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INTRODUCTION

In the NFL, all the coaches are very good at what they do. But there are three or four coaches that stand out from the pack—they are unique in how they think about the game and how they organize a team to play the game.

—Super Bowl TV Commentator

The idea for this book originated with a postgame analysis of a recent Super Bowl game. One of the TV commentators stated that both coaches were “standout” coaches. He explained that all coaches in the NFL are good at what they do, but there were only three, or maybe four, that stood out from the pack. He then elaborated on what made these coaches special. He summed up his list of examples by remarking that the three or four that he named “just think very differently about the game and how it is played.”

As a career educator who has spent over forty years as a teacher, principal, and professor of education, I have met and worked with many school administrators from all positions in main offices—principals, assistant principals, department chairs—as well as those in central offices—superintendents, assistant superintendents, human resources (HR) directors, business managers, directors of facilities. They are all very good in the managerial roles they perform, but in all my associations with fellow school administrators, I have only met and worked with three or four who stood out from the pack. My interest in writing this book is to identify and analyze the leadership and managerial characteristics that make these administrators stand out. It is my hope that by identifying these traits and giving examples of them here, other educational leaders will be able to incorporate these attributes and actions into their own practice, thus also becoming standout school leaders (SSLs).

CENTRAL THEME

A substantial amount of school reform literature focuses on the critical role that school leadership plays in developing effective schools. The attributes necessary for effective school leadership fall into three leadership models: instructional leadership, business leadership, and new-age leadership. In the

most traditional model—instructional leadership—the knowledge and skills associated with curriculum, instruction, and team building are fundamental to success. This model is based on the principle that “how teachers teach” is the foundation of effective schools.

Although these attributes of instructional leadership remain the standard definition of effective school leadership, the last decade of literature on this topic has been populated by the traits of successful chief executive officers (CEOs). This business leadership model is based on the principle that private sector techniques and managerial dispositions should be emulated by administrators in the public sector.

The struggle to achieve the right balance between the educational fundamentals of instructional leadership and the entrepreneurial talents of business leadership has led to a new model of leadership, one that presents techniques for solving the educational-entrepreneurial dilemma. Instead of developing an educational knowledge base or practicing the CEO technique of the day, the new-age leadership model is based on the principle that disciplining the leadership ego is the foundation of effective schools.

Administrators good at their jobs (AGJs) may emulate one model, or a mix of models, but what they all have in common is the efficient implementation of *institutional* functions of schooling: credentialing, accreditation, standardization, regulation, and accounting. While these institutional functions effectively control student behavior and student outcomes, they are poorly suited for developing the diverse talents, abilities, and interests of children and adolescents. AGJs preoccupy themselves with a set of goals that are based on the *what* and *how* of schooling—the managerial means of schooling. SSLs preoccupy themselves with a set of goals based on the *why* of schooling—the valued ends of schooling.

What sets SSLs apart from their main office colleagues is how they think about and respond to school structures that are fundamentally opposed to mission-driven goals and values. AGJs view the dilemma of institutional schooling as an *either/or* proposition, where institutional means take precedence over educational ends. SSLs view the dilemma of institutional schooling as a *both/and* proposition, where institutional means work together with

educational ends to create mission-driven learning environments. Each chapter in this book describes the organizational strategies and habits of thought that SSLs employ to maintain the smooth running of schools that fit a community’s expectation of what schooling should look like, yet at the same time foster innovative teaching environments that fit a student body’s expectation for how schooling should *feel*.

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WHAT IS A MISSION-DRIVEN SCHOOL?

A fundamental principle in school organizations is the belief in and adherence to the educational goals and values written in school mission statements. School mission statements include one or more of the mission-driven goals and values listed in Figure I.1. All school administrators publicly promote the educational goals and values written in their school mission statements, but they rarely admit to the institutional values that too often drive the operations of the schools they lead. SSLs take on the challenge of creating schools organized around the mission rather than falling back on traditional, institutional practices in their day-to-day administration. Each chapter in this book describes the contrasts between how AGJs and SSLs approach the underlying struggle between institutional and educational goals and values, allowing AGJs to move further along the continuum toward becoming SSLs.

