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Introduction

WHY THIS BOOK? WHY YOU?

Leadership, like teaching, can and should be a joyful profession where practitioners feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work. Yet worldwide, there is a sense of hopelessness around changing the contemporary culture of chaos. Studies show that the attrition rate of education leaders in K–12 schools worldwide has been steadily increasing at an alarming rate (NASSP & LPI, 2022), and systems may struggle to fill leadership roles for years to come. While similar to the data seen around classroom educators exiting the profession, this issue is receiving far less media attention. Therefore, we must shift the narrative. As authors, we are a team of eternal optimists with deep experience and endless admiration for education leaders. We aim to empower education leaders with a framework that enables them to regain control of their mindset and their practice despite their daily encounters with factors outside their control. The habits of personal and professional practice described in this book focus on adult well-being as seen through the lens of effective learning environments in schools and districts. In support of every leader's right to experience sustained confidence, fulfillment, and joy in their career, you will find that the chapters of this book provide authentic, proven practices that extend beyond self-care or managerial skills and provide a framework for you to sustain your journey without impacting your health. Let us dive in!

THE IMPERATIVE TO ADDRESS LEADER WELL-BEING: RESILIENCE IS KEY

Education leaders today need simple, proven habits that will equip them for the contemporary educational landscape. Administrators' well-being matters to themselves and the teachers, communities, and students they serve. School leaders are expected to support students, teachers, and the broader school community. This emotional labor, including managing

crises, conflicts, and the well-being of staff and students, often takes a toll on their own mental health. Stress and burnout are closely associated with high turnover rates among school leaders, which disrupts school continuity and affects student learning outcomes. Resilience, however, is an effective mindset comprised of many factors that may be intentionally developed and serve to mitigate the effects of stress, burnout, and environments characterized by constant uncertainty.

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands” (American Psychological Association, n.d.). These processes are critical for leaders striving to sustain well-being amidst their myriad complexities and challenges. Education environments are constantly evolving due to curriculum changes, policy shifts, technological advancements, or unexpected events (like pandemics). Leaders who have developed resilience can better adapt to these changes while maintaining stability for their staff and students. A resilient leader models perseverance, optimism, and emotional intelligence, which can foster a school culture that encourages these same traits in teachers and students. By understanding resilience through the habits related to leading an education system within these chapters, leaders can invest in their well-being and that of their entire community.

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The habits described in this book each play a unique role in contributing toward your ability to develop and experience resilience. For example, a distinct aspect of resilient individuals is the experience of efficacy or belief in their ability to do their work well (Goddard et al., 2004). This construct links to the broader observation of sociocultural theory that we all have a vast network of influences that encourage or discourage us from believing in our ability to affect change. The habits of resilient leaders described herein are all focused on creating a positive and supportive network of influences that can enable those beliefs for individual leaders and support them in creating that social context for those they serve. In this way, we hope to show that these habits aren't *life hacks* capable of solving any problem but small

practices that collectively create a context within which leaders can grow and develop as influential instructional leaders while navigating the complexities of contemporary education.

HOW DO HABITS INFLUENCE YOUR RESILIENCE AS AN EDUCATION LEADER?

Habits play a crucial role in shaping resilience for education leaders, as they form the foundation of how you react, adapt, and persist in all situations. As you navigate the extreme unpredictability of a job that demands your utmost clarity of mind and complete focus, your habits will provide you with a calm, predictable foundation for ways of thinking and acting that require almost no bandwidth to engage. As with the *Habits of Resilient Educators* (Prendergast & Lee, 2024) book, you will focus on building psychological capital, a practice supported by research on positive psychology, to support your ability to withstand change and uncertainty, become proactive, and develop a sense of control amidst chaos. Intentionally mastering skills, for example, around the habit of setting boundaries (Chapter 1) will empower you to apply healthy responses in demanding situations without almost any cognitive demand, easing your brain's levels of stress and protecting your attention for more impactful tasks such as casting an ambitious vision for your community (Chapter 3). You'll experience the opportunity within these chapters to draw connections across the habits, recognizing that becoming an expert in the art of seeking feedback and applying it to your personal and professional growth (Chapter 8) will amplify your efforts to develop the habit of checking your blind spots (Chapter 4) to ensure you improve at predicting how your community may react to new initiatives or ideas. Each of these habits has been carefully selected to support your growth at any stage of your career and to be revisited throughout your career as an iterative cycle of continuous personal improvement. As author Clear (2018) shared in *Atomic Habits*, "Habits are the compound interest of personal improvement" (p. 118). As you engage in the interactive activities within these chapters, you are investing small moments of your time and energy toward your broader goals of succeeding as a leader in education, and your daily efforts will multiply into a greater impact on both your well-being and the effect your leadership may have on the students and families in your school.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Perhaps you find yourself reading this book at the start of your career as an education leader, or maybe you are well into your journey and seeking renewal and inspiration to offset the stressors and challenges around you. No matter the case, this book offers learning opportunities and fresh ideas applicable in any setting and for any individual. Though organized in a sequential manner, the chapters need not be explored to have an effect. Rather, the habits within these chapters are best understood as a web of practices and mindsets that intersect across and throughout the environments and scenarios you lead. As a result, consider each of the chapters and determine your ideal learning journey based on your needs and goals. You may explore habits based on the time of the school year when you

are most likely to apply them or as a deep dive during a school holiday to gain insight into where each habit might be applied across your work. Without question, the concepts in the book are deeply amplified when explored in a setting with others: coach, mentor, fellow leaders, professional learning network, etc. For example, the opportunity to implement activities within each chapter will be enhanced with reflection conversations, bringing diverse perspectives and experiences to your personal approach. Regardless of how, when, and with whom you embark on the learning journey, prepare to grow and invest in your resilience as a leader so you may better serve your community!

