

THE LEADER *WITHIN*

Legendary football coach Vince Lombardi once said, “Leaders are made. They are not born.” If that’s true, then everyone has leadership potential. You just need to learn how to unlock your inner leader.

BY KWOK-SZE RICHARD WONG, ED.D.



Most school counselors, teachers and other school faculty do not consider themselves to be leaders. After all, the principals, assistant principals and other administrators are the leaders of the school. Everyone else is just a line worker.

However, we all know school counselors, teachers and other school staff who are highly effective – and others, not so much. What sets the effective educators apart from the ineffective educators is leadership.

At their core, leaders inspire, instruct and inform. Not surprisingly, these are also the fundamental tasks of school counselors, teachers and other school staff. Effective educators believe they can make a difference in their students' lives by inspiring them to take on new challenges and never shrinking in the face of failure. They believe students can change and grow with the proper tools and knowledge. They believe they can provide the information needed to guide their students to promising futures. All effective educators are leaders.

So why do educators continue to think they are not leaders? Jim Collins, author of "Good to Great," would contend that it is this very attitude that makes them good leaders. Leadership is not something you do; it is something you are, even if you don't realize it. If you don't think of yourself as a strong leader, perhaps the problem isn't that you're not a leader; you just need to understand the leadership mindset.

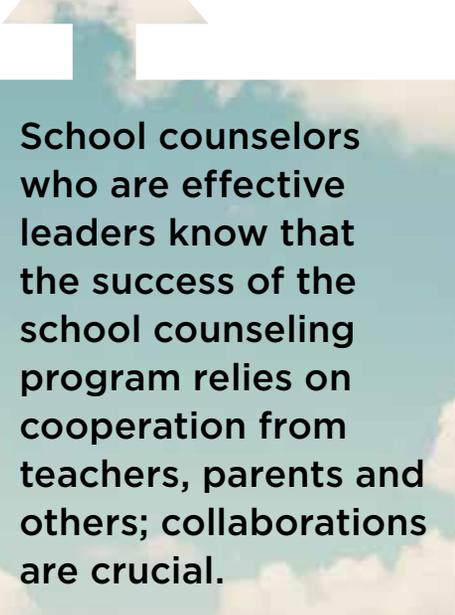
"The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs (Third Edition)," views leadership through the lens of the Reframing Leadership Model developed by Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal. This approach examines leadership in terms of four frames:

structural, human resource, political and symbolic. School counselors who understand and use all four frameworks will have the attitude and disposition to bring out the leader within.

The Structural Frame

As its name implies, the structural frame focuses on the systems that keep an organization churning. Leadership in the structural frame uses logic, facts and data to guide decision-making. This approach works well when there are clearly stated goals; cause-and-effect relationships are understood; and little conflict, uncertainty or ambiguity exist within the system.

School counselors who are effective leaders recognize that schools and school districts are sets of systems working in concert. Administrators oversee



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the overall organizational system. Each department is a system. Even each subject has its own system of curricula to ensure all students learn the same concepts. Teachers have flexibility to determine how and when the concepts are taught, but they share the overall objectives of the system.

Yet, for decades, school counselors did not operate within a system. Most school counselors focused on responsive services, waiting to respond to the needs of certain students instead of creating a plan to meet the needs of all students.

They didn't have a structural mindset.

The ASCA National Model requires school counselors to develop the structural mindset by managing a comprehensive program that moves school counseling from providing services for a relatively few students in need to designing and implementing a program that meets the needs of all students. The ASCA National Model also requires school counselors to recognize that the school counseling program must fit in with other systems within the school and cannot operate independently. Finally, the ASCA National Model requires the program to have clearly defined and stated goals and, more importantly, to collect, analyze and present data that help determine ways to meet those goals and demonstrate the program's progress. After all, the school collects data such as enrollment, promotion rates, attendance and disciplinary referrals. Teachers track grades, homework completion, test scores and other data. School counselors must adopt a data mentality as well. They should not be the only professionals in a school building who do not operate from a structural mindset.