FIGURE I.1 AIMING FOR MISSION-DRIVEN SCHOOLS

INSTITUTIONAL-DRIVEN SCHOOLS		MISSION-DRIVEN SCHOOLS	
VALUE/ATTRIBUTE	GOAL	VALUE/ATTRIBUTE	GOAL
School centered	To follow directions	Child centered	To develop agency
Uniformity	To accurately classify	Diversity	To develop a sense of belongingness
Preparation	To develop skills	Life-long learning	To develop an interest
Replicative thinking	To recite knowledge	Critical thinking	To develop knowledge

AUDIENCE

In the last decade, state governmental bodies, professional educational organizations, think-tanks of all political persuasions, and a number of notable CEOs and successful entrepreneurs have called for the radical transformation of the way we “do schooling” in this nation. Proponents of these reform efforts have all reached the same conclusion: Real change in how schools are organized and how teachers teach is wholly dependent on the leadership abilities of the people who sit in main offices.

While there is no disagreement about the critical role leadership plays in any transformational process, the institutional realities of schooling established by governmental and private bodies—mandates, accreditation, certification, safety, and accountability—are in direct opposition to the innovative thinking, dispositions, and practices that these reform proponents promote. This book is aimed at administrators who observe and experience the gap

Standout School Leaders: Challenging What It Means to Lead offers guidance on how school administrators and potential school leaders can challenge the institutional realities of the schools they lead and develop the kinds of learning experiences described in their school mission statements.

between managing their schools well but falling short of mission-driven goals and values listed in their school mission statements. *Standout School Leaders: Challenging What It Means to Lead* offers guidance on how school administrators and potential school leaders can challenge the institutional realities of the schools they lead and develop the kinds of learning experiences described in their school mission statements.

WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK DISTINCTIVE

This book is not a how-to guide to become an SSL or a list of research findings on effective school leadership. The book begins with the acknowledgement that school administrators have in their careers mastered the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to manage their schools well—they are administrators good at their jobs. A school that is *doing things well*, however, isn't necessarily *doing the right things*. Each chapter in this book provides answers to questions that school administrators wrestle with and helps them develop tools and strategies to do the *right things*—closing that gap between the *is* and *ought to be* of schooling. Applying these strategies to their own practice will help administrators focus less on smooth management (the *what* and *how*) and more on their mission (the *why*), moving them toward becoming SSLs. To help leaders in that endeavor, this book provides practical features and resources.

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FEATURES AND BENEFITS

- **Chapter openers:** Each chapter begins with a description of a fundamental administrative function that is interpreted and performed in differing ways by SSLs and AGJs.
- **Conversation excerpts:** The opening of each chapter brings the reader into school office conversations where SSLs and AGJs present their opposing philosophies on the *what*, *why*, and *how* of schooling.
- **Vignettes:** Throughout the chapters the reader is presented with managerial and leadership scenarios that school administrators face every day. Each situation calls upon an administrator to make an institutional or mission-driven response. As the reader progresses from chapter to chapter, a pattern of behaviors emerges showing the differing managerial and leadership responses of SSLs and AGJs.

- **Figures and tools:** Throughout the book readers will find several tables and figures that summarize the key managerial and leadership concepts presented in each chapter. These figures serve as practical tools that school leaders can reference when applying the managerial and leadership practices developed in each chapter.
- **SSL tips:** Each chapter ends with an insight into how SSLs think differently about the goals and practices of schooling.
- **Reflective questions:** These questions help readers reflect on the content of the chapter and invite the reader to apply the insights of the chapter to their own practices and school sites.
- **End-of-chapter resources:** Each chapter provides the reader with resources that elaborate on the managerial and leadership concepts developed in the chapter.

All of these features provide readers with abbreviated versions of the managerial and leadership concepts developed in each chapter. They serve as practical and applicable tools that school leaders can immediately apply to improve their practice.

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CHAPTER 1





BEING GOOD AT THE JOB

In this chapter I discuss how simply ensuring smooth school operations is not enough to stand out. The conversations that follow illustrate seven essential managerial functions that all AGJs master and perform on a daily basis—necessary to demonstrate managerial competence, but insufficient for becoming an SSL.

Principal to Class of 2025 (Communication)	<p>“Welcome to our first open house. Mr. Davies will provide you with the schedule we will follow tonight. Before we proceed with tonight’s activities, I want to take a few minutes to discuss our staff’s commitment to excellence. In my last newsletter, I described several initiatives we have undertaken to raise the academic bar in our school. Among those that we believe show the most promise is the adoption of our online student gradebook program.</p> <p>“Additionally, in our classrooms tonight you will hear references to our Central High Scholar program. This program is designed to provide all students with the technologies and tutorial services they will need to meet the criteria for becoming a Central High scholar. I’ve asked several Central High scholars to make a brief presentation during our break about the programs that most helped them achieve academic excellence.”</p>
Board Member to Principal (Organization)	<p>“Dr. Lorenzo, I would like to commend you on providing all our students with full schedules on the first day of school. As you know, in the past we have had too many students in the counselor’s office on the first day of school waiting to be scheduled for classes they registered for.”</p>
Principal to Parent (Outreach)	<p>“Hope to see you at our spring booster barbecue event. Great ribs and, as always, our booster chairperson, Mary, will put together the best silent raffle in the conference.”</p>

