

# Marshall Memo 366

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

December 28, 2010

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## Quotes of the Week

“Of all the factors vital to improving schools, none is more essential – or vulnerable – than hope.”

Robert Evans (quoted in item #1)

“You have to know what your people can do. The ones who need to be challenged, you give them challenges. The ones who need to be carried, you carry them. The ones you need to let go, you let them go. A leader has to have a certain kindness but a certain meanness, too.”

Wynton Marsalis (see item #2)

“Wise leaders do not conduct an endless search for ‘buy in,’ but acknowledge the truth – change is difficult and always involves opposition.”

Douglas Reeves (see item #4)

“Beliefs and anecdotes, no matter how compelling, cannot compete with evidence.”

Douglas Reeves (*ibid.*)

“I have made this letter longer than usual, because I lacked the time to make it short.”

Blaise Pascal (quoted in item #1)

“Intelligence is the ability to take in information from the world and to find patterns in that information that allow you to organize your perceptions and understand the external world.”

Brian Greene, Columbia University physicist, quoted in a Deborah Solomon interview,

“Greene, with Curiosity,” in the *New York Times Magazine*, Dec. 19, 2010

[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/19/magazine/19FOB-Q4-t.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=Greene.%20with%20Curiosity&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/19/magazine/19FOB-Q4-t.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Greene.%20with%20Curiosity&st=cse)

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## 1. Abraham Lincoln and School Leadership

(Originally titled *Learning from Lincoln: Leadership Practices for School Success*)

In this thoughtful ASCD book, Eastern Washington University professor and former principal Harvey Alvy and consultant Pam Robbins draw ten school leadership lessons from our 16<sup>th</sup> president:

- *Implement and sustain a mission and vision with focused and profound clarity.* “A compelling mission and vision should have personal meaning to all those who may be affected by the idea,” say Alvy and Robbins. In schools, it should transcend the struggles of the moment and be powerful for future generations of educators and students.

- *Communicate ideas effectively with precise and straightforward language.* Lincoln got his ideas across so well because he used crisp, precise language; used vivid, down-to-earth words, metaphors, and stories; sought out and used feedback; was a patient and attentive listener; mastered the communication media of his day (telegraph and newspaper); and ensured that his actions aligned with his words. Each of these is important to today’s school leaders, including skillful use of today’s communication media – but Alvy and Robbins caution that principals should follow Lincoln’s example and make maximum use of face-to-face communication.

- *Build a diverse and competent team to successfully address the mission.* Lincoln recognized that he had a lot to learn as chief executive and commander in chief, and he impressed his contemporaries (and future generations of leaders) by bringing prominent political rivals into his cabinet, marshaling the best talent, expertise, perspectives, and opinions available. Similarly, school leaders can’t do the job alone and need to reach out, broaden their base, collaborate, delegate, and empower.

- *Engender trust, loyalty, and respect through humility, humor, and personal example.* Lincoln “managed to be strong-willed without being willful, righteous without being self-righteous, and moral without being moralistic,” wrote historian Michael Burlingame. Lincoln’s personal qualities, especially his humor and integrity, shone through in his words and actions, and provide a model for school leaders. For school leaders, say Alvy and Robbins, personal example is the best way to win trust, respect, and support.

- *Lead and serve with emotional intelligence and empathy.* “He possessed extraordinary empathy,” wrote historian Doris Kearns Goodwin of Lincoln, “the gift or curse of putting himself in the place of another, to experience what they were feeling, to understand their motives or desires.” Lincoln’s second inaugural address was a model of restraint, empathy, and

calling forth people's better angels: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds... to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations"). Alvy and Robbins list five skills that school leaders need to marshal, especially in times of difficulty: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivating others, empathy, and social skills.

- *Exercise situational competence and respond appropriately to implement effective change.* Alvy and Robbins cite Lincoln's steep learning curve as commander in chief, his skill in dealing with brutal setbacks during the Civil War, his openness to new ideas, his evolving public position on slavery, and his clarity on the core mission of preserving the Union. On a smaller scale, school leaders must exercise the same skill set as they deal with the work of bringing all students to high levels of achievement.

- *Rise beyond personal and professional trials through tenacity, persistence, resilience, and courage.* Lincoln battled depression and endured bitter, non-stop criticism throughout the Civil War and yet tenaciously held to his goals and increasingly reached for a spiritual dimension. Similarly, school leaders need to have what Jim Collins calls a paradoxical blend of "personal humility and professional will." This comes from self-knowledge, inner strength, and a personal narrative that connects with the deeper purposes of education.

