

Preface

Society continues to evolve at an exponential rate thanks to unprecedented advances in technology. This has led to shifts in the way people communicate, collaborate, solve problems, create projects, and consume content. These changes have placed all educators in a position to reflect upon the effectiveness of teaching, learning, and leadership so that the noble goal of ensuring learner success now and well into the future is achieved. Therein lies the key focus of the work of schools. There must be an emphasis on cultivating competent learners who are equipped to thrive and survive in a digital world. A secondary goal is the building of powerful relationships with key stakeholders in education (parents, students, community members) by authentically engaging them where they are at. Are you up to the challenge?

The increasing dominance technology plays in our lives can easily be experienced through behavioral observations of professionals, businesses, parents, children, and even grandparents. As of December 2017, approximately 54% of the world's population was on the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2018). New tools are popping up faster than ever. Have school structures and procedures taken these shifts into account? More important, do leaders know how to adapt to these shifts and thus lead meaningful, sustainable change in their schools? The point is that we need to be better, and not only because of the changes we are seeing outside the walls of our schools. Change begins with each and every one of us and spreads from there. The truth is that there is no perfect lesson, project, classroom, school, district, teacher, or administrator. There is, however, the opportunity every day to get better.

AUDIENCE

The primary audience for the book is school leaders (supervisors, assistant principals, principals, directors of curriculum, superintendents, and teacher leaders). Professors of higher education can also integrate this book in their preparation programs, as many people would agree that exposure to this style of leadership is desperately needed. Even though the book is directed at school leaders—because they have the decision-making power to implement schoolwide and districtwide changes—teachers can easily incorporate the principles at the classroom level to improve their pedagogy and their communication with their students, colleagues, parents, and community members.

THE CALL

Leaders today must establish a vision and implement a strategic process that creates a teaching and learning culture that provides students with critical competencies—creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, entrepreneurship, technological proficiency, and global awareness. The twenty-first century skills movement is played out, as we are well into this century. The development of competent learners in the digital age is the key to the future. This focus should be at the heart of every decision a leader makes, and it is key to providing students with the tools to succeed in jobs that have not yet been created. Consistent innovation, purposeful use of technology, meaningful professional learning, connecting beyond the walls of a brick-and-mortar building, and an open mind are all mandatory duties of a leader in the digital age.

The call to prepare students for the unknown jobs of tomorrow is made more difficult as mounting challenges such as budget cuts, new standards, seemingly constant changes to standardized tests, value-added evaluation of staff using test scores, and what seems like a relentless attack on the profession of education have taken their toll on staff morale. Quality leadership therefore becomes imperative in order to cultivate a school culture whose primary focus is on the learning and achievement of each and every student while anticipating needed changes in a society that is evolving at a dizzying pace.

It can also be argued that these changes have created a new type of learner that schools are entrusted with educating, as well as key

stakeholders with shifting needs in terms of how they prefer to engage with schools. In this digital age, we are experiencing amazing advances in educational technology that have the potential to enhance the teaching and learning process, as well as establish powerful connections with our communities and among an array of stakeholders. These advances have also unlocked the creative potential of many students, teachers, and administrators.

The challenge for school leaders is to acknowledge these societal changes and embrace them. If schools continue to follow an outdated educational model focusing on preparation for an industrialized workforce, they run the risk of becoming irrelevant to our students and communities. More often than not there is a fundamental disconnect between learners and the schools they attend. Relevancy is just as important as achievement. It is hard to increase the latter if there is not a consistent focus on the former. Why are schools not meeting the diverse learning needs of students today at scale? Do school leaders leverage available technology and social media to do what they do better? Are our decisions and behaviors taking into account future shifts and changes, or is the status quo still coddled? Why are so many slow or fearful to change? If these pressing questions are not squarely addressed by leaders, our system of education will continue to devolve into irrelevancy and inadequacy.

Digital leadership consists of a dynamic combination of mindset, behaviors, and skills that are employed to change and enhance school culture through the strategic use of technology. As leaders across virtually every sector began to evolve and take advantage of an interactive web, they began to embrace change, demonstrate transparency, increase engagement, employ collaboration, focus heavily on sharing, initiate global dialogue, and build community. Leaders quickly found the value in a plethora of digital tools to support and enhance traditional aspects of leadership (i.e., management, productivity, collaboration, evaluation, feedback, and communication) while forging new pathways to initiate change leading to transformation. Many would argue that this leadership style is still prevalent today.