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<p>Union Representative to Principal (Mediation)</p>	<p>“Dr. Lorenzo, would you consider moving Ms. Jane Ferguson to the media center? I recognize the problems she is having in the classroom, but she has always been a loyal, dependable, and tireless educator.”</p>
<p>Parent to Principal (Negotiation)</p>	<p>“Dr. Lorenzo, would it be possible to use the gym one night a week for our community soccer league? Our league can’t afford to pay the fees for park district facilities. I know some of our varsity teams have these facilities scheduled year-round, but our league gives our Latino youth an opportunity to participate in a worthwhile after-school activity.”</p>
<p>Principal’s Post to the Faculty Page on Facebook (Cheerleading)</p>	<p> WELCOME BACK, PANTHERS! </p> <p>The halls of Central High are buzzing with excitement as we kick off another fantastic year! Whether you’re a returning student or one of our new Panthers, we’re thrilled to have you as part of our incredible community.</p> <p>This year, we’re setting the stage for success with our theme: “Leading with Panther pride!” Let’s bring our energy, enthusiasm, and commitment to make this year our best one yet. Together, we’ll inspire, challenge, and achieve greatness.</p> <p>Here’s to a year filled with Panther pride, growth, and endless possibilities!</p> <p> Go Panthers! </p> <p>Dr. Lorenzo Principal</p>
<p>Superintendent to Board of Education (Personalization)</p>	<p>“I’d like to congratulate Principal Lorenzo on acquiring and implementing our new finance management software package. With this program in place, we now have a process for cost-effective decision-making.”</p>

BEING VERY GOOD AT YOUR JOB

The introduction to this book presented the idea that while there are many football coaches—and school administrators—who are good at the job, there are very few who stand out. Here I summarize the knowledge and skills that all school administrators must possess and enact on a daily basis to be perceived by the school community as doing the job well. Mastering these skills is no small feat; being an AGJ is a great achievement. However, while these skills are necessary for demonstrating managerial proficiency, they are not enough to become an SSL. In fact, if they are not moderated, they can become enemies to standout school leadership.

Communication

AGJs are effective communicators. They use a variety of methods to communicate their message to the stakeholders in the school community. They assure parents, faculty, and students that their school has high standards of excellence. They share ideas and plans and invite these stakeholders to be participants. They discuss the structures that are in place to ensure that the school embraces diversity and provides a safe environment for all. To become an SSL, however, administrators must do more than this. Aspiring SSLs author and communicate the particulars of these qualities of schooling. These particulars might include innovative instructional programs, inventive measures to address problematic programs, or overhauls of poorly functioning building systems. Taking these extra steps will help AGJs stand out.

Organization

AGJs are effective implementers. They pay close attention to the efficient and effective operations of the systems that parents and the district depend upon. Buses arrive on time, student schedules are correct, school events are executed well, the school facility is clean and orderly, budgets are balanced, reports are filed on time, and all state rules and regulations are followed. Each of these schoolwide functions is the result of well-established managerial tasks designed to comply with directives arriving in a main office inbox. To become an SSL, administrators must do more than ensure the smooth running of these logistical processes. Aspiring SSLs redesign organizational systems that are serving as obstacles to achieving mission-driven goals or entangling students and parents in bureaucratic mazes. SSLs are careful not to allow the institutional values of efficiency and order to overshadow the educational values of developing the individual abilities, talents, and interests of diverse student populations. SSLs create engaging educational experiences. Taking this extra step will help AGJs stand out.

Outreach

AGJs are effective at public relations. Main offices have formal channels of communication such as newsletters, webpages, and scheduled community events to inform the public of the goals, programs, and activities most valued by parents. Most administrators, however, choose informal channels for communicating these goals, programs, and activities. The favored informal channel is through working public gatherings. Circulating during various social functions, principals greet parents with a narrative that goes something like this:

John, so glad to see you! I know your work schedule makes it difficult to attend these games. Your son Dan had a great season! His last-minute shot last week put us into the regionals. I see he's

active in our Model United Nations program. We started that program last year to balance out our offerings in the humanities department. Hope to see you at the spring booster barbecue event. Great ribs and, as always, our booster chairperson, Mary, has put together the best silent raffle in the conference.