The structural frame is so important that one of the four main components of the ASCA National Model is management. Although school counselors are encouraged to view their job in terms of managing a program instead of providing a service, managing is not leading. The two are closely interconnected and interdependent, but they are not interchangeable. It has been said that you manage programs. You lead people. We all know efficient and organized managers whom we wouldn't consider to be good leaders. An important aspect of the structural frame is the recognition that an organization may comprise several systems, but it is run by people.

The Political Frame

Effective leaders know they cannot focus only on the systems that make up the organization. They must know how to work with people both inside and outside the organization. Schools consist of many systems, but they also consist of several constituent groups such as

students, administrators, teachers, non-teaching faculty, parents and multitudes of subgroups. Each group has its own agendas and goals, which often conflict with other groups' agendas and goals. Administrators are ultimately responsible for ensuring the groups within the school coexist and avoid conflict as much as possible and for meeting the needs of each group. Of course, every need of every group cannot be met, so administrators must create an environment that facilitates negotiation and reasonable compromise.

School counselors who are effective leaders know that the success of the school counseling program relies on cooperation from teachers, parents and others; collaborations are crucial. They must know how to build coalitions, to resolve conflicts, and to negotiate and create compromises. They also must understand how to build power bases.

Educators do not often think of their jobs in terms of power; however, they acknowledge there is a hierarchy of authority. There is also a hierarchy of power that does not always correlate with the levels of authority. In a school, like most other organizations, the person "in power" doesn't always have the power. If you ask most school faculty to name the most powerful person in the building, the honest answer would probably be the school secretary or the custodian.

In his seminal book about management, "Images of Organization," Gareth Morgan lists several common sources of power:

Formal authority: Schools have a formal authority structure, generally with principals and other administrators as the highest authorities.

Informal alliances and networks: In any organization, groups of individuals working together can exercise as much, or sometimes more, control as those with formal authority, sometimes in support of the formal authority but sometimes in conflict.

Control of resources: With the limited resources most schools experience, the person who controls the resources has a great deal of power. This could be the bookkeeper, business manager or, sometimes, the custodian.

Control of information: Thomas Hobbes wrote, “Knowledge is power.” In the information age, the person who controls the flow of information also controls the flow of knowledge, which wields a tremendous amount of power in a school.

Control of technology: All school personnel are dependent on technology, which means they are dependent on the people who provide and maintain the technology.

Rules and regulations: Like formal authority, formal policies carry a certain degree of power, not just for the people who create the policies but for anyone who seeks to use them to exercise control over others.

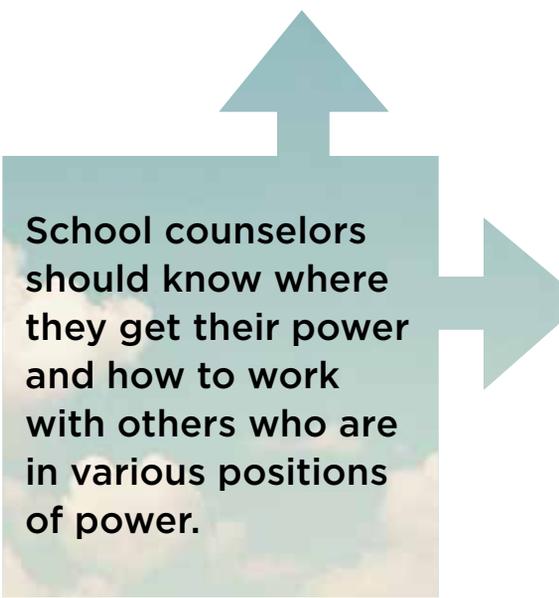
Ability to cope with uncertainty: In the hectic world of preK-12 schools, some people are perceived to be more reliable because they can remain calm and rational during the countless daily crises, as well as the larger issues of budget cuts and layoffs.

