

Marshall Memo 607

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

October 12, 2015

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Quotes of the Week

“An apology is something one person says to another. Forgiveness is the next stage, where we are actually engaged in the unusual act of reconciliation. I can get up on the dance floor by myself and look really beautiful. But if what I really want is to dance with you, and you won't get up on the dance floor, then I will always be on my own.”

Rev. Dr. Amy Butler (see item #2)

“I knew that in some contexts, such as class discussions, I felt smart and empowered, while in others, such as when taking standardized tests, I felt incompetent and victimized.”

Zachary Stein (see item #1)

“Life will never be perfect for those of us who choose to teach. Children's lives aren't perfect either. But we can choose to be still, be patient, and connect. That's the space where we discover empathy within for those who need us the most.”

Virginia superintendent Pamela Moran in “On Patience and Empathy” in *School Administrator*, June 2015, <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=37362>

“Today's adolescents generally perceive their external environment as harsh, unpredictable, and unsafe. Terrorism, Facebook envy, and cyberbullying are all part of their daily reality.”

Ruby Payne (see item #3)

“It's time to move the discussion away from bilingual education and focus instead on bilingualism and its benefits for all of our kids and the adults they will become.”

Claude Goldenberg and Kirstin Wagner in “Bilingual Education: Reviving an American Tradition” in *American Educator*, Fall 2015 (Vol. 39, #3, p. 28-32, 44), http://www.aft.org/ae/fall2015/goldenberg_wagner

1. Changing the Metaphor We Use to Describe the Mind

In this article in *Independent School*, Zachary Stein (Meridian University and the Center for Integral Wisdom) describes what it was like growing up as a “high-achieving dyslectic.” A supportive mother and understanding teachers helped him successfully navigate schools and universities all the way to a doctorate (he’s about to publish his dissertation), but Stein is well aware of his disadvantages. “Make no mistake,” he says: “in some contexts I am truly disabled. Put me in a spelling bee or have me proofread a paper, and you might be shocked that I ever graduated from high school. However, I have come to realize that my dyslexia is a blessing because it has forced me to reflect upon the nature of my mind.”

Metaphors are how we try to understand the mysteries of the human brain. Freud often described the mind as a steam engine, which helped him explain why bottling up emotions could create pressure that results in an explosion of neurotic symptoms. Then in the 1960s, a new metaphor emerged – the mind-as-computer – which has been embraced by many educators. According to this metaphor, explains Stein, “the brain is hardware and the mind is software. The mind is fundamentally about ‘information processing,’ and our individual information processing units vary only in terms of their speed and memory capacities. Smart students have a lot of RAM and fast download speeds. Students who are struggling just ‘don’t have the bandwidth.’ If students follow the right programs and subroutines, they will encode the right information, which will be stored in memory and made available for retrieval later.” Learning problems are software glitches that need to be fixed with medication or test prep.

The computer metaphor is appealing, says Stein, but it has some major shortcomings. For starters, computers don’t have emotions and are not creative – they process the information put into them – whereas human learning is intimately tied up in emotion, individuality, and creativity. And the mind-as-computer paradigm leads to a simplistic view of I.Q., which Stein believes has been the cause of some major injustices.

A much better metaphor, he says, is the one put forward by Jean Piaget and, more recently, by Harvard’s Kurt Fischer: the mind is an evolving *organism* or *ecosystem*. According to this view, says Stein, “the mind is best understood as a complex and dynamic system, always in process, always changing, growing, and becoming more diverse and differentiated... You are not simply smart or dumb, having either a fast or slow information-processing unit between your ears... You may have highly evolved skills in some contexts, and primitive ones in others.” Here’s a comparison of how the two metaphors play out in schools:

- Mind-as-computer: Students are passive and programmable; emotions are a distraction from learning.
- Mind-as-ecosystem: Students are active and autonomously growing; emotions are a driving force of learning.
- Mind-as-computer: Variability among students is a problematic result of glitches in their “hardware” (brains) or “software” (skills); these need to be avoided or fixed.
- Mind-as-ecosystem: Variability among students is expected as a natural result of dynamic self-organization and growth; it needs to be fostered and leveraged.
- Mind-as-computer: The quality of a mind can be represented in a single index of “computational power” – for example, I.Q. or SAT scores.
- Mind-as-ecosystem: The quality of a mind can be represented in multiple measures of various skills and capacities, which co-evolve dynamically over time.
- Mind-as-computer: Teaching is like computer programming: specific scripts are followed; information is “put into” students, who are then graded on outputs.
- Mind-as-ecosystem: Teaching is like environmental stewardship: general principles are followed, educational environments are designed that nourish students, who then uniquely transform those environments.
- Mind-as-computer: Schools are like computer factories or repair shops, with students designed or repaired to specifications (standards) and measured by standardized tests.
- Mind-as-ecosystem: Schools are like conservation areas for the preservation of uniqueness and the fostering of self-actualization, where students are supported and nurtured, and then assessed in terms of their own organic progressions toward jointly constructed goals.