- *Exercise purposeful visibility.* Lincoln was determined to connect frequently with ordinary citizens and the soldiers in the field, in camps, and hospitals. Alvy and Robbins say the parallel for principals is frequently getting into classrooms, using their many brief encounters with colleagues, students, and parents to talk about teaching and learning, and staying in close touch with other key stakeholders.

- *Demonstrate personal growth and enhanced competence as a lifetime learner, willing to reflect on and expand ideas.* "The Lincoln example is especially inspirational to educators because his desire to gain knowledge and wisdom never faded," say Alvy and Robbins. He had only one year of formal schooling but educated himself to the point where he could enjoy Shakespeare, converse intelligently with anyone, and write one of the most eloquent speeches ever given. Painting on a smaller canvas, school leaders can model lifelong learning by reading widely, taking part in book and study groups, attending conferences and courses, showing genuine curiosity about what works in classrooms, and teaching classes themselves.

- *Believe that hope can become a reality.* Hope springs from high ideals and a fundamental optimism about what can be. Lincoln found a way to communicate hope with conviction and simplicity – and he combined his moral vision with tactical smarts and good timing. For example, he released the Emancipation Proclamation right after a Union victory and far enough into the war so that it wouldn't alienate border states that were essential to victory. "Of all the factors vital to improving schools, none is more essential – or vulnerable – than hope," says Robert Evans (1996). School leaders are well aware of the depressing statistics on the achievement gap and the probable futures of many American children if schools don't dramatically improve. They also have to deal with Hollywood myths about heroic individuals who magically turn things around.

It takes hope – and all the other skills listed above – to make a lasting difference in our schools.

*Learning from Lincoln: Leadership Practices for School Success* by Harvey Alvy and Pam Robbins (ASCD, 2010); the authors are at [halvy@ewu.edu](mailto:halvy@ewu.edu) and [probbins@shentel.net](mailto:probbins@shentel.net).

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## **2. Wynton Marsalis on Leadership**

In this *Harvard Business Review* interview, trumpet maestro Wynton Marsalis shares his wisdom on leadership. In his early years as a band leader, he says he was too harsh on his fellow players, but he grew into the role. “You have to know what your people can do,” he continues. “The ones who need to be challenged, you give them challenges. The ones who need to be carried, you carry them. The ones you need to let go, you let them go. A leader has to have a certain kindness but a certain meanness, too.”

Marsalis draws a distinction between skills that can be gained by practice – “You can become proficient at anything” – and deeper stuff – “You can’t practice the ability to make connections or have a deep, spiritual insight. To be great, you need courage to speak out and endurance to deal with what is given to you.”

Asked what he looks for when he hires musicians, he lists four things: Having a unique individual sound; knowledge of music; being able to respond well to pressure; and wanting to “be a part of us.”

Marsalis says that when he composes music, he works best with the television on. “It makes me concentrate more deeply on what I’m doing,” he says. “I grew up in a big family with a lot of noise.”

Asked what leaders can learn from listening to jazz, Marsalis says, “If you hone your listening skills so you can follow the development of a solo, you can listen more empathetically to people when they talk and hear underneath what they’re saying. You can feel their intention.”

“Life’s Work” – An Interview with Wynton Marsalis by Katherine Bell in *Harvard Business Review*, January/February 2011 (Vol. 89, #1-2, p. 184); available for purchase at

<http://hbr.org/2011/01/lifes-work-wynton-marsalis/ar/1>

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## **3. Three Imperatives for Being a Great Boss**

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Harvard Business School professor Linda Hill and former executive Kent Lineback say that many new managers underestimate the challenges of leadership positions – and some veteran managers become complacent and stop growing. “At best, they learn to get by,” say Hill and Lineback. “At worst, they become terrible bosses.” This often happens because they don’t understand that “management is responsibility for the performance of a group of people... To influence others you must make a difference not only in what they do but also in the thoughts and feelings that drive their actions.”

To accomplish this, Hill and Lineback say that managers need to deal with three imperatives: Manage yourself, manage internal politics, and manage your team. They suggest managers self-assess on the questions under each one, rating themselves from 1 (I need to make progress) to 5 (This is a strength):

- *Manage yourself.* “Management begins with you,” say Hill and Lineback, “because who you are as a person, what you think and feel, the beliefs and values that drive your actions, and especially how you connect with others all matter to the people you must influence. Every day those people examine every interaction with you, your every word and deed, to uncover your intentions... How hard they work, their level of personal commitment, their willingness to accept your influence, will depend in large part on the qualities they see in you.”

