meet the challenges presented in schools today and improve student achievement. One resource to help school leaders focus on improving student achievement while developing effective leadership behaviors is Bryan Goodwin, Greg Cameron, and Heather Hein's (2015) book, *Balanced Leadership for Powerful Learning: Tools for Achieving Success in Your School*. Bryan Goodwin is currently the president and CEO of McREL International, a nonprofit education research and development organization. Greg Cameron was the former executive director at McREL and previously held the positions of elementary school principal, assistant principal, and middle and high school classroom teacher. Heather Hein is a communications consultant at McREL International.

The authors' intent with the book was to give school leaders a starting point for the school improvement process as well as the knowledge to improve their leadership. The premise of the book is that school leaders can learn to develop the three basic leadership behaviors needed to improve student achievement which are: learning to establish a clear focus; learning to

manage change; and learning to create a purposeful community. *Balanced Leadership* is a book built on research that is appropriate for practitioners and aspiring school leaders. The 106 page book is divided into 5 chapters including 1) *Balanced Leadership: What the Research Says* 2) *Establishing a Clear Focus* 3) *Managing Change* 4) *Creating a Purposeful Community* 5) *Conclusion: Characteristics of Great School Leaders*. The book is composed of principal success profiles, leadership tools and a no-nonsense explanation of leadership theory. The five chapters and the leadership tools are written as a sensible handbook for school leaders to implement immediately. This publication builds on the work first published by Marzano, Walters and McNulty (2005), *School Leadership that Works*.

Balanced Leadership Framework

In *Balanced Leadership*, the authors begin with an explanation of the research that supports the conceptual framework of the book. The authors lay out research conducted by McREL and discuss a meta-analysis conducted both of which address the issues of linking principal leadership and student achievement. The authors then go on to discuss the process of how that research was analyzed and the Balanced Leadership Framework was developed. The Balanced Leadership Framework is the core of the book and is based on research that spans 30 years. From the research, 21 leadership responsibilities were identified that positively correlated with student achievement. Along with the 21 leadership responsibilities, 66 associated practices were identified that linked principal leadership and student achievement. The authors realized it would be unlikely that principals would be able to implement 21 leadership responsibilities along with 66 associated practices on a daily basis and thus developed the Balanced Leadership Framework. The Balanced Leadership Framework includes three components: establishing a clear focus, managing change, and creating a purposeful community.

Chapters two through four focus on the components of the Balanced Leadership Framework. Each chapter is a short easy to read description of how the concepts could be applied to the school building and more specifically to increase student achievement. The authors developed Chapter two around the theme of *Establishing a Clear Focus*. The short message of the chapter was effective school leaders' focus on high expectations for all students and a clear focus for improvement efforts. Chapter two includes leadership tools two through five that guide the school leader in establishing a clear focus. Chapter three develops the concept of *Managing Change* and focuses the chapter on four main ideas: change lies in the eye of the beholder; misreading change can have an adverse effect on student achievement; leaders need to adjust their approach based on the change at hand, and change is a complex and iterative process. Chapter three includes leadership tools six through eleven that guide the school leader through the change process. Change is never easy for anyone and the leadership tools will help facilitate people to change and for lasting change to occur. In Chapter four, the authors develop the concept of *Creating a Purposeful Community*. While there is not easy fix for creating a positive school culture, the authors offer the advice that effective schools require a community that believes all members can make a difference in student outcomes. Chapter Four focuses on three main sections: a culture of high expectations, the four characteristics of a purposeful community, and leading toward a more purposeful community. The chapter begins ends with a principal success profile that illustrates the concept of creating a purposeful community that allows the reader to see how to build a positive school culture. Chapter four includes the leadership tools

twelve through eighteen that help the school leader create a purposeful community. The authors conclude the book with the finding that outstanding leaders had the following six characteristics: deep conviction and moral purpose; a selfless, iron will to improve performance; deep reservoir of optimism; emotional intelligence and relationship building; commitment to self-improvement; and less mystery, more action.

Leadership Tools: Practical Application and Unique Contribution

The authors developed a well written guide for school leaders to improve student achievement based on the Balanced Leadership Framework. The book is written to be used by practicing school leaders and offers principal success profiles to illustrate the principles of the book along with leadership tools to guide implementation of the Balanced Leadership Framework. The real strength of the book is the eighteen leadership tools woven into each of the first four chapters. The leadership tools help aspiring and practicing school leaders focus on the leadership behaviors needed to help improve student achievement. The authors include a website and password where the leadership tools may be downloaded. This makes the tools very user friendly and practical.

Leadership Tool #1

Balanced leadership framework analysis. This tool provides the school leader with the opportunity to assess along with the leadership team the following areas: establishing a clear focus, managing change, and creating a purposeful community. A short eleven question framework is provided along with a column for actions that will allow the school leader to assess specific responsibilities in relation to each of the identified areas.

Leadership Tool #2

Combining the five whys and the what matters most framework. This tool helps school leaders identify a problem and narrow the focus to a manageable starting point. The What Matters Most Framework includes five points: instruction, curriculum, student engagement, school culture, and organizational processes/focus/data use. The tool helps school leaders to identify a problem and then ask why five times. At the end of the process, the leader has a much better idea of the actual problem that needs to be solved.

Leadership Tool #3

Identifying and specifying desired outcomes. This tool helps school leaders state goals in measurable terms. This tool builds from Leadership Tool #2. With this tool, school leaders identify who will benefit, by how much and by when. The authors provide clear and specific directions to help the school leader think through how to develop clear measurable goals and desired outcomes.

