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10 STL Primary Intentions With Moves

Primary Intention 1: Optimize Learning Conditions: Time, Space, and Accommodations	59
Maximize collaborative time.	71
1.1 Protect meeting time.	72
1.2 Allocate time to examine learning outcomes.	74
1.3 Foster collaboration between meetings.	77
Enhance the learning space.	79
1.4 Micro-prep.	79
1.5 Attend to room details.	81
Promote equitable access to team learning.	85
1.6 Accommodate adults with learning differences, disabilities, or preferences.	86
1.7 Leverage strengths in disability.	88
Primary Intention 2: Establish Expectations and Responsibilities: Norms and Roles	91
Facilitate a group norm-setting process.	93
2.1 Co-construct norms through consensus.	96
2.2 Save time with starter norms.	98
2.3 Promote mindfulness with personal norms.	99
Institute social norms that maximize team impact.	105
2.4 Foster sensitivity for cultural norms.	106
2.5 Surface unspoken norms.	108
2.6 Set ground rules for potentially difficult conversations.	110
2.7 Restore a norm after it has been broken.	113
Share responsibility through roles.	116
2.8 Clarify the team leader role.	117
2.9 Commission others to lead learning.	120
2.10 Break from fixed or imposed roles.	122

Primary Intention 3: Nurture Group Culture: Community and Trust 125

Foster inclusivity. 128

- 3.1 Welcome underrepresented voices. 128
- 3.2 Instill a sense of belonging. 130

Build community and relational trust through play. 132

- 3.3 Plan play strategically. 133
- 3.4 Frame the game. 134
- 3.5 Level up language. 135
- 3.6 Give simple directions. 136
- 3.7 Do a demo. 137
- 3.8 Lead community- and trust-building games. 138

Strengthen a culture of vulnerability-based trust. 144

- 3.9 Share a story-moment. 145
- 3.10 Make struggle visible. 147
- 3.11 Practice compassion. 149

Primary Intention 4: Design and Plan Learning: Work Plans, Agendas, and Protocols 153

Plan purposeful meetings.

- 4.1 Draft a team inquiry work plan. 156
- 4.2 Write a three-question agenda: Why? What? How? 164
- 4.3 Open a meeting to activate learning. 176
- 4.4 Close a meeting to establish next steps for learning. 179

Structure tasks and talk. 181

- 4.5 Choose a protocol. 182
- 4.6 Preview a task or protocol. 185
- 4.7 Facilitate a protocol. 188

Learn from a text-based discussion. 207

- 4.8 Select a shared text. 207
- 4.9 Design the reading/viewing experience. 210
- 4.10 Prep the text, the reader, and yourself. 213
- 4.11 Build a collaborative reading habit. 215

Primary Intention 5: Engage and Interact: Participation and Conflict Resolution 217

Boost engagement. 219

- 5.1 Set parameters for breakout groups. 220
- 5.2 Foster equitable airtime. 221
- 5.3 Reframe your ask. 224

5.4 Provide downtime.	226
5.5 Manage your own level of participation.	227
5.6 Empower others to problem solve.	228
Maximize productivity.	230
5.7 Form subcommittees.	230
5.8 Paraphrase.	232
5.9 Table the discussion.	233
5.10 Appoint a volunteer.	235
Focus talk.	237
5.11 Frame conversation with clear parameters.	238
5.12 Zoom out to the big picture.	239
5.13 Zoom in on a key point.	240
5.14 Redirect.	243
5.15 Pivot from teaching to learning.	244
5.16 Synthesize ideas.	245
Manage conflict.	248
5.17 Clarify understanding.	249
5.18 Interrupt negative energy.	250
5.19 Turn to a third data point.	251
5.20 Listen for the point of agreement.	253
5.21 Acknowledge. Assert. Move on.	254
5.22 Adopt a learning stance.	255
5.23 Clear the air as a group.	258
5.24 Check in 1:1.	262
5.25 Provide a graceful exit.	265
Primary Intention 6: Lead With Purpose and Direction: Priorities, Inquiry Questions, and Goals	267
Align with a priority.	269
6.1 Unpack priorities for understanding.	270
6.2 Identify a priority-based focus area.	271
6.3 Maintain focus on what's important.	273
Focus on a specific student-centered challenge.	277
6.4 Envision possibilities.	278
6.5 Brainstorm student-centered challenges.	278
6.6 Formulate an inquiry question.	283
Work toward a S-M-A-A-H-R-T goal.	288
6.7 (Specific) Write specific student-learning targets.	291
6.8 (Measurable) Measure what matters.	294