- Do you use your formal authority effectively but not excessively? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do you create thoughtful but not overly personal relationships? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do others trust you as a manager? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do you exercise your influence ethically and in service of a greater good? 1 2 3 4 5

- *Manage internal politics.* Some managers resist “greasing the skids” for their ideas in their organization’s network before presenting them in formal settings – thereby dooming their proposals to failure. Organizations are necessarily political because there’s a division of labor, different groups are interdependent, and resources are scarce. Being political in the sense of informally influencing colleagues is essential to being an effective manager.

- Do you systematically identify those who should be in your network? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do you proactively build and maintain your network? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do you use your network to provide the protection and resources your team needs? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do you use your network to accomplish your team’s goals? 1 2 3 4 5

- *Manage your team.* Some managers believe meetings are a waste of time and try to manage their teams through one-on-one interactions. “In a real team,” say Hill and Lineback, “members hold themselves and one another jointly accountable. They share a genuine conviction that they will succeed or fail together. A clear and compelling purpose, and concrete goals and plans based on that purpose, are critical.” Without this, and without team norms and limits, the team will not accomplish much. In addition, it’s essential to be clear on how you’re doing, which means measurable goals and benchmarks of progress.

- Do you define and constantly refine your team’s vision for the future? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do you clarify roles, work rules, team culture, and feedback about performance? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do you know and manage your people as individuals as well as team members? 1 2 3 4 5
- Do you use daily activities and problems to pursue the three imperatives? 1 2 3 4 5

“Are you a Good Boss – or a Great One?” by Linda Hill and Kent Lineback in *Harvard Business Review*, January/February 2011 (Vol. 89, #1-2, p. 124-131), no e-link available

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#### 4. Basing Decisions on the Right Data

In this *American School Board Journal* article, author/consultant Douglas Reeves describes three blind alleys in educational policy decision-making – and two more sensible avenues:

- *Spurious claim 1: I believe it.* Some educators and parents have strong views, for example, the virtues of corporal punishment and certain methods of teaching reading. But these are views, not research-based claims. As Silicon Valley entrepreneur James Barksdale said, “Everybody’s entitled to their own opinion; they’re just not entitled to their own facts.”

- *Spurious claim 2: It worked for me, or I tried that in my classroom and it didn’t work.* “In both cases,” says Reeves, “the implied claim is that personal experience can be generalized to all students in all schools.” So although a principal might have been subject to corporal punishment as a child and turned out fine, he still doesn’t allow children to be beaten in school, and although we might know a person who was a heavy smoker and lived into her nineties, we still discourage students from smoking.

- *Spurious claim 3: Everyone thinks this is a lousy idea.* Determined opponents sometimes enlist “the popular will” against a leader’s initiatives. “When the ‘I’ becomes ‘we’ in discussions of reform ideas,” says Reeves, “then leaders become preoccupied with the need for popularity rather than effectiveness. They succumb to the idea that ‘buy in’ is the prerequisite for change, failing to acknowledge that effective change requires that people sacrifice time and energy – and pre-existing beliefs. Wise leaders do not conduct an endless search for ‘buy in,’ but acknowledge the truth – change is difficult and always involves opposition.”

- *More solid ground: systematic examination of authentic cases* – Individual school success stories are not definitive, but they provide leaders with detailed descriptions of the specific actions that successful schools have taken. Reeves cites three books in this vein: *Bringing School Reform to Scale: Five Award-Winning Urban Districts* by Heather Zavadsky (Harvard Education Press, 2009), *It’s Being Done* by Karin Chenoweth (Harvard Education Press, 2007), and *How to Change 5,000 Schools* by Benjamin Levin (Harvard Education Press, 2008).

- *Most solid of all: looking for the preponderance of evidence* – “Beliefs and anecdotes, no matter how compelling, cannot compete with evidence,” says Reeves. Sometimes there’s evidence on both sides of a pedagogical issue and it’s a tough call. But leaders don’t need evidence “beyond a reasonable doubt” (as they would if they were jurors in a criminal case). Rather, they need to decide based on “the preponderance of the evidence” (as they would in a civil case). “The evidence is not perfect, and neither side has a monopoly on the truth,” says Reeves. “But at the end of the day, you find that one side has made a sufficient case for public policy.” Reeves cites several books that have compiled solid evidence for effective practices:

- *Visible Learning* by John Hattie (Routledge, 2009)
- *Learning from Leadership* by Ken Leithwood et al. (2010), a Wallace Foundation publication available at:

<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/WF/Knowledge%20Center/Attachments/PDF/ReviewofResearch-LearningFromLeadership.pdf>

- *The Fourth Way* by Andy Hargreaves et al. (Corwin, 2009)
- *The Art and Science of Teaching* by Robert Marzano (ASCD, 2007)

“Fact or Fiction” by Douglas Reeves in *American School Board Journal*, January 2011 (Vol. 198, #1, p. 40-41), no e-link available; Reeves can be reached at [dreeves@leadandlearn.com](mailto:dreeves@leadandlearn.com).

