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LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING: PERSONAL CHANGE IN A PROFESSIONAL SETTING

by Barry C. Jentz and Joan W. Wofford.

New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979. 181 pp. \$14.95.

Efforts to bring about professional change in a professional setting are common, as are efforts to bring about personal change in a personal setting. But the idea of personal change in a professional setting is a rarity. This is, however, the guiding principle of the work of Barry Jentz and Joan Wofford, consultants with the Leadership and Learning Cooperative (LLC) in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

Jentz and Wofford began their careers in organization development, and still call themselves "organization consultants" to school

administrators, engineers, and business leaders. But more than a decade ago they added an emphasis on personal counseling to their original training and created something quite different and far more powerful. While their basic goals and some of their techniques (data collection, analysis, and feedback) may still sound like those of organization development consultants, the authors focus far more on the needs of school personnel *as people*. Their method is to work closely with one leader in a way that approaches therapy. Rather than

enter a school with an agenda of solutions or role-playing exercises, the LLC consultants close the door to the principal's office and listen to the concerns and needs of that person.

Leadership and Learning presents the authors' theory of professional growth through detailed case studies of five male principals struggling with difficult school problems. Although the book contains theoretical, jargon-spiced passages, the authors suggest that the real message is in the dialogues and ruminations of the principals as they confront supervisors, listen to parents, criticize and counsel teachers, and practice their new skills with the LLC consultants. In contrast to more academic books on organizational change in schools, *Leadership and Learning* shows us the details of change as it occurs in these interactions. The case studies show people changing and describe how their changes affect the people and organizations around them.

The weakness of more formal or group-oriented school change strategies is that they underestimate the secret shame of school leaders confronting problems they do not know how to solve. Such shame must be dealt with in private sessions with skilled consultants-cum-counselors before it can serve as a resource in conversations with teachers, parents, superiors, and groups within schools. Here are two examples of thoughts that principals expressed with an LLC consultant.

When I respond to the problem of not knowing what to do by faking an expertise I do not feel or believe, I risk feeling like a fraud. When I admit I do not know, I risk looking like a fool. Feeling like a fraud opens me to questions about my fitness for leadership. Looking like a fool raises the same questions by publicly exposing my private incapacities and confirming in the public eye what I privately feared—that I am unfit for leadership. (p. 4)

It was simply . . . agonizing to admit how confused I was. I was being wrenched apart inside. At that point, if somebody had offered me a job selling encyclopedias, I would have taken it. . . . Were you fit to be a principal, you wouldn't have this confusion, this fear, this lack of trust in yourself. (pp. 21; 23)

Indeed, most principals feel they have to control every situation, remain invulnerable, act with a minimum of reflection, and solve problems quickly, decisively, and completely. Jentz and Wofford show how this macho mythology of school leadership leads principals to deny their fear, anger, sadness, and feelings of frustration lest they appear cowardly, weak, and out of control. The authors correctly point out that people who are in this bind make poor leaders because their own emotional isolation prevents them from empathizing with others. The case study transcripts in *Leadership and Learning* show that this sense of isolation can be overcome, first in one-on-one sessions between principal and consultant, then in skillfully led support groups of principals, and finally in carefully monitored trials of new skills with teachers and colleagues.

The skills that Jentz, Wofford, and their LLC colleagues have tried to teach principals and other leaders come from Kiyo Morimoto, a counseling professor and head of the Bureau of Study Counsel at Harvard University. In skills such as active listening—"imagining out loud"—and quiet and polite confrontation, we can see elements of Carl Rogers, Thomas Gordon, and Haim Ginott.¹ Many school people react to this nondirective therapy and active listening in the way described by one principal: "I'm an administrator, not a shrink" (p. 101). But Jentz and Wofford tell how, moments later, the same principal saw the dramatic effects of active listening: a fellow school principal suddenly felt the empathy of those around him and expressed his deepest fears as an administrator—following the Morimoto maxim, "The shortest way through psychic pain is right through the middle" (p. 177).

Leadership and Learning has other vivid examples of active listening which confound common assumptions about such "amateur

¹ See Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961); Thomas Gordon, *Parent Effectiveness Training* (New York: Wyden, 1970); and Haim Ginott, *Teacher and Child* (New York: MacMillan, 1972).

therapy." Paul, one of the principals, reported on his first attempt to use active listening with an angry parent: "Instead of being preoccupied with controlling the situation through repeated attempts to correct her, to lay the blame on her, and then living out the day with my guts tied in knots, I let go, in a way, and paid attention to her" (p. 47). Active listening does work, but the authors emphasize that fluency comes with practice—practice in a protected setting with a skilled consultant.

The problems with which these principals grapple reflect the real world of schools, simultaneously mundane and challenging. Several of the principals, for example, face the task of criticizing less than competent teachers, a task they have avoided in the mistaken belief that in so doing they were protecting the teacher. One principal deals with a parent who nags him constantly about her son's being two years behind; another with a teacher who keeps asking his advice on handling difficult students and who then returns to tell him his advice has not worked; another with a supervisor whom he has never liked and with whom he has constantly disagreed. In each case, the principal is in despair over his failure to deal with the problem, and confronts the fact that although he supposedly fosters learning and growth in other people, he does not truly believe that people can change.

