At the beginning of the 20th century, American schools underwent profound changes as they adapted curricula and teaching practices to the demands of industrialization and a growing population. Now, eight years into a new century, our schools confront an even greater challenge: to achieve the systemic transformation needed to prepare our children well for the increasingly complex world they will enter. Countless studies, reports, and articles have been written on the mechanisms that can incentivize or compel the changes needed. Far fewer works have addressed the one element that is essential to any constructive and effective change: leadership.

What kind of leadership is needed to reshape our schools? Certainly not the type that focuses solely on assigning tasks, managing units of time, and verifying compliance. Management and audit tasks such as these have an important place in stewardship of our schools, but they are not the essential tasks of leadership. Our schools need leadership that challenges the imaginations of our students and teachers. They need leadership that can uncover the liberating opportunities concealed within daunting challenges—this is the defining ability of American genius. This is the “generative leadership” we come to understand so clearly in this powerful and concise volume.

Kathy Sullivan is one of the first people who comes to mind whenever I think of education or leadership, so it’s no surprise to find her playing a central role in bringing this vital subject to the fore. She and her colleagues, Karl Klimek and Elsie Ritzenhein, have done a masterful job of synthesizing large bodies of complex work into an engaging and readable narrative that outlines the foundations of generative leadership. They follow this foundation with a variety of practical tools to help school leaders jump-start their leadership practice.
We typically think of teachers, principals, and superintendents as school leaders. In our country, however, parents and businesspeople, nonprofit executives and academics are also part of school leadership. This book can inform and potentially unite all these school leaders in the common cause of reshaping our schools for the challenges of this new century.

—Senator John H. Glenn