Inherent power: It is no secret that some people have a natural ability to attract others, who listen and respond to those people when they may not be drawn to others.

Personal attributes: Although characteristics such as gender, age and race can sometimes be detrimental to power, they can also be a source of power. For example, staff members are often shown respect simply because of their age or tenure at the school.

There are many other formal and informal sources of power and authority in a school building. School counselors should know where they get their power and how to work with others who are in various positions of power.

One of the most effective ways to work within the political frame is to practice 19th-century philosopher Thomas Carlyle’s principle of enlightened self-interest, which states that the best way to achieve your goals is to help others achieve their goals.



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For example, many school counselors have difficulty finding time to meet with students because they do not have the authority to “order” teachers to release their students. However, knowing the teacher’s goal is to improve learning, if you can show the teacher that giving you time to meet with the student will help improve the student’s learning, the teacher is more likely to cooperate.

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Leadership Competencies

In their book “Primal Leadership,” Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis and Annie McKee presented four sets of leadership competencies based on Goleman’s concept of emotional intelligence.

SELF-AWARENESS

Emotional self-awareness: Leaders know their emotions so they can recognize how their feelings affect them and their job performance. They also know their core values, which can guide them to the best course of action, even in complex situations.

Accurate self-assessment: In addition to knowing their values, leaders know their strengths and limitations. They are open to suggestions for improvement and welcome constructive criticism and feedback without being defensive.

Self-confidence: Leaders know their abilities accurately and are self-assured without overstating their abilities. They also openly admit their mistakes or faults without avoiding them or blaming others.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-control: Leaders who manage their emotions and impulses do not act inappropriately or allow their emotions to affect their performance negatively. Instead, they can redirect their emotions in positive ways. In addition, people respect leaders who don’t panic in stressful situations.

Transparency: Leaders who live their values build trust because others know the reasons and beliefs behind their actions. They embody what they expect from others, so they cannot be accused of saying one thing and doing another.

Adaptability: Organizations are often ambiguous and ever-changing, so leaders are flexible in their actions or judgments without losing their focus or energy.

Achievement: Leaders have high personal standards that drive them to high performance both for themselves and for their organization. They set challenging but attainable goals and are never satisfied with mediocrity.

Initiative: Leaders are self-driven and constantly think of new ways to improve the organization. More importantly, they act on their ideas and inspire others to help carry out their plans.

Optimism: Leaders who expect the best inspire others to be the best. Leaders who fixate on problems and expect the worst do not inspire hope.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Empathy: Leaders who truly care about others, both inside and outside of the organization, establish bonds that help build trust and confidence. They also work more effectively with others because they can sense and understand others’ points of view.

Organizational awareness: Leaders understand organizational and interpersonal dynamics. They not only navigate the political forces, they guide the values contributing to the political forces.

Service: Leaders seek to serve others, not to be served. They ensure the organization meets the needs of the people within the organization as well as the people the organization serves.

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Inspiration: Leaders inspire others to believe in their vision through both their words and actions. They do not force others to believe in their values but show why their values are worth believing.

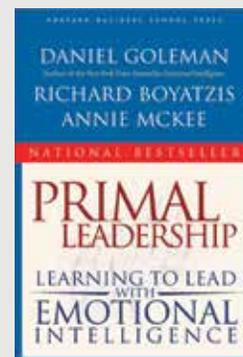
Influence: Leaders are compelling and engaging. They know how to modify their message depending on the audience and know how to gain support from diverse groups.

Developing others: Leaders cultivate people’s abilities and are natural coaches and mentors. They help others grow as they help the organization grow. Leaders are continually learning and teaching.

Change catalyst: Leaders are strong advocates for change, even in the face of opposition. They recognize the need for change, challenge existing beliefs and find ways to overcome barriers to change.

Conflict management: Leaders are able to manage conflicts by understanding different perspectives, acknowledging different points of view and finding common areas of agreement.