6.9 (Attainable) Reach for a tippy-toe goal.	296
6.10 (Aligned) Align with priorities and individual goals.	297
6.11 (Heartfelt) Connect to what matters.	299
6.12 (Results-driven) Distinguish learning outcomes from pathways.	302
6.13 (Time-bound) Establish a time frame according to student need.	305

Primary Intention 7: Promote Intentional Data Use: Assessment and Analysis 309

Select (or design) a meaningful assessment. 311

7.1 Specify the reason for assessing.	312
7.2 Choose an assessment based on the view of data you need.	314
7.3 Examine (or design) assessment tasks/questions.	320
7.4 Optimize assessment conditions for students.	323

Prepare data to examine. 325

7.5 Select student work samples (student data) to examine.	325
7.6 Organize student data.	329
7.7 Make data accessible.	332
7.8 Plan teacher work to examine together.	333

Facilitate data analysis. 335

7.9 Maintain a healthy data culture.	336
7.10 Prompt for evidence-based observations.	337
7.11 Prompt for evidence-based reasoning.	338
7.12 Analyze student errors.	339
7.13 Target and plan for student success.	341

Primary Intention 8: Engage in Analytical Thinking, Creative Problem Solving, and Clear Decision Making: Unbiased Reasoning and Diverse Perspectives 347

Suspend an assumption. 349

8.1 Spot an assumption.	350
8.2 Call attention to an assumption.	352
8.3 Inquire into an assumption.	355

Interrupt assumptions, bias, and unsound reasoning. 358

8.4 Seek alternate evidence.	359
8.5 Confront bias with success criteria.	361
8.6 Explore alternate reasoning.	362
8.7 Reframe a negative association.	363
8.8 Contrast with a high-expectations belief statement.	365
8.9 Capitalize on a learning moment.	367
8.10 Address deficit thinking.	368

Cultivate diverse perspectives.	370
8.11 Exercise flexible thinking.	370
8.12 Spotlight the minority viewpoint.	377
8.13 Invite dissent.	378
8.14 Advocate with humility.	379
Make clear impactful decisions.	382
8.15 Clarify the decision-making process.	383
8.16 Reach agreement on group decisions.	386
8.17 Commit to action.	390
8.18 Communicate a changed decision.	392
Primary Intention 9: Implement New Learning: Change, Peer Observation, and Accountability	393
Lead peer observation.	395
9.1 Set a focus for peer observation.	398
9.2 Design a peer observation.	399
9.3 Choose an observation method.	400
9.4 Decide a means for collecting student data.	404
9.5 Debrief a peer observation.	405
9.6 Strengthen vulnerability-based trust for peer observation.	406
Navigate resistance to change.	409
9.7 Spot reluctance to change.	410
9.8 Reframe talk about resistance.	411
9.9 Address implementation questions.	413
9.10 Address the emotional side of change.	415
9.11 Remove technical barriers to implementation.	417
9.12 Surface competing commitments.	420
9.13 Focus on student impact.	421
9.14 Give time and space.	422
Invite accountability.	425
9.15 Partner for accountability.	426
9.16 Go to an authority figure.	426
Primary Intention 10: Assess: Feedback, Reflection, and Growth for Teams and Leaders	429
Solicit feedback.	431
10.1 Design feedback questions.	432
10.2 Hear what's hard.	434
10.3 Make feedback public.	436

Assess team function and impact.	439
10.4 Monitor student progress.	440
10.5 Reflect on a meeting.	442
10.6 Publicly celebrate impact.	448
Develop as a leader.	450
10.7 Self-assess.	451
10.8 Set leadership growth goals.	456
10.9 Admit missteps.	457
10.10 Practice mindfulness.	458
10.11 Build capacity.	459

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10 STL Primary Intentions With Moves

I don't like to bake. Yet, one way I unwind from a long day is to watch the PBS *Great British Baking Show* reality series, in which home bakers compete to demonstrate their skills to produce winning pastries, pies, and treats. You might think it odd that someone who doesn't know the difference between baking soda and baking powder would commit to this show, but I enjoy watching the thoughtful design and planning that bakers put into their creations and seeing the different techniques they execute. Most riveting, however, is when the soufflé doesn't rise and the biscuits bomb. It's in these moments that you witness the intentional moves the bakers make to put forth their best creation. Watching them, it becomes clear who has mastered their craft and who is just hoping to get by on a cake pan and a prayer.