The ecosystem metaphor helped Stein understand why traditional schools were so counterproductive for him – and why some teachers were so helpful. “Most schools are suited to meet the needs of only a very narrow range of students, and at times actively *exclude* more diverse minds,” he says. “I knew that in some contexts, such as class discussions, I felt smart and empowered, while in others, such as when taking standardized tests, I felt incompetent and victimized. But if the mind is both context sensitive and dynamically self-regulating, then this variability in performance makes sense, and these are no longer contradictory experiences. Change the context and you change what the mind can do.” The bottom line for schools: “Variability should be expected and then leveraged.”

Stein acknowledges that it will be difficult for many educators to shift from the computer metaphor. A lot will have to change, from the way classrooms are structured to the whole standardized testing business. He’s been working for 20 years to help schools make the shift to viewing each student “as a unique and evolving ecosystem of skills and ideas” and wean schools off their reliance on high-stakes, summative testing, replacing it with numerous low-stakes, embedded, formative assessments peppered throughout the curriculum to support each child’s growth and development.

“Minding Your Metaphors About the Mind” by Zachary Stein in *Independent School*, Fall

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2. What Does Real Forgiveness Look Like?

In this *New York Times* article, author Bruce Feiler describes what happened when a speaker at a recent gathering in Manhattan asked a mixed-age group of over 400 people, "In how many of your families, at the level of first cousin or closer, are there people who are not on speaking terms?" Two-thirds of the hands went up. "I know," said the speaker. "It's a staggering figure. And when you ask people to explain the origin of the fight, they often sound ridiculous." The focus of this New York discussion? Forgiveness.

In the last few years, a number of public figures have asked to be forgiven, among them Hulk Hogan, Ray Rice, Lance Armstrong, Paula Dean, Josh Duggar, and Ariana Grande. But is this the approach that should be used in families [or schools]? Psychologist Frederic Luskin thinks not: "The celebrity stuff you're talking about is not really the hard work of forgiveness. It's the narcissistic work of forgiveness. It's just asking for forgiveness."

So when people have harmed someone close to them and want to work through all the conflicting feelings and get to a place of dignity and peace, how should they proceed? Here are Luskin's suggestions:

- *Admit vulnerability.* Part of this is accepting responsibility for how one's actions affected others. "Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not O.K.," says Luskin. Get in touch with how the other person is feeling right now. Rabbi Shai Held, a theologian, puts it this way: "Vulnerability is acknowledging you owe something to someone by admitting that you hurt them."

- *Really apologize.* Saying, "I'm sorry you're upset" is not nearly enough. A true apology conveys that one's poor choice of action or words caused harm to the other person, that there's real regret and an acceptance of responsibility, followed by a promise to make amends. Luskin says that "when children grow up in a home where they see Mom and Dad genuinely apologizing ('Honey, I apologize for being late. I'm sorry you had to wait.').", then they grow up thinking an apology is not a bad thing. And that's a good thing."

- *If you want to be forgiven, ask.* "An apology is something one person says to another," says Rev. Dr. Amy Butler of Riverside Church in New York. "Forgiveness is the next stage, where we are actually engaged in the unusual act of reconciliation. I can get up on the dance floor by myself and look really beautiful. But if what I really want is to dance with you, and you won't get up on the dance floor, then I will always be on my own." The moment of forgiveness, she says, "is that moment of true humanity when we are seen for who we really are and loved anyway."

- *How do you get to forgiveness? Practice.* Part of being human, says Rabbi Held, "is to strive to become better, kinder, more generous, more forgiving. Rather than let those remain abstractions, I want us to try to make them more real in the relationships that matter the most." This might take the form of family members coming together for a conversation about hurt that

has occurred and asking for forgiveness. The best closure to a gathering like this is for each person to say, *Thank you*. “Then,” says Rabbi Held, “you know you’ve taken a step toward wholeness and everyone can walk out together.”