Leadership Tool #4

Designing an intervention bundle. This tool teaches school leaders to develop an intervention bundle that helps track the progress of school improvement. The intervention bundle tool asks the school leader to identify a desired outcome and then to identify three to five specific changes under each of the following categories: key improvement activities, concrete actions, and improvement measures.

Leadership Tool #5

Trilateral planning. The Trilateral Planning Tool builds from leadership tools #3 and #4. It is a graphic that helps school leaders identify the classroom practices, student supports, school practices, and leadership practices they hope to change. The tool includes reflective questions to use individually or as a leadership team.

Leadership Tool #6

Estimating the magnitude of a change. This leadership tool helps school leaders work with stakeholder groups to determine the scale of a change. The tool guides the school leader through a series of questions to help determine if the proposed change is perceived as first or second order change.

Leadership Tool #7

Create demand. It builds from Leadership Tool #4. When change occurs, the school leader must create demand or in other words cause dissatisfaction with the existing situation while creating a new more appealing reality. This tool takes the school leader through the creating demand stage of the change process by focusing on three areas: change agent, intellectual stimulation, and ideals/beliefs. The tool provides guiding questions and provides space for both actions and evidence to be outlined.

Leadership Tool #8

Framing an initiative to become a shared vision. This tool takes school leaders through the process of developing a shared vision by choosing a framing device and then developing a target initiative for stakeholder groups. The first half of the tool guides school leaders to choose a framing device and then develop metaphors, catch phrases, exemplars, depictions, and visual images to illustrate the shared vision. The second half of the tool helps school leaders identify the target initiative, focus on each of the stakeholder groups and determine why the shared vision matters to each group along with which framing device would be effective to reach that group.

Leadership Tool #9

Implementation plan. This tool builds from Leadership Tool #4. It helps school leaders identify detailed actions needed to lead change through the implementation phase. The tool guides leaders through the implementation phase of the change process while focusing on the

responsibilities of knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment and optimization. The tool provides guiding questions as well as helps develop actions and evidence of success.

Leadership Tool #10

Monitoring and evaluating implementation. It builds from Leadership Tool #4. This tool guides school leaders through the monitoring and evaluating stage of the change process by using the bundle of improvements to develop a plan, check for specific actions, and record evidence of impact.

Leadership Tool #11

Managing personal transitions. This leadership tool helps school leaders focus on measurable student outcomes and plan for a differentiated approach based on the needs of the school. The tool guides school leaders through the change process and helps them to identify the change process responsibility of flexibility.

Leadership Tool #12

Purposeful community: Teacher's reflection assessment. This leadership tool guides school leaders in an assessment of their school's level of purposeful community. This tool is used with teachers and then responses are tallied to be used to determine how a school differs with the ideal purposeful community and what characteristics need further attention.

Leadership Tool #13

Developing operating principles and agreements. This leadership tool helps school leaders put in writing the operating principles and agreements that need to be in place before the desired outcomes can be achieved. This tool begins by asking community members the question, "What can we accomplish by working together?" The tool then guides the school leader through a process of defining specific agreements that must be in place for a school to operate.

Leadership Tool #14

Assessing use of intangibles assets. This leadership tool guides the school leader through a process of evaluating intangible assets. This tool helps school leaders determine the focus of their school and to what degree intangible assets are used effectively.

Leadership Tool #15

Identifying staff expertise. This leadership tool identifies tangible and intangible assets by surveying staff members to determine their level of expertise. The school leader is guided to share a data report with the staff.

Leadership Tool #16

Using leadership responsibilities to strengthen purposeful community. This leadership tool helps school leaders think through their understanding of purposeful community and the associated leadership responsibilities. The tool provides guiding prompts to help school leaders in determining useful leadership actions in leading a purposeful community.

Leadership Tool #17

Interpreting events through the leadership responsibilities. This tool helps school leaders reflect on an event that happened in the school community using the 21 leadership responsibilities. The tool lists all 21 leadership responsibilities and helps the school leader interpret actions in terms of successes and failures.

Leadership Tool #18

Reflection on shared leadership. The final leadership tool helps school leaders investigate shared leadership in their school community. This tool uses the 8 leadership responsibilities associated with purposeful community and the leadership responsibility of Optimize to help school leaders challenge the leadership team or staff to develop a shared vision.

Each of the leadership tools reviewed above can be used immediately by school leaders to help begin the school improvement process and facilitate increased student achievement. Giving principals the necessary tools to facilitate school improvement is the first step toward increased student achievement. High quality leadership is second only to high quality teaching in its effect on student achievement (Goodwin, Cameron, & Hein, 2015, p.5). The inclusion of ready to use leadership tools makes *Balanced Leadership* a practical and unique contribution to the field of Educational Leadership.

Concluding Remarks

Balanced Leadership (Goodwin, Cameron, & Hein, 2015) offers research-based insights, profiles from principals, and unique leadership tools to help guide the school improvement process. This is a book that can be applied to the everyday life of a building level principal and thus increase student achievement. The authors ultimately believe that leadership behaviors can lead to increased student achievement. A strong point of the book is the eighteen leadership tools that can be easily downloaded and used to facilitate school improvement. Each leadership tool like each chapter is short, easy to read and use. The leadership tools begin with a purpose followed by clearly written directions. The authors include profiles of real life principals who have effectively implemented the principles of balanced leadership in their schools with the hope of illustrating the possibilities of average school leaders doing the same. The most important person in the school improvement process is the school building principal and only those who have the needed leadership behaviors will be able to sustain improvement in student achievement.

References

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