

Record: 1**Title:** Leading with soul and spirit.**Authors:** Bolman, Lee G.
Deal, Terrence E.**Source:** School Administrator; February 2002, Vol. 59 Issue 2, p21-26, 6p**Physical Description:** Illustration**Document Type:** Article**Subjects:** Educational leadership
School administrators
Job qualifications
School administration
Leadership**Abstract:** Leadership qualities are ultimately rooted in faith and soul. For school leaders, soul manifests itself in the form of a bedrock sense of identity and a durable sense of conviction, a deep-seated sense about who they are, what they value, and what they need to do. This spiritual core provides school leaders with a clear voice with which to speak and solid ground on which to stand.**ISSN:** 00366439**Accession Number:** 507742642**Database:** Education Source**LEADING WITH SOUL AND SPIRIT****Effective leadership in challenging times boils down to qualities such as focus, passion and integrity**

When we and our colleagues at the National Center for Educational Leadership set out to unravel the mysteries of school leadership in the late 1980s, we weren't looking for spiritual aspects. If we had been, we probably would not have received federal funding.

Our emphasis at the time was particularly on the role of cognition in school leadership. We expected that leaders who had a solid understanding of what they were up against, were clear about where they wanted to go, and could conjure up versatile and adaptive strategies would be highly effective. To explore this hunch, the center mounted a series of studies of superintendents, principals, teachers and other school leaders. Our search was fruitful and confirmed a lot of what we expected to find.

But we also uncovered new questions. We were puzzled about the high incidence of frustration and burnout in American schools. We winced every time veteran teachers and principals told us they were counting the days to retirement. We met too many talented educators who had lost much of the hope and spark they had brought with them into the profession. Their biggest complaint: "It's not fun

anymore."

Were we seeing the consequences of work that has become more challenging and sometimes nearly impossible? Was this sense of hopelessness a fallout from the meager respect and rewards that American educators receive? Was it a sensible reaction to what one urban principal termed "the relentless decline in civility" among many of the parents and children he hoped to serve?

But pessimism was not universal. We also found teachers and school leaders who still had fire in their bellies and a smile in their hearts. They were excited and committed even though they encountered the same frustrations as their more-disenchanted colleagues. What did they have that others didn't? What sustained their optimism and commitment? The more we explored such questions, the more we became convinced that the answers hinge on matters of faith, soul and spirit.

The fundamental importance of deeper human issues has come into even sharper relief in the wake of the horrific events of Sept. 11, 2001. Education makes sense as a profession because of an abiding belief that every human life is sacred and no task is more important than nourishing and developing the extraordinary potential in all students. When zealots methodically and planfully choose to take their own lives and thousands of others with them, the affront to our basic beliefs and values is so powerful that we all struggle to understand the unimaginable, to get beyond numbness and to cope with fear and overwhelming sadness.

We need to confront these issues head on because they challenge the foundations of learning and learning is our business. But reason and courage alone will not suffice. We will need spiritual sustenance as well. If we are wise, we will reach into our hearts for hope and understanding. We will pray for those who have been lost, for ourselves and for children who embody our dreams of human possibility. As we deepen our own reservoirs of faith we will look for ways to help others do the same. It is a leadership challenge as forbidding as any educators will ever face.

Five Qualities

How do we meet such a challenge? It helps to start by asking what extraordinary leadership looks like. Think about the great leaders you've known and ask yourself what made them so? When you look at examples of effective leadership, it becomes clear that it's not related to any one style, personality, gender or ethnicity. Many pathways point to effective leadership. But some qualities are consistent across effective leaders. We address five below.

- Focus.

Allen Kennedy, co-author with Terry Deal of *Corporate Culture*, once said that the basic problem of leadership is getting the whole herd moving roughly west. That suggests two problems. Getting the herd moving is often very hard. But the bigger challenge is figuring out which way is west--where you and your system should be going.

Great leaders have an internal compass and know where west is. They always have it in mind and use every activity and event as an opportunity to demonstrate the desired direction. These are leaders with a

vision. Others get lost in complexity, tossed about on a chaotic sea of swirling problems and pressures. They behave more like weather vanes than compasses-switching direction depending on the prevailing winds.

- Passion.