“Here’s How to Ask for Forgiveness” by Bruce Feiler in *The New York Times*, September 27, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/fashion/how-to-forgive-in-four-steps.html?_r=0

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3. Ruby Payne on Connection and Belonging in Middle Schools

“In the past 20 years, the push for high achievement, along with a very narrow definition of achievement at the federal level, has forced many schools to neglect the very foundation of learning: safety and belonging,” says author/consultant Ruby Payne in this article in *AMLE Magazine*. Payne says she’s heard increased concern among educators around the country about “cutting” – various forms of self-harm. She believes the “hurt” that drives adolescents to cut themselves has to do with a lack of connections, safety, and belonging.

Generation K (teens 13-20, many under the spell of *Hunger Games* icon Katniss Everdeen) “has a deep distrust of institutions – especially governments and corporations,” says Payne. “They watched the Great Recession and the spike in terrorism... Today’s adolescents generally perceive their external environment as harsh, unpredictable, and unsafe. Terrorism, Facebook envy, and cyberbullying are all part of their daily reality. The school environment has become harsher under the pressures of state assessments (you make it or you don’t) and zero tolerance in discipline. And in middle school, students often are bullied in school and out of school – in person and via social media. No place is safe.” According to one study of American and British Generation K girls, 30 percent are unsure or negative about marriage, 31 percent feel the same way about having children, 86 percent are concerned about getting a job, 77 percent about going into debt, and 22 percent have considered suicide.

In this environment, human connections and belonging are essential, and if those are absent, some teens harm themselves, while others engage in avoidance behaviors. One study found that the average American teenage boy watches 50 pornography clips a week and, by 21, has played more than 10,000 hours of video games, mostly alone. Activities like these rewire boys’ brains for constant arousal, novelty, and excitement, says Payne, and instill a preference for being isolated from social contact.

“Schools cannot change the external world nor the perception that the world is ‘not safe,’” says Payne, “but they can address the issue of ‘belonging.’” Her suggestions:

- Have students volunteer or engage in community service. “Volunteering is a powerful way to gain a broader perspective and get outside one’s own fears and concerns,” she says.

- Have students do academic tasks in pairs. This is particularly helpful to keep boys from becoming isolated from others.

- Connect students to people in another country, particularly in Third World countries, via Skype or Google Hangouts.

- Never allow a student to eat lunch alone. “Assign student ambassadors whose explicit responsibility is to befriend,” says Payne.

- Survey students about their best friends and the topics they discuss, and then counsel them on how to be “better friends” who ask questions rather than giving advice and who alert adults when they hear troubling references to pornography, cutting, heavy drug use, and suicide.

“Your students may not thank you,” says Payne of such interventions, “but they will be the beneficiaries.”

“Keeping Students Safe from Harm” by Ruby Payne in *AMLE Magazine*, October 2015 (Vol. 4, #3, p. 36-37), no free e-link available; Payne can be reached at rpayne@ahaprocess.com.

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4. Carol Dweck on Glitches in the Implementation of Mindsets Thinking

In this *Education Week* article, Carol Dweck says that as she and her colleagues at Stanford University have watched the theory of fixed and growth mindsets become more and more popular among educators, “we’ve become much wiser about how to implement it.” Here are her thoughts about one major misunderstanding.

Growth mindset isn’t just about effort. “Certainly, effort is key for students’ achievement,” says Dweck, “but it’s not the only thing. Students need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they’re stuck.” After all, the goal is learning, and if they’re not learning, they need to be strategic about how to get there. Praising effort can help keep them in the game, but an adult should say something like this when dealing with a striving but unsuccessful student: “Let’s talk about what you’ve tried, and what you can try next.”

Dweck says she is haunted by the possibility that some educators and parents haven’t fully understood the mindset concepts and are misapplying them in the following ways:

- Trying to boost students’ self-esteem by praising effort;
- Trying to make children feel better by saying, “Everyone is smart!”
- Explaining students’ failure by saying they have a *fixed* mindset.
- Treating children’s mistakes as problematic or harmful rather than pathways to success.

In these cases, children can actually be pushed toward a fixed mindset about their intelligence. “Must it always come back to finding a reason why some children just can’t learn,” asks Dweck, “as opposed to finding a way to help them learn? Teachers who understand the growth mindset do everything in their power to unlock that learning.”