In **Chapter 1**, you will begin your journey toward resilience by studying the merit of creating personal and professional boundaries as a leader. You will also learn strategies to clarify priorities; determine healthy boundaries across different environments and roles; and communicate with others around the “why,” “who,” and “how” these boundaries will ensure effective school leadership.

In **Chapter 2**, you’ll explore how leaders who can sustain a high level of function in their professional lives often invest equally in nurturing a healthy personal life. This chapter presents practices and strategies to identify all aspects of one’s identity, develop routines that balance personal and professional pursuits, and connect a leader’s investment in their overall well-being to their impact on the students they serve.

Chapter 3 examines the habit of long-range *vision casting*. You’ll explore the integration of data use, the practice of zeroing in on your purpose as a leader as it pertains to leading the school’s vision, the crucial need to foster hope for the community, and many other leader actions that not only streamline your efforts but amplify your impact.

Chapter 4 centers on the habit of recognizing and addressing *blind spots* as a leader. It will introduce explicit practices such as identifying implicit biases, applying the concept of blind spots toward crucial leadership priorities, and building the most effective staff to achieve your highest outcomes for students.

In **Chapter 5**, you’ll delve into a study of efficient, impactful practices for becoming a lead learner in your system. Practices and ideas will be presented around prioritizing *must know* information and strategically involving team members in the learning, reflecting on stakeholder behaviors across a consciousness/competence matrix, determining effective support actions, building leader credibility, and becoming an authentic activator of learning in your school or district.

In **Chapter 6**, you'll investigate how leaders may be at risk for inadvertently allowing a slow, gentle decline in expectations of their community and how that can have devastating cumulative effects. This chapter will provide strategies for building team maturity and understanding around the causes and effects of adult expectations, examine the effect of martyrdom in a school setting, and offer tools for *giving away the work* so others may become equal owners of the impact.

Chapter 7 will lead you on a journey toward effective use of data as a leader. You will learn strategies around using the data sources to *get curious*, seek powerful practices, identify sources of excellence to replicate, determine who and what needs attention for support, and continuously communicate with stakeholders the connection between data and instruction.

Chapter 8 addresses the key characteristics of feedback for education leaders, specifically examining the importance of seeking feedback for leaders in pursuit of their professional and community growth. You'll gain unique strategies for soliciting feedback and utilizing it to accelerate personal impact as a leader and connect feedback to overall school culture.

Chapter 9 will establish that leaders cannot have the fullest impact on their schools without comprehensive support from a network of mentors and coaches, fellow leaders, and the greater education community. You'll gain strategies for determining the type of networks that serve individual needs, how to build them, and practices for intentionally leveraging their value to foster your continuous growth as an education leader.

Chapter 10 culminates your study of the habits by examining how to skillfully navigate change as a leader. Building on the skills and mindsets developed across each of the other habits, you will develop approaches toward leading and managing change that empower you to confidently guide your community toward a vision of utmost success for every stakeholder.

Throughout this book, you will also experience practical stories from educational leaders, opportunities to apply your learning in the Pause and Reflect sections, and opportunities for journaling and reflection at the end of each chapter.

TAKE YOURSELF ON A PERSONAL GROWTH JOURNEY

As you begin the book, you will notice an early emphasis on the habit of investing in yourself. We invite you to embrace this mindset throughout every chapter as you create time and

space to reflect, understand, and apply the practices within each habit. While much of your work as a leader inherently positions you to be the caretaker of those around you, without feeling fulfilled and healthy yourself, your efforts to support the teachers, families, and students in your community will further drain your precious energy reserves and put you at risk for ultimately being unable to take care of yourself, let alone of others. Thus, consider the learning experiences in this book as an entry point into the mindsets and practices that you may apply on a daily basis throughout your career to nourish your personal well-being and your professional capacity to lead. Rather than isolate self-care's personal and professional aspects, the habits you will study are situated at the intersection of the two. For example, as you learn the habit of utilizing data as a leader, you will not only apply practices that foster efficient data analysis to understand the effect of academic learning initiatives but you will also apply the habit of gathering data to inform how you interpret interpersonal interactions with those in your community. As such, you will understand that data may support your ability to be realistically optimistic in even the most challenging situations, a mindset recognized as an attribute of resilient individuals who navigate uncertainty with confidence and control. This is but one example of the myriad ways in which each of the habits applies to your work as an instructional leader and your own personal well-being. You deserve the time and space to learn these skills, and by investing in a conscious effort to apply them routinely, you will grow as a leader and amplify your positive impact on those you serve.

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COLLABORATE WITH A MENTOR, COACH, OR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COHORT

In Chapter 9, “Don’t Travel Alone,” you will study the habit of developing a thriving network of individuals and groups who may nourish your growth and support you in times of uncertainty. Before you reach that chapter, consider the opportunity to engage in your learning experience around all of the habits in collaboration with others. By partnering with a colleague, seeking a trusted mentor or coach, or perhaps gathering a group of fellow leaders to study the habits together, you will find that

your learning grows exponentially. Surrounded by the fresh perspectives of others with backgrounds and experiences distinct from your own, each chapter's specific activities will become much more meaningful. Further, by partnering with a peer who may serve as a personal *accountability partner*, you will benefit from the effect of feeling motivated to uphold expectations for someone else who is counting on you to share the experience with you. There is no recipe for a perfect collaboration method around the book's content, but without question, this book is well-suited to being studied in partnership with others.

GET READY, SET YOUR INTENTIONS, AND GO IMPROVE!

MY LEARNING INTENTIONS FOR READING THIS BOOK ARE . . .

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3.