Teamwork and collaboration: Leaders build collegiality, cooperation, commitment and a spirit of group identity. They understand accomplishments are only achieved through collective, not individual, efforts.



Another facet of enlightened self-interest is idea that people are more likely to collaborate with you if you make it easier for them. High school counselors who write hundreds of college recommendation letters each year know this well. They are more likely to write a letter quickly if a student has provided all the information needed for the letter. Students who do not provide any information or direction force the school counselors to direct more attention to the letter. Although school counselors would like to apply all their energies to every student, the reality is they can help students better if the students meet them halfway.

The Human Resource Frame

Effective leadership in the political frame relies on the ability to work with people. Fortunately, this is a major strength for most school counselors. To use this strength in the human resource frame of leadership, school counselors

should support the goals of the organization as well as individuals, but they must show empathy and empower others. Both the political and human resource frames emphasize the interpersonal qualities of leadership.

To work effectively with others, you must first be comfortable with yourself as a leader. In “Good to Great,” Collins describes five levels of management, and he calls the highest Level 5 Leaders. Some of the characteristics of Level 5 Leaders are:

Compelling modesty: Most people think of great leaders as larger-than-life characters such as Winston Churchill or Lee Iacocca. However, Collins contends that charisma is a detriment to greatness. The best leaders are quiet and unassuming. Most do not even consider themselves to be leaders; they’re just doing their job.

Ambition for the organization: Coupled with a strong sense of humility for themselves, Level 5 Leaders

have strong ambitions for the success of the organization. They have grand vision and set high goals but all in the interest of the organization. Good leaders do not engage in any sense of self-serving.

Unwavering resolve: Level 5 Leaders exhibit an almost relentless will for their organization. They do whatever is necessary, legally and ethically, to ensure the organization’s success. They not only set high goals, they also set high standards and refuse to compromise on those standards.

The mirror and the window: Level 5 Leaders look out the window to give others credit for success, and they look in the mirror to place blame on themselves. They don’t seek or accept accolades. They don’t blame others for their failures or the organization’s failures.

A strong sense of self can help school counselors be effective leaders in the human resource frame when working with both students and other adults.



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The Symbolic Frame

People are more likely to be loyal to an organization or cause when they believe what they are doing is important and when they feel a deep sense of identity related to the organization or cause. Symbolism is important in communicating a sense of mission and identity, often in the form of values that help build cohesiveness and a common vision. These values are reinforced by traditions, ceremonies and rituals. In schools, they take the form of honor rolls, awards ceremonies, commencement ceremonies and other programs.

Leadership in the symbolic frame focuses on vision and inspiration. Like the human resource frame, the symbolic frame is only effective when the leader has a deep sense of self. School counselors cannot inspire others when they don't believe themselves. School counselors must believe a comprehensive program is important and is not simply

something ASCA or their principal tells them is important.

Faculty and staff generally support a school mission and the school identity. It should not be difficult to encourage them to support the school counseling mission, which should align with the school mission. The goal of all faculty should be the success of every student, not just in school but in life after graduation. If school counselors truly believe in student success, then everything they do will symbolize that belief.

One of the most powerful symbols for school counselors is your office. School counselors who stay in their offices, usually with their doors closed, send the message that they isolate themselves from the rest of the school. School counselors who are in the halls, cafeteria and classrooms as much as possible show they are an active part of the school community.

Several principles of the ASCA National Model were relatively

revolutionary to some school counselors and other educators: school counseling as a program, not a service; collaboration among faculty and staff; accountability of all educators, including school counselors; and most notably, school counselors as educational leaders. To implement a comprehensive program, school counselors should embrace these and other concepts presented in the ASCA National Model. They may need to adopt a new way of thinking. They need to see themselves as not just school counselors but as program managers and not just as managers of programs but as leaders of people. To do this, they need to adopt a leadership mindset to unlock the leader within.

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