Similar to these bakers, skillful team leaders (STLs) intentionally use varied techniques and deliberate moves. I grappled with writing the main part of this book as moves because I was concerned that doing so would reduce the act of team leadership to a series of prescriptive steps. But, what's true for contestants in the technical challenge who line up their finished baked goods on a table for comparison is also true for team leaders: Two people can follow the same recipe and have the same ingredients, but how things turn out depends on the baker. This book makes the moves visible; you are what makes them work.

Important Tips for Reading

Read this part last.

It is tempting to skip Parts I and II of this book and jump ahead to Part III, which delves into practice. But, to most effectively implement the moves, first read Chapters 1–6 so that you build an understanding of a skillful intentional approach to leading groups of adult learners.

Lead with your primary intention, then select the move that will most likely get you there.

There are over 150 moves in this book organized into the 10 STL Primary Intentions. The moves in Primary Intentions 1–5 address collaborative conditions, expectations, culture, planning, and engagement. These moves build what are commonly known as “soft skills.”

The moves in Primary Intentions 6–10 build what might be called the “harder” skills. They address goal setting, assessment, data analysis, evidence-based decision making, bias and assumptions, resistance to change, and accountability.

To best navigate this book, begin thinking about what you are trying to accomplish. Ask yourself, “What's my primary intention?” Then flip to a move that you think will work and try it.

Approach the moves as a guide, not a comprehensive manual.

Some moves in this book will be familiar to you; some will be new. If you're a more experienced team leader, you might wonder why a particular strategy or protocol, for example, isn't in this book. Please remember my purpose for writing is not to provide you with a comprehensive A–Z book of what to do in every situation, but rather to highlight key effective moves that help teams get to and stay in the high-functioning, high-impact Quadrant 1.

For example, I do not include every norm-setting technique that exists, but I do highlight three (one that is original to me) that will help you reach your primary intent of establishing expectations for collaborative learning. Implement the moves that make sense, and draw from what you know if it isn't included here.

Beware of hyper-focusing on yourself.

A whole book of small moves can make an already cautious, conscientious leader more so. New team leaders, in particular, might hyper-focus on what *they* are doing and saying rather than on others. As a result, they might misread signals in a group, miss opportunities for learning, overpower voices in a meeting, or misjudge how a meeting went. (We've all been there.) With time and practice, the moves in this book will become more fluid and natural to you, but if you are just starting out or if you tend to lean toward the "I'm worried I'll make the wrong move" type of thinking, then let go a bit and trust your colleagues. Listening to them will help you organically decide which moves to make when.

Read and study together, observe each other in action, but please don't use this book as an evaluation tool.

This book is great to use as the basis for book study with your school or district's teacher team leaders, coaches, and administrators. People can read and discuss excerpts together, share their own strategies, and observe one another's team meetings noticing effective moves leaders make. There is even a reflection tool in Primary Intention 10 that can help people know what to look for when observing a team (see Figure 29). Principals and administrators, if you need to evaluate the effectiveness of team leaders, then look at the outcomes of their team, but please avoid evaluating the moves a team leader makes as if using a checklist. Instead, use this book as a developmental tool (e.g., "Your team does not have purpose and direction. Let's look at the moves in Primary Intention 6 to see what you can do to bring this about.").

Jump around.

Anyone who read my first book, *The Skillful Team Leader* (MacDonald, 2013), knows that I like professional texts that are packed with resources but designed in an accessible, easy-to-reference format for the busy practitioner. Part III of this book can be a doozy if you try to read it cover to cover. Turn to the moves you need, as you need them. My hope is that you'll return again and again to this section as a reference.

Aim for understanding, not precision.

The goal is not to execute the moves in this book to the letter of the law. Let your intuition, insight into your school's culture, and your personal style, wit, and creativity guide you to implement the moves that make sense. The more you practice the moves, the more nimble you will become with them. Cook up your own moves and never forget your intention behind doing what you are doing.

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