A second quality of outstanding leaders is that they care deeply about their work and making a difference. This should be easy for educators--what work has greater intrinsic value or contributes more to children and society? But too many in leadership positions are committed to little more than moving paper and avoiding trouble. Their souls shrivel and their leadership falters. They simply put in time until retirement finally rolls around.

Fortunately, there are many other examples of veteran school leaders who have kept the flame alive. They genuinely love their work. Passion is hard to fake. People know if it's there or not. Either way, those feelings are contagious.

- Wisdom.

Veteran leaders have lots of experience. Wise leaders have learned from their experience, from both success and failure. Their hard-earned wisdom enables them to recognize and appreciate the complexities they face. They are able to see pattern and order where others are overwhelmed by confusion. Albert Einstein once said the simplicity on this side of complexity is worthless, but the simplicity on the other side is almost priceless. Wisdom helps you navigate your way to the other side.

- Courage.

Leadership inevitably places bets on the future, making decisions in the face of incomplete information and conflicting pressures. Sometimes it will be months or years before you'll know whether you made the right call. You'll be wrong some of the time. Even when you're right, there always will be critics who think otherwise. Right or wrong, you'll hear from opponents and naysayers.

That's why leadership is stressful and scary. You can tell when the faint at heart are running scared. They fudge, hedge, delay and duck while problems pile up. It is not an easy matter to plunge ahead when you don't have all the information and aren't sure you're on the right road. Courage lets you move ahead anyway.

- Integrity.

Warren Buffett once said the three most important qualities in a manager are integrity, intelligence and energy. But without the first, he cautioned, the other two will kill you. Integrity is at the heart of qualities like honesty, depth and a moral compass that inspire trust and loyalty.

If such qualities are keys to inspired leadership, where do they come from? Are they inborn? Taught? Learned from experience? The more we study gifted leaders, the more we are convinced that leadership

qualities are ultimately rooted in faith and soul. They emerge over the course of an individual's life journey.

A dictionary will tell you that soul is "immortal essence," "animating and vital principle" or "spiritual nature." For leaders, soul takes the form of a bedrock sense of identity and a durable sense of conviction. It is a deep-seated sense about who you are, what you value and what you are here to do.

This spiritual core provides leaders firm ground on which to stand and a clear voice with which to speak. Without this solid center, leaders lose their bearings or sound an uncertain trumpet that rallies no one. Even worse, they become soulless game players who care little about interests other than their own.

The quest for soul requires reclaiming and rekindling your spiritual center. It involves building a faith that sustains you when the going gets tough. It is a personal journey in search of answers to life's fundamental questions: Where did you come from and where are you going? What is your life about and what are you here to do? What makes life worth living and work worth doing?

If you have a faith or a personal philosophy that answers these questions, cherish it and nourish it. If not, keep looking until you find one that works.

The Spiritual Journey

The search for soul and spirit always has been central to the human experience, despite a modern tendency to shunt it aside. More and more people are realizing that solipsistic faiths like careerism or consumerism can never provide adequate spiritual anchors. If you try to ignore basic spiritual questions, sooner or later they will knock on your door, usually at inconvenient moments. When your world is crashing around you, it's nice to have something to cling to.

But how do we deepen soul and touch spirit? We can find an important clue in stories people have always told. To choose only one highly visible example, how was J.K. Rowling able to turn so many students into avid readers? Why were they so enchanted with the adventures of a youthful wizard named Harry Potter?

At one level, Harry Potter novels are successful because they're good stories. Look deeper and you find that they are also about the spiritual journey. Compare Harry Potter to Beowulf, one of the oldest surviving works in English literature. It is the story of a prince, Beowulf, who courageously confronts a murderous beast in her den deep in an icy pond. In the underlying spiritual narrative, Beowulf is in quest of his own soul. Symbolically, the monster at the pond's bottom embodies the inner beast that Beowulf must face and conquer to know himself and to move forward.

It's the same with Harry Potter. In the first two novels, the climax comes as Harry confronts his personal demon represented by evil Lord Voldemort ("flight of death" in French). Each time the confrontation requires Harry courageously to plunge down into dark and hidden subterranean passages and caverns. Like Beowulf, Harry carries the reader into the depths in search of his and their souls.