We get vivid impressions of these principals as they struggle with their problems: one principal is coached by a consultant for a confrontation with a teacher and nervously asks what he should do if the teacher interrupts; another principal worries all night before a crucial meeting with a teacher; another admits in a session with several colleagues and a consultant that he is afraid of a teacher with whom he has never got along.

The case studies clearly show that instructional expertise is simply not enough for a principal. The most skilled of the five principals says:

I might be tempted to take bright ideas which I've come to through my experience

in life, like light bulbs, and hand them over to Helen (a teacher) on the assumption that all she would have to do is screw the bulbs into the right socket and they would light her up! Think of the time it would save her not having to go through what I did to come to my conclusion. She could simply put them right to work, lighting up children's lives. Unfortunately, as I had found in the past, and the consultant confirmed, the bulbs don't often light up. My good advice makes no sense to someone else. Or, I've found, if it makes sense in words, it comes out cockeyed in action. (pp. 149–150)

The problem with giving advice when teachers present problems is twofold: it puts them "in deficiency" (to use the LLC jargon), indirectly confirming their fears of incompetence in problem solving; and it makes them dependent on the principal for future help and less able to solve their own problems. Active listening—talking to teachers in a reflective, sensitive, nonjudgmental way—allows them to admit their difficulties without becoming defensive and to work toward their own solutions.

The final case in *Leadership and Learning* is a remarkable forty-page account of a principal's successful confrontation with a teacher's serious problems with students, parents, and colleagues. In a series of five meetings with the teacher, the principal shows that he has mastered the skills described in the book—but not without great tension, a few mistakes, and a session with the consultant before each meeting with the teacher. This chapter of *Leadership and Learning* intersperses a narrative account of the meetings with the principal's silent commentary (in italics) as he plans his next move, catches himself making a mistake, waits out an awkward silence, and goes back to the consultant for advice. This case is an exemplary combination of theory and practice and should be read by all school leaders.

Can the kind of work these consultants undertook with these five principals really change schools? Does identifying and overcoming the educators' inhibitions and frus-

trations raise test scores and reduce vandalism? *Leadership and Learning* claims no dramatic results, no cure-alls. What we see is a new interactive process being tried, which seems to enable a few principals to make subtle shifts in behavior and attitude. Although larger efforts could not be documented, the changes these five principals went through seemed to improve the overall climate and effectiveness of their schools. A positive change in one tenured teacher affects hundreds of children in years to come; a change in a principal's response to conflict and crisis can profoundly affect teachers and students alike. Indeed, the thread running through much of the recent literature on school effectiveness is a sense of the principal's importance.² Thus the approach described in *Leadership and Learning* deals directly with a major problem in American schools. To a significant extent the present crisis in our schools comes down to simple interactions in principals' offices and in classrooms: the slow, difficult, often painful solution to the crisis must start at that level.

The main difficulty with the LLC approach is that it takes time. Jentz and Wofford promise no real change in less than three or four years of difficult sessions with skilled consultants—reading their book is no substitute. School committees and superintendents want immediate results and are often attracted by slick packages and impressive-sounding jargon. The LLC approach, while it has a modest amount of jargon, is neither slick nor quick.

A second limitation of the Jentz-Wofford approach is that it focuses exclusively on the principal. Although quality of training is more important than quantity, and although what these principals learned undoubtedly affected the people around them, there is

something to be said for follow-up work in their schools with more of a group focus.

A third problem is that this approach can only serve willing customers. Principals who do not volunteer for this kind of professional therapy, who are too consumed by day-to-day crises to step back and reflect, or who are forced into such sessions by their superiors, will not learn from the *Leadership and Learning* model. The need for dependence on volunteers limits the approach and leaves open the question of how to help those principals who do not respond.

A fourth limitation of the LLC approach is that it obviously requires great skill on the part of the consultant. Although the consultants remain in the background throughout the book, their careful listening to and guidance of the five principals is what brings about the results. *Leadership and Learning* will be of great interest to other consultants, but it probably does not provide more than a tantalizing model for those who want to work with principals. The skills demonstrated by the LLC consultants come only from long apprenticeship and training, and most institutions providing that kind of training lead people away from schools, not into the principal's office.

A final and somewhat saddening note about the book: the word *principal* does not appear anywhere on the cover, and the review that is quoted on the book jacket comes from the director of the MBA program at the Boston University School of Management. The authors are clearly trying to appeal to a wider audience—especially the business world—and this distresses me. It both denigrates the seriousness of the problems school principals face and insures that the book will not be as widely read by school people as it deserves. The skills taught by Jentz, Wofford, and their colleagues may be applicable to the world of

² See Wilbur Brookover and Lawrence Lezotte, *Change in School Characteristics Coincident with Changes in Student Achievement* (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1979); Ronald Edmonds, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," *Educational Leadership*, 31, 1979, pp. 15-23; Michael Rutter, Barbara Maughan, Peter Morti-

more, Janet Ouston, with Alan Smith, *15000 Hours* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979); and George Weber, *Inner City Children Can Be Taught to Read: Four Successful Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1971).

business, but this small number of talented consultants is desperately needed in schools. I only hope that this book will loosen enough government and foundation pursestrings to

lure Jentz, Wofford, and company back to where they are needed most.

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