Digital leadership considers changes such as ubiquitous connectivity, open-source technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, mobile devices, and personalization. It represents a dramatic shift from how schools have been run and structured for over a century. The

shift has already started for many leaders through their use of technology for personal reasons. If there is value here, then surely there must be for professional practice as well. There is no time like the present to ride the digital wave and incorporate it seamlessly into every facet of leadership. You must be the change that you wish to see in education, but more important, you must be the change your learners yearn for.

The evolving web and other technologies provide an opportunity for each and every one of you to work smarter, not harder, with the goal of improving results. A new path can be forged when improved thinking is applied to the way you lead. Digital leadership can thus be defined as establishing direction, influencing others, initiating sustainable change through access to information, and establishing relationships in order to anticipate changes pivotal to school success in the future. Leaders must learn to better anticipate the learning needs of students and staff, their desire for information from stakeholders, and the necessary elements of school culture that address both rigorous standards and needed competencies. They must also be “change savvy” (Herold & Fedor, 2008), which involves

- careful entry into the new setting;
- listening to and learning from those who have been there or been at it longer;
- engaging in fact finding and joint problem solving;
- carefully, rather than rashly, diagnosing the situation;
- forthrightly addressing people’s concerns;
- being enthusiastic, genuine, and sincere about the change in circumstances;
- obtaining support for what needs to be fixed or improved; and
- developing a credible plan for making a fix or improvement.

THE NEW DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

A great deal has changed since the initial publication of *Digital Leadership*. New tools have been developed, while old ones that many of us loved have been shut down. The pace of change in the digital age continues to increase at an exponential rate, and as a result, disruptive innovation has taken hold in virtually every sector. We are moving further into the fourth Industrial Revolution and

eventually the fifth, and it is incumbent on digital leaders to adapt and embrace needed shifts to practice. In a world with advanced robotics, enhanced automation, and evolving artificial intelligence, the need to teach, learn, and lead not only differently, but better, must be a priority. Whereas the first edition focused a great deal on tools and skills, this new edition provides greater attention to the specific competencies needed to transform teaching, learning, and leadership that are vital no matter how fast technology evolves. This edition moves past trends and fads to focus on the essence of leading innovative change in education now and in the future.

CENTRAL PURPOSE AND FOCUS OF THIS BOOK

Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times, Second Edition presents a framework for leaders to harness the power of innovative ideas and digital strategies in order to create school cultures that are transparent, relevant, meaningful, engaging, inspiring, and primed for better results. In order to set the stage for increasing achievement and to establish a greater sense of community pride for the work being done in our schools, we must begin to change the way we lead. To do this, leaders must understand the origins of fear and misconceptions that often surround the use of technology and implementation of innovative ideas. Once the fears and misconceptions are placed on the table, leaders can begin to establish a shared vision for the effective use of technology to improve numerous facets of leadership. The challenge for school leaders is why, how, and where to begin. Digital leadership is not about flashy tools; it is a strategic mindset that leverages available resources to improve what we do while anticipating the changes needed to cultivate a school culture focused on efficacy. This book will present an evolved construct of leadership that grows out of the leader's symbiotic relationship with the digital world.

Talk is cheap. Leaders must be able to back up talk with action that leads to improvement at scale. This book provides readers with research-aligned strategies and evidence to transform the teaching and learning culture in any school or district. A good deal of the ideas presented come from my days as a practitioner, as principal of New Milford High School in New Jersey, where digital leadership paved the way for improved outcomes and achievement. It tells the story of how I radically changed my beliefs on how a school should

be structured and function, with the end result being sustainable change in programs, instruction, behaviors, and leadership involving technology. The book examines how shifting a leadership style from one of mandates, directives, and buy-in to one grounded in empowerment, support, and embracement is the key to sustainable change. My story is only one component. This second edition covers the stories of other bold leaders who are creating schools that work for kids.

The Pillars of Digital Leadership

The Pillars of Digital Leadership are the specific areas embedded in the culture of all schools that can be improved or enhanced through the purposeful use of technology.

Student engagement, learning, and outcomes: We cannot expect to see increases in achievement if students are not learning. Students who are not engaged are not likely to be learning. Engagement is not a silver bullet though. Students need to be empowered to think at the higher levels of cognition while applying what has been learned in relevant contexts. Leaders need to understand that schools should reflect real life

Figure 0.1 Pillars of Digital Leadership



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and allow learners the opportunity to use real-world tools to do real-world work. As technology changes so must pedagogy, especially assessment and feedback. Pulling from real-world examples, a blueprint is provided for improving instructional design and accountability protocols to ensure efficacy in digital learning.