Dweck wonders whether she and her colleagues put too much emphasis on sheer effort, making it sound as though developing a growth mindset is easy. “Maybe we talked too much about people having one mindset or the other,” she says, “rather than portraying people as mixtures. We are on a growth-mindset journey, too.”

So how can educators move to a deeper understanding of the growth mindset? Dweck says we need to acknowledge that (a) We’re all a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets, (b) We will probably always be that way, and (c) “If we want to move closer to a growth mindset in our thoughts and practices, we need to stay in touch with our fixed-mindset thoughts and deeds.” Two sure routes to a *false* growth-mindset are to stigmatize and “ban” the fixed

mindset and to attach high stakes to children's mindset status. Adults also need to be aware of own their triggers. Dweck's suggestions:

- When faced with challenges: "Do you feel overly anxious? Does a voice in your head warn you away?"
- When you have a teaching setback, or when students aren't listening or learning: "Do you feel incompetent or defeated? Do you look for an excuse?"
- When we're criticized: "Do you become defensive, angry, or crushed instead of interested in learning from the feedback?"
- Watching an educator who's better at something we value: "Do you feel envious and threatened, or do you feel eager to learn?"

"Accept those thoughts and feelings and work with and through them," she says. "And keep working with and through them."

"Growth Mindset, Revisited" by Carol Dweck in *Education Week*, September 23, 2015 (Vol. 35, #5, p. 4, 20), www.edweek.org

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5. How Can Students' Opinions of Teachers Have Maximum Impact?

In this article in *School Administrator*, Massachusetts superintendent Rebecca McFall describes visiting a sixth-grade teacher's classroom and seeing these mid-year goals posted on the front wall:

- I will incorporate more challenging work and provide an extra challenge activity for students who have finished their work early.
- I will make sure that each homework assignment is related to what we are working on in class and put a system into place to ensure students work on no more than 25 minutes of ELA homework each night, or that they have some nights without homework to work on projects.
- I will work to implement activities where students will be accountable for each other's success – not just their own.
- I will work to integrate some elements of student choice and allow students to show their work in different ways when possible.
- I will use a variety of ways to teach my lesson: drawing, talking out loud, slides, writing on the board, games, and discussions.

When McFall asked the teacher about these goals afterward, the teacher became flustered and self-conscious. Students' responses to a mid-year questionnaire had been quite disappointing in a number of areas, she said, and she decided to discuss the full survey results with her students. Together they created goals to bring about improvements in five key areas during the remaining months of the year. Students felt good about being asked and promised to keep their teacher accountable for the changes she wanted to make. As a result, classroom dynamics improved, with students and teacher working harder and more effectively.

McFall was delighted to hear this, since she had specifically suggested that teachers share survey results with their students. Surveys are part of a district professional development initiative, using guidelines and model questions supplied by the state education department. McFall is a strong supporter of the idea of surveying students about their teachers' performance – but only if the results are handled in a low-stakes manner. “If the results of student surveys are directly tied to professional evaluation ratings,” she says, “educators will strongly resist the process. They will contest the validity of the results and never will be open to the incredible positive potential student feedback holds to improve classroom culture and instruction and to increase student engagement and ownership for their learning. But the real benefits of student feedback can be achieved only if teachers feel safe to acknowledge their areas of needed growth and feel free to communicate with students and take risks with their instruction.”

“The Benefits of Soliciting Our Students' Feedback” by Rebecca McFall in *School Administrator*, October 2015 (Vol. 72. #9, p. 13), <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=38128>; McFall can be reached at bmcfall@lincnet.org.

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6. Some Do's and Don'ts of Using Rubrics in Classrooms

In this *AMLE Magazine* article, author/consultant Rick Wormeli acknowledges the advantages of using rubrics rather than percentages and the 100-point scale to assess students' writing, math solutions, artwork, and other open-ended assignments. Conversations stemming from well-handled rubric assessments “are some of the most liberating and inspiring ones we have,” he says. “They often lead to serious revelations about instruction and learning, and with each conversation, we find one more reason to get out of bed in the morning and teach.”