At the end of these parent gatherings, AGJs have achieved the goal of putting a human face to what often appears to be a faceless bureaucracy. To become an SSL, administrators must do more than this. Aspiring SSLs use these informal gatherings as opportunities to *listen* for “sticking points” in their school’s organizational structure or instructional program that are

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serving as barriers to developing the individualities of students or that marginalize the participation of differing demographic groups in the community (see vignette titled “Enhancing Engagement With Dual Open Houses”). They move those sticking points to the top of their personal calendars and to the top of team meeting agendas to create educational environments conducive to developing the individualities of diverse student populations. Taking these extra steps will help AGJs stand out.

ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT WITH DUAL OPEN HOUSES

Maria Dominguez (community outreach director) and Theodore Wallace (principal)

Ms. Dominguez: Dr. Wallace, would you be open to setting up a separate open house for our Spanish-speaking families?

Principal Wallace: What’s the problem with our current open house?

Ms. Dominguez: The format works very well for most of our school community, but not so well for our Spanish-speaking families. That’s why their attendance at our open house nights is low.

Principal Wallace: What would you suggest?

Ms. Dominguez: Our community is much more comfortable in a more informal setting.

Principal Wallace: Informal setting?

Ms. Dominguez: Well, some Hispanic parents are uncomfortable with the formality of the night: walking to classrooms every ten minutes, following a bell schedule, and formal presentations by teachers in a language they often don't understand well. It just doesn't work for our community."

Principal Wallace: Well, what would work?

Ms. Dominguez: After brainstorming at the Bilingual Department meeting, we identified an open house format that prioritizes effective communication with our parents. We could hold the open house in the media center. There's enough room to accommodate a seating area and open areas where parents have an opportunity to visit with neighbors, friends, and relatives. We would set up tables by the computer room for a potluck dinner before the presentation. Bilingual program teachers Julio Garcia and Margaret Johnson have volunteered to make a presentation on the goals of the program and recommendations on how parents could support their children's schooling. Several teachers from the regular academic program, along with teachers in the Bilingual Department, would sit at tables near the TV studio to answer questions about their courses and, if asked, report to parents on their children's progress. Several faculty members and students from our Spanish classes have volunteered as translators. Oh, one more thing, Dr. Wallace: Mrs. Ashanti from the Home Economics Department said students from her childcare course would provide a babysitting service for the night."

Principal Wallace: Ms. Dominguez, you've certainly done your homework on this. While I see the need for such a night and applaud you for all the work you put into planning it, let me tell you about the obstacles that I'll face if I try to do this. First, I have at least three board members who feel that we shouldn't even have a bilingual program in our school. They firmly believe that learning a second language is best achieved by full immersion in the language of the host country. Secondly, I know I will have faculty members who will question a program that appears to support a 'separate but equal status' for our Hispanic students. Just recently, the mayor made several comments in our local press questioning signs and advertisements for local merchants that are in Spanish.

Ms. Dominguez: I know you are a strong supporter of our program. I don't want to put you in a bad position with the board or faculty, but I know you're concerned about the lack of attendance of Hispanic parents at school events. I was just looking for ways to bring my community back into the school. Maybe we can work at softening up the critics this year and plan for next year's open house.

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- Principal Wallace:** No, Ms. Dominguez, we'll do a bilingual open house this year. I'll call it a pilot program. Let me get the ball rolling with the space and furniture arrangements. You seem to have done the heavy lifting with the program. I'll get a letter to parents in your community about the changes in the program.
- Ms. Dominguez:** No need for the letter. I'll spread the word to the families and the teachers in the Bilingual Department can talk to their students about the program change.
- Principal Wallace:** Ms. Dominguez, thanks again for all the thought and planning that went into reformatting our open house to increase participation by our Hispanic families.
- Ms. Dominguez:** Dr. Wallace, I can't believe this happening! Oh, one more thing, do you think we could have mariachi band perform at the end of the evening? We have several really good bands in our community.
- Principal Wallace:** Let's think about the band for next year.

Mediation

AGJs are effective peacekeepers. The entire professional infrastructure of public schooling in this country is grounded in the beliefs, values, and practices of a bureaucratic model of schooling that is perfectly suited to satisfy institutional goals: standardization, compliance, and documentation. However, these functions are not well suited to achieving educational goals: interests, agency, and critical thinking.