Innovative learning spaces and environments: Would you want to learn under the same conditions as your students do, or in similar spaces? More often than not, the answer is no. Research has shown the positive impact that innovative spaces can have on learning outcomes. Leaders must begin to establish a vision and strategic plan to create classrooms and buildings that are more reflective of the real world while empowering learners to use technology in powerful ways. In order to do so, leaders must be knowledgeable of the characteristics and dynamics that embody innovative learning spaces and environments that support Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), 1:1, more personalized pathways such as blended and virtual learning, and maker education.

Professional learning: Leaders need and should want access to the latest trends, research, and ideas in the field. With the continual evolution of digital tools and increasing connectivity, schools can no longer be silos of information. Such, leaders do not have to feel like they are on isolated islands, have answers to every question, and feel pressured to always have to come up with the next big idea. This section discusses how leaders can form their own Personal Learning Network (PLN) to meet their diverse learning needs; acquire resources; access knowledge; receive feedback; connect with experts in the field of education as well as practitioners; and discuss proven strategies to improve teaching, learning, and leadership. Readers will learn how to develop their own PLN for free and access this priceless resource anywhere at any time. This section will also discuss the move from professional development to learning. Digital leadership also compels educators to create more personalized learning pathways for adults during the school day and year.

Communication: You will not find an effective leader who is not an effective communicator. Leaders can now provide stakeholders with relevant information in real time through

a variety of devices by meeting them where they are at. No longer do static, one-way methods such as newsletters and websites suffice. Discussion will focus on types of information that can be communicated through various tools and simple implementation strategies to create a more transparent culture.

Public relations: If you don't tell your story, someone else will, and more often than not, another's version will not be the one you want told. Leaders need to become the storyteller-in-chief. This section will focus on how leaders can use free social medial tools to form a positive public relations platform and become the de facto news source for their school or district. It is time to change the narrative by sharing all of the positives that happen in schools every day to create a much-needed level of transparency in an age of negative rhetoric toward education.

Branding: This is how your school or district is defined. It is not something that you want to leave up to others. Businesses have long understood the value of brand and its impact on current and potential consumers. Leaders can leverage social media to create a positive brand presence that emphasizes the positive aspects of school culture, increases community pride, and helps to attract/retain families looking for a place to send their children to school. Tell your story, build powerful relationships in the process, and empower learning.

Opportunity: It is important for leaders to consistently seek out ways to improve existing programs, resources, and professional learning opportunities. This section highlights how to leverage connections made through technology and increase opportunities to make improvements across multiple areas of school culture. Leaders will see how the other six pillars connect and work together to bring about unprecedented opportunities that would otherwise be impossible, such as securing donations, resources, authentic learning experiences for students, and mutually beneficial partnerships.

Leaders need to be the catalysts for change, and the Pillars of Digital Leadership pave the way. Each is critical in its own right to transforming and sustaining a positive school culture. This book breaks down each pillar, uses research to emphasize its importance and value, and provides an overview of specific strategies that can be used regardless of budget obstacles. I use not only my experiences and successes in each of these areas, but also those of other

innovative leaders, schools, and districts who are not just talking the talk but are actively walking the walk. These practitioner vignettes offer powerful voices that establish a context for each pillar and illustrate the *why* and *how* so that readers will be able to implement the strategies in their own contexts.

By addressing each of these pillars, leaders can begin changing and transforming their respective schools into ones that prepare learners for success in a digital world while building critical relationships with stakeholders through improved engagement strategies. Be sure to share your thoughts, ideas, reflections, and work on social media using #digilead.

After reading this book, you will be able to

- Identify obstacles to change and specific solutions to overcome them in order to transform teaching, learning, and leadership in the digital age.
- Work smarter, not harder, by aligning a digital-leaning mindset to leadership practices to enhance school culture and improve stakeholder relations.
- Leverage digital resources and personalized pathways to grow professionally like never before.
- Readily implement practical digital leadership strategies aligned to research and proven in action, as told through practitioner vignettes.

New features in the second edition include

- Revamped organization throughout to emphasize the interconnectivity of the Pillars of Digital Leadership to drive sustainable change that gets results.
- A reduced focus on tools and a greater emphasis on leadership dispositions to create a more evergreen resource.
- New and updated vignettes from digital leaders who have successfully implemented the strategies presented.
- New insights from my experiences working in schools and organizations all over the world.
- Informative graphics in full color that add more context.
- A new foreword.

- Guiding questions at the end of each chapter to help you reflect on and apply the lessons offered in the book.
- A brand-new Chapter 12 and a new focus on efficacy and competencies (as opposed to skills).
- New online resources.

As you read, answer the guiding questions, and reflect be sure to engage and share on social media using #digilead.

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