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## 5. Is Guilt Part of What Makes Workers Successful?

In this intriguing *Harvard Business Review* interview, Stanford Business School professor Francis Flynn reports on a study in which he used a psychological test (TOSCA or Test of Self-Conscious Affect) to identify workers in the finance department of a Fortune 500 company who had a tendency to feel guilt. He then studied their performance and found these workers did better than less guilt-prone colleagues in:

- Work ethic
- Job performance
- Leadership ability
- Willingness to help others
- Commitment to their employer
- Ability to see the big picture

“From a researcher’s perspective,” said Flynn, “the correlation is stunning... Not only that – in a follow-up study we found that more guilt equaled more commitment. Those who felt guilty worked harder and were more likely to promote the organization to others.”

How can this be, since most people assume that guilt isn’t a constructive emotion? “Our take,” says Flynn, “is that guilt activates a keen sense of responsibility for one’s actions.” And there don’t appear to be downsides. The guilt-prone workers had the same level of job satisfaction as others, weren’t more stressed, were good at managing their feelings, and were less selfish.

Flynn is now working on a study of how guilt correlates with absenteeism, staying late to finish projects, and dealing with time conflicts between work and home.

“Guilt-Ridden People Make Great Leaders” – An Interview with Francis Flynn in *Harvard Business Review*, January/February 2011 (Vol. 89, #1-2, p. 30-31), no e-link available

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## 6. Short Items:

*a. Anti-bullying resources* – This article by Jennifer Holladay in *Teaching Tolerance* provides some useful links on bullying prevention curriculum materials:

- *A Thin Line*, a social marketing campaign from MTV addressing the line between harmless jokes and hurtful speech and actions: <http://www.athinline.com>

- *Bullying in Schools and What to Do About It*, materials on the Method of Shared Concern, a restorative-justice approach to bullying interventions by former teacher and counselor Ken Rigby: <http://www.kenrigby.net>
- *Cyberbullying: Understanding and Addressing Online Cruelty*, a curriculum from the Anti-Defamation League for early, middle, and upper grades on the bigotry that fuels cyberbullying: [http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum\\_connections/cyberbullying](http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/cyberbullying)
- *Middle School Cyberbullying Curriculum* from the Seattle Public Schools: <http://www.seattleschools.org/area/prevention/cbms.html>
- *NetSmartz* from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America addresses online predators and peer-to-peer abuse: <http://www.netsmartz.org/resources/reallife.htm>
- *Wired Safety*, the Tween and Teen Angel programs that train and empower youth to lead presentations about responsible technology use for other children, parents, and teachers: <http://www.wiredsafety.org>

“Cyberbullying” by Jennifer Holladay in *Teaching Tolerance*, Fall 2010 (Vol. 38, p. 42-45), spotted in *Education Digest*, January 2011 (Vol. 76, #5, p. 9)

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***b. Film clips for character education classes*** – This site has an extensive library of film clips for use in character education <http://www.FilmClipsOnline.com>, with access to some free materials for certain organizations (check with yours).

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***Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?***

*If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: [kim.marshall8@verizon.net](mailto:kim.marshall8@verizon.net)*

# 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 41 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 44 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 about 50 issues a year).

## ***Subscriptions:***

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for the school year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and information on paying by check or credit card.

## ***Website:***

If you go to <http://www.marshallmemo.com> you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Headlines for all issues
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Marshall Memo subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or log-in

## ***Publications covered***

*Those read this week are underlined.*

American Educator  
American Journal of Education  
American School Board Journal  
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews  
Ed. Magazine  
EDge  
Education Digest  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
Education Week  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Edutopia  
Elementary School Journal  
Essential Teacher (TESOL)  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Education Letter  
Harvard Educational Review  
JESPAR  
Journal of Staff Development  
Language Learner (NABE)  
Middle Ground  
Middle School Journal  
New York Times  
Newsweek  
PEN Weekly NewsBlast  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal  
Principal Leadership  
Principal's Research Review  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Reading Today  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
Teachers College Record  
The Atlantic Monthly  
The Chronicle of Higher Education  
The Language Educator  
The Learning Principal  
The New Yorker  
The Reading Teacher  
The School Administrator  
Theory Into Practice  
Tools for Schools