In Beowulf, Harry Potter and countless variations on the story of spiritual development, the journey typically moves through three major stages. The first is leaving home--often physically, but always

psychically and spiritually. Leaving home requires letting go of comfortable and familiar ways. It is the essential first step for escaping the shackles of established convention and everyday routine. In the case of the orphaned Harry Potter, this meant leaving the stultifying home in which he had grown up under the oppressive indifference of his insufferable aunt and uncle.

Leaving home leads to the journey's second stage, the quest. The quest is a time of overwhelming danger and challenge. Harry Potter is nearly killed in a trio of adventures and in the fourth witnesses the murder of a classmate.

Even if educational leaders rarely face mortal danger, they may feel the costly psychic and spiritual consequences of their choices. That recognition may tempt them to reject the challenges in hopes of staying safe and comfortable. But avoiding the journey's hazards may put them at even greater future risk because they have short-circuited the growth and learning they eventually will need.

Only by embarking and persisting on the quest can we prepare ourselves for the journey's third stage, returning home. Home will be different, as will we, now armed with new capacities and a deeper understanding of life's treasures. We will have acquired gifts we can now offer to others.

Leadership Gifts

In our book, *Leading With Soul*, we describe four gifts leaders can bestow. The first is authorship --the sense of pride and satisfaction we feel when we create or produce something that is uniquely ours, that bears our personal signature. Watch a child's face light up as she proudly displays her latest artistic, musical or literary achievement. You also can see authorship in the deep satisfaction of teachers who have spent hours developing a new way to teach math facts, French verbs or the Civil War. They are ecstatic because an important lesson really worked!

Amid the current pressures for accountability and standards, we're in grave danger of stamping out opportunities for authorship in our schools. The results will be dismal if we do.

A second gift is love, or caring--a person's compassion and concern for others. Many educators might be embarrassed or fearful about even using the word "love" at work in any context. They shy away from love's deeper meanings, fearing both its power and its risk. Yet one person's care and concern for another is at the heart of teaching and learning. It is the social and ethical glue that holds any group or community together.

A caring school system requires servant leaders who serve the best interests of the institution and its stakeholders. This implies a profound and challenging responsibility for leaders to understand the needs and concerns of those they serve.

A third gift is power -- the capacity to make a difference, to have an impact on the world. Administrators sometimes hoard power because they feel there's not enough to go around and they don't have as much as they need. The paradox is that hoarding power produces divided and powerless organizations. People stripped of power look for ways to fight back through sabotage, passive resistance, withdrawal or angry militancy.

The gift of power, on the other hand, enrolls people in working for a common cause and liberates energy for more productive uses. When people have a sense of efficacy and an ability to influence their workplace, they seek to be productive. They direct their energy and intelligence toward making a contribution rather than obstructing progress.

In school districts, this issue is particularly critical at the level of constituent groups who feel that schools are run by and for people who aren't like them. Some gifted leaders understand this sense of futility and make systematic efforts to enable constituents who feel excluded or ignored to be heard and to have an impact.

A final gift is significance, with dual connotations of importance and meaningfulness. Building shared meaning and mutual respect is one of the toughest challenges today. Rapid change, high mobility, globalization, and racial and ethnic conflict tear at the fabric of school communities. Differences among many constituents are often divisive and hotly contested. The glue that potentially holds a district or school together is shared faith and commitment to common purpose.

Schools are imperfect. But they are indispensable vehicles for nurturing and developing a community's dreams and hopes. Deep down, parents and community members understand that schools will make mistakes, not every child will go to Harvard and not every athletic team will win the state title. They will tolerate disappointments as long as they retain confidence and faith that things are moving in the right direction, schools are honoring the right values and pursuing worthy goals. When that faith crumbles, as in too many school districts, the resulting chaos and chronic political infighting can turn leadership into an almost impossible job.

Nourishing Faith

How can educational leaders nurture and strengthen the bonds of significance that glue a community together? First they must be secure in their own faith--in themselves, in the capacity of their schools and in the significance of the educational enterprise. Leaders then are able to orchestrate an ongoing dialogue about mission and values. They can articulate their own beliefs and help others to do the same. They can encourage principals and schools to share stories of success and achievement. They can enrich and support celebratory and ceremonial occasions to mark transitions, honor heroes and heroines and help all to renew their bonds and nourish their faith.