The gap between educational goals and institutional realities generates daily conflicts between organizational structures designed to routinize and instructional programs designed to honor the diverse interests, talents, and lifestyles of their student bodies. When these conflicts disrupt organizational and instructional routines, AGJs employ a variety of work-around strategies that soften the rough edges of bureaucratic schooling, such as offering extra time, extra credit, or extra help. To become an SSL, administrators must do more than this—they

SSLs are careful not to allow the softening of bureaucratic rough edges to interfere with maintaining a safe and orderly school environment.

must openly acknowledge the existence of these rough edges and enact specific administrative measures to smooth them. Aspiring SSLs reconcile institutional goals with practices that enhance the individual interests, talents, and abilities of staff and students. SSLs are careful not

to allow the softening of bureaucratic rough edges to interfere with maintaining a safe and orderly school environment. Taking these extra steps will help AGJs stand out.

Negotiation

AGJs are effective diplomats. Every school district is packed with special interest groups competing for limited resources. In addition to the special interest groups of the school community, an array of local and state governmental agencies, community groups, professional organizations, and private vendors also influence different segments of the school organization.

AGJs keep all these groups invested in the goals and operations of the school by manipulating different resource variables—time, space, personnel, materials, and fundraising activities—to create an image of perceived fairness among all interest groups. To become an SSL, administrators must do more than just engage in this political gamesmanship. Aspiring SSLs must make a distinction between the equal distribution of resources and the distribution of resources based on the different circumstances of the groups they serve. SSLs aim to distribute resources in ways that provide different groups the opportunities to reach equal outcomes. SSLs are careful not to allow their redefinition of fairness to be perceived by the school community as favoring certain groups or activities.

Motivators

AGJs are effective motivators. Teachers do not work well in environments that are externally controlled and competitive. AGJs translate teacher distaste for being supervised and rated into superficial dispositions that will make them a “good boss” in the eyes of their faculty (see Resource 1.1 for examples of these superficial dispositions). To become an SSL, administrators must do more than cater to teachers’ need for approval. Aspiring SSLs are sensitive to the social, emotional, and intellectual harm that poor teaching can inflict on children and adolescents. Establishing performance standards and helping staff continually improve to meet those standards will make AGJs stand out.

Personalization

AGJs are effective optimizers. They recognize and harness their unique personal and professional interests—what I term *bents* (see Resource 1.2). A particular administrator’s bent may come in handy for resolving a school-wide problem that established managerial tools have failed to fix. To become an SSL, however, administrators must do more than focus on their own interests. Aspiring SSLs must consider both their own bents and the bents of their colleagues and optimize them to directly advance the educational mission of schooling. Taking this extra step will help AGJs stand out.

SSL TIP

Why Being Good at Your Job Is Not Good Enough

There is no question that these managerial tasks and functions are essential for *doing things right*. Like AGJs, SSLs accept the necessity of performing well the managerial tasks and functions summarized in this chapter. SSLs, however, stand out from their colleagues by asking, “Are we doing the right things?” Listed here are the types of value-added questions that an SSL would ask regarding the managerial functions they perform each day:

- Will raising the academic bar in the school create learning environments that enhance the diverse interests, talents, and abilities of children and adolescents?
- Will well-choreographed social events signify a caring and respectful learning environment?
- Will attendance at social gatherings advance the educational goals of the school?
- Will the adoption of learning standards compensate for monotonous teaching regimes?
- Will allocation of resources represent equal opportunities for all community groups?
- Will high staff morale result in high staff performance?
- Will the effective implementation of programs symbolize a quality educational program?

These are the responses that SSLs might formulate for these valued-added questions:

- Moving a struggling teacher into a nonteaching position would maintain high teacher morale at the expense of compromising established classroom performance standards.
- The focus on *compliance* with accountability mandates would come at the expense of fulfilling the *substance* of the mandates.
- The focus on raising student test scores would come at the expense of creating learning experiences that would enhance the diverse talents, abilities, and interest of children and adolescents.

These answers would identify which managerial functions are worth pursuing and which should be modified or abandoned. The remaining chapters in this book will describe how SSLs create organizational and instructional systems that *do the right things well*.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. As you think about the content of the certification programs you completed, which bents (see Resource 1.2) were emphasized and which bents received little or no attention? Why do you believe these program priorities were established?
2. In reviewing your past performance evaluations, what administrative functions received little or no attention? Why do you believe these administrative functions go unnoticed or receive a cursory comment?
3. Recent surveys of job satisfaction of principals found that a majority expressed frustration with their inability to spend more time on supervising instruction. They cited the following reasons for their inattention to classroom supervision: putting out fires, complying with district and governmental directives and mandates, and managing operating building systems. If you agree with these survey results, what strategies would you adopt to spend more time on the central mission of schooling—to educate?
4. As you think about the various bents of the school leaders in your building, what bents are serving as obstacles to achieving mission-driven goals, and what bents are optimizing those same goals?

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