
Foreword

From a district leadership perspective, it's important to recognize the importance of this book in the context of our contemporary political and philosophical climate as it pertains to public education. The authors accurately note the "existential insecurity, instability, and lowered self-esteem" which characterize American teachers' experience during a time when politicians and critics diligently work to manipulate and control the direction and spirit of education in the United States.

Leaders who attempt to work with teachers and principals to promote systemic change within this environment realize district efforts to create a positive atmosphere and common purpose leading to improved student achievement and well-being are hindered by behaviors which create a loss of trust among school professionals. Funding difficulties, curricular narrowing, high-stakes testing of debatable utility, special interest advocacy, and other factors already conspire to evoke a feeling of powerlessness and frustration among staff. When these elements are combined with a teacher's perception that "I will probably never truly trust an administrator again," it's hard to imagine how the organizational *gestalt* essential for reform and improvement can be generated and sustained in a district or school. In this vein, the authors aptly quote Bok, whose statement that "Trust and integrity are precious resources, easily squandered, hard to regain" illustrates what we all know about administrative-staff relations.

For all these reasons, this book should come with a warning. The challenges implicit in these findings reflect issues affecting the gamut of school performance and the success of related initiatives to guide and improve teaching and learning: abuse and denigration of staff members is seldom dealt with easily or without creative, dedicated effort and courage. The research and the findings presented in this book must not be brushed aside as a natural outcome of human interaction in the form of so-called personality conflicts or as grouching from poorly performing staff members. On the contrary, the complexity and depth of change required to ensure consistent progress in education demands that the problem of mistreatment of teachers be taken very seriously and that appropriate preventative and corrective action serve as one of the keystones of growth and productivity in district and school cultures.

Over the past two decades, Joseph and Jo Blase have shown a clear, prolific, and reliable dedication to describing behaviors and organizational practice consistent

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with the cultural and individual growth necessary to support a productive instructional climate and positive student-teacher interaction. Their work and writing reflects my belief that school-based, collaborative, shared decision making, and genuine inclusion, in concert with parallel district leadership-level activities, constitute a major tactical tenet of school improvement. Not surprisingly, I've found that boards of education and superintendents, regardless of their degree of dedication and effort, will fail in their efforts to improve school performance without the guidance of principals and teachers working together and with an energy based on trust and belief in a commonly accepted vision. Staff leadership, systematically encouraged and facilitated, lies at the heart of true reform, if we want to use that term. In preceding books by Blase and Blase, that has been the message. Now, these researchers turn their attention to what they refer to as a "dark side" of administrative behavior which intrudes on and obstructs the ideals of organizational development they have promoted so convincingly in their earlier work. The result of their courage is truly a groundbreaking effort and one that deserves serious attention.

In the course of this book, the authors draw on a growing background of research describing workplace mistreatment and abuse throughout American industry and across a broad range of organizations and occupations. They employ this background of research to help characterize different levels and types of damaging supervisory behavior. Experienced administrators will see parallels and familiar examples as they follow escalating examples of mistreatment and principals' bullying of teachers through the early chapters. Although the spirit and impact of the anecdotal records vary somewhat, a characteristic of this sort of qualitative research, it's clear that a teacher's effectiveness and energy must dissipate after months and years of the kind of negativity and ambivalence described herein. Further, the authors convincingly describe the continuing emotional and somatic impact of a frightening range of belittling, isolating, and condemning behaviors on teachers' personal lives and relationships.

Blase and Blase's findings leave us to struggle not only with the notion of barriers to organizational growth but with violation of standards of decency and humanity which fly in the face of our beliefs and values as educators. These are tough issues to face and fathom, indeed. However, if the referenced literature regarding mistreatment of employees in the American workplace accurately reflects the frequency and pervasive nature of these behaviors, the imperatives are clear. Both central office and building-level educational leaders must commit themselves to support and assist each other and our teaching staffs to minimize interpersonal strife and the resulting anxiety and fear which detract from the growth and success of individuals, schools, and districts. If we doubt for a moment the importance of dealing with the problem of teacher mistreatment, we need only read articulate and truth-ringing statements from apparently outstanding classroom teachers who have lost their zest for teaching or been reduced to the practice of "defensive teaching." These attitudes are inconsistent with the work we're all trying to do.

Given today's scrutiny of public education and the attendant advance of varying qualities and quantities of accountability measures with their resulting initiatives,

the task seems daunting. Principals are faced with a raft of requirements and increased expectations from all levels. The art of balancing a demanding sense of responsibility for data-based results and a need to foster positive and collaborative relationships with staff can be vexing and difficult. Statutory and policy-based constraints often ensure the difficulty of pursuing the perfect equilibrium of fairness to the individual and high quality instruction for students. In this climate, school and district leadership requires even greater extension of consistent and positive interchange between players. Blase and Blase make it clear that “overtly or covertly authoritarian” leadership styles are incompatible with these demands and that those styles can be regularly identified as leading to the dysfunction they’ve identified in this study.

Those of us on the job in central administration usually don’t have to look far to find evidence of staff mistreatment in our own organizations. In my work, I’ve been faced with the need to replace school leaders whose intimidating and insulting styles placed entire schools and district-wide relations at risk. As we examine the possible effects, well described in this book, of these and similar conditions on our schools and students, we may find ourselves discouraged and on the horns of a veritable administrative dilemma. How can we best use policy, evaluation, coaching, and other tools to construct an institutional spirit designed to improve relationships and minimize the destructive impact they may bring to our organizations? Is this possible and can we sustain a positive political climate among our leadership staff as we do so? These are hard questions to answer. In that regard, we should be thankful that the authors promise us further work designed to sniff out the most successful practices for accomplishing those ends. We should read this work with an open mind and a vision of what we seek together in the future of American education. Beyond that, we can look forward to the assistance and support we’re assured of gaining from their ongoing research. In order to help us to not become discouraged or dismayed by this component of the many tasks before us, Jo and Joseph provide at one point a remarkably telling quote from J. R. R. Tolkien. His inspiring observation is worth looking for. On the way to discovering it, I predict that most of us will find ourselves on an exceptionally important road toward further growth in our capability to sense and respond to the needs of our schools and districts.

— Don Saul
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