But Wormeli worries that “rubricizing” may have gone overboard in certain ways. Here are his suggested do's and don'ts:

- Rubrics should be written by those who have actually taught the material. “[W]e must be intimate with a subject before we can argue the merits of its elements,” he says.
- Use a 3-5 level scale. Trying to create rubrics with more levels creates a false sense of precision – and it's very difficult to come up with precise descriptions at each level.
- Reference the same domain all the way through. “Rubrics and scales are about clear communication,” says Wormeli, “so let's not muddy the waters.” The skill being described – strategic thinking, for example – needs to be tracked through all the levels.
- Keep the evaluative criteria for each level authentic to the learner's experience. “If we have students practice one way in class and at home, but we test them a different way at the end of the unit, the report of their learning is invalid,” says Wormeli. “After wordsmithing our rubric descriptions, let's audit them for how authentic they are to the student's experience during the unit.”
- Test-drive the rubric on real student work before giving it to students. This will highlight elements teachers forgot to include and details that weren't really important.

- Provide exemplars at each level. This allows teachers, students, and parents to see more clearly what actual performance looks like.
- Get students involved in creating rubrics. “This process moves those criteria into students’ internal editors,” says Wormeli, “and they reference them in real-time while working on their own efforts.”
- Use a common rubric for differentiated assessments. When students are allowed to choose from among several ways to demonstrate proficiency, they should still be accountable for meeting the same set of criteria.
- Continuously assess the rubric’s use and quality. Does it account for everything that needs to be assessed? Is it the best way to assess this product? Is the rubric tiered for this class’s level of readiness? Is it written so that someone reading it “cold” can understand what’s expected? Can a student understand the content and yet score poorly on the rubric, or understand very little of the content and yet score well? (Neither is a good sign.) How does the rubric support differentiated instruction?
 - Don’t use *average*, *above average*, or *below average* as descriptors.
 - Don’t fully describe every level of performance. Wormeli is worried that students will be overwhelmed by too much verbiage and will settle for *Satisfactory*. He recommends spelling out detail on the *Exemplary* level to challenge students to push themselves toward excellence.
 - Don’t let reports of compliance distort reports of learning. It’s important that rubrics are seen as reporting learning with respect to goals rather than reports of what students did.
 - Don’t use numerical rubric scores in isolation. A score of 2 on a 4-3-2-1 rubric scale should be linked to specific descriptors of what performance at that level means, and it should be seen as a placeholder followed by more work and improvement to higher levels.

“Calling a ‘Timeout’ on Rubrics and Grading Scales” by Rick Wormeli *AMLE Magazine*, October 2015 (Vol. 4, #3, p. 41-43), <http://bit.ly/1KNcrD0>; the author can be reached at rwormeli@cox.net.

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7. Four Tiers of Integrating Instructional Technology

In this article in *School Administrator*, New Jersey superintendent David Lindenmuth describes the SAMR model – Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition – that his district is using to monitor and improve teachers’ use of technology. (The model was developed by Ruben Puentedura at Hippasus.)

- *Substitution* – Technology is used to take the place of previous approaches with no functional change – for example, an interactive whiteboard replacing a chalkboard. There’s nothing wrong with this stage, and using a whiteboard may improve student attention, but it doesn’t take full advantage of technology’s potential.

- *Augmentation* – Technology substitutes for previous methods with some functional improvements – for example, the whiteboard is used to show videos, which engages students with different learning styles.

- *Modification* – Technology allows for significant redesign of instructional tasks – for example, students collaboratively create a movie by combining text, audio, and video, taking the lead in their own learning.

- *Redefinition* – Technology makes possible new activities and assignments that were inconceivable or impossible before – for example, a seventh-grade class studying ancient Rome connects with a class in Rome that is visiting the Coliseum, or students use FaceTime video to go on an interactive field trip, then create websites or blogs to display what they learned and continue the discussion.

“We have used the model to accumulate data to measure where we are in our attempts to transform our learning environment,” says Lindenmuth, “which then serve as the basis for discussion and training opportunities rather than formal observations.” Since adopting the SAMR model, the district has seen steady growth in the use of technology: two years ago, 85 percent of classrooms were at the substitution level; now more than 80 percent are at the augmentation or modification level.

“A Model for Expanding Tech Use in Schools” by David Lindenmuth in *School Administrator*, October 2015 (Vol. 72. #9, p. 12), <http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=38124>; the author can be reached at dlindenmuth@claytonps.org.

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8. Short Item:

World War II deaths – This video shows the deaths by country, year, and campaign during the Second World War: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXcp5NRCyiA>.

“The Fallen of World War II” by Rik Bessler, June 6, 2015

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*If you have feedback or suggestions,
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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 44 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 64 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year).

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast
Better: Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
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Educational Horizons
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Educational Researcher
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Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
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Literacy Today
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine
Wharton Leadership Digest