The tragedies of Sept. 11 and their aftermath are only one factor in a widespread crisis of meaning and moral authority. It is in times like these that leadership is both most difficult and most needed.

The most important responsibility of school leaders is not to answer every question fully or make every decision correctly. They, of course, need to track budgets, comply with mandates and keep the buses running. But as leaders they serve a deeper, more powerful and more durable role when they are models and catalysts for such values as excellence, caring, justice and faith.

Harry Potter and Beowulf were not foolish enough to face their demons alone. Beowulf was aided in his quest by loyal retainers. Harry depends on the support of faithful friends. The challenges and dangers of the spiritual journey are so great that few of us are likely to succeed without help.

Rabbi Harold Kushner, who wrote *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, once said that we attend services not to find God, but to find a congregation. Given the challenges of school leadership, it helps to have a congregation to turn to. Congregations often take the customary form of a group of people who pray together at the same church, temple or mosque. But they also might be a group of professional colleagues or friends who meet periodically to share experiences and support one another through triumphs and tragedies. The critical thing is to have trusted friends with whom to share and explore the challenges and frustrations of leadership.

Leaders who set forth with courage and optimism on their own developmental journey, who look deep within themselves and who seek and obtain support and sustenance from friends and colleagues will build the inner strength and confidence that will enable them to bring soul and spirit to their institution.

In Search of Spirit and Soul at Lawndale

The Lawndale Elementary School District might seem an unlikely candidate for a spiritual renaissance. Located in a poor town just south of the Los Angeles International Airport, 91 percent of the district's 5,800 students are minorities, 84 percent receive free or reduced lunches and 20 percent are transitory. To complicate matters, the district's staff is 91 percent white.

Several years ago, the district superintendent, Joe Condon, and one of the district's principals, Dorinda Dee, got together after summer recess. Each had a book to recommend to the other. They were surprised to learn that their reading recommendations were identical--*Leading With Soul*, a book we co-authored in 1995. The superintendent soon bought the book for each of the system's building principals to use as a basis for a series of discussions.

For some principals, such as Frank Noyes, the ideas reinforced what they already believed, provided a common vocabulary and helped strengthen a sense of community. For other administrators who had narrower views of their role, the ideas felt foreign. They had difficulty connecting with others in the group. Some principals left the district. Even today, according to Condon, people who cannot connect to others or to the spirit of the job will "not find a match in Lawndale."

Influencing Culture

The first part of the group's discussion centered on peoples' personal journeys. As Noyes observed: "The book became a tool to look at ourselves and then at how we could connect more closely to our lives at work. We realized that when you tap into your soul you realize that you have personal gifts to share and then can offer them to the wider community."

From the leadership team, the ideas began to wend themselves into the Lawndale culture. Some discussions were one-on-one, others were in small groups. Teachers especially were drawn into the discussions. As one principal remarked: "Teachers have life issues going on when teaching. If a teacher dries up, he or she can't help others. People learned they have to take care of themselves to do a good job. The real meaning of leading with soul is what teaching is all about."

At a symposium to kick off the school year for the entire district staff, *Leading With Soul* was shared with custodians, secretaries and other classified employees as well as certificated personnel. In small

groups, everyone discussed the interlude "Community and the Cycle of Giving." They were asked to highlight things that spoke to them and then discuss how gift-giving could enhance the Lawndale community in the coming year. There was an open discussion of love and "how we can express love for one another."

Following the discussion, a modified game of the quiz show "Jeopardy" was used to help newcomers learn the cultural history of the district. The plan was to follow up the retreat with "family" groups that would meet throughout the school year to focus on other sections of the book. Dee, now an assistant superintendent in Lawndale, captured the soulful strategy: "This is our way of bringing the whole side of life into balance--caring, authorship and power give significance to what we do. To work is to live; to live is to work."

The superintendent summed up the emerging spirit of Lawndale. Says Condon: "In my annual report to the school board, not one word was spent on goals or test scores. We focused on what people are bringing to the party. This goes much deeper than work. It gets at the essence of who we are. We have to deal with that before we start to work."

--Lee Bolman and Terry Deal

PHOTO (COLOR): Joe Condon

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Terry Deal is the co-author (with Lee Bolman) of *Leading With Soul*.

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**Source:** School Administrator, February 2002, Vol. 59 Issue 2, p21, 6p

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