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Acknowledgements

For years I have been watching great leaders – those I have been lucky enough to work with and be inspired by and those in the public eye whom I have never met but who have had an impact on me from afar. It is from these people – colleagues, line managers, role models and icons – that I have tried to take little bits, to piece together my own style of leadership. Whether it has been a senior leader who has inspired me to want to have a greater impact than just inside the four walls of my classroom, a sports coach delivering an inspirational team talk, or a state leader giving an inspiring battle cry to the nation that has modelled how to inspire action in others, I have always been fascinated by the way these highly skilled professionals are agents for change.

However, we all need an opportunity to lead and develop as a leader in our own right and to put these skills into practice. I am eternally grateful to all the leaders above me who saw enough in me to push me towards and, in some cases, open up the door of opportunity for me at the various stages of my career. These people understood that leadership is not about creating followers, but about creating more leaders.

To those whom I've had the pleasure of working with, who have inspired me and given me the confidence to lead, I thank you. To those whom I've never met, but have inspired me to want to be like them, even in the smallest of ways, you'll never get to understand the impact you've had on me personally and the young people in my care.

And finally, to my wife Tracy. Without her support and belief in me, I would not have had the confidence and conviction to

climb half the professional mountains that I have. When you have the love and support of someone to wake up to and go home to, even the most difficult situations and complex circumstances seem that little bit easier to overcome.

Introduction

This book is written from my personal experience of being a senior leader in two diverse and dynamic secondary schools, leading school improvement in many areas. The skills I have picked up from watching and working with others, and the experience this has given me to raise standards and the life chances of the young people in our care, are laid out for you in the forthcoming chapters.

Like a lot of professions, promotion in education means that, strangely, the better you get, the more you move away from what you are good at… teaching children. Senior leadership requires a very different skillset from the skills that have got you to where you are today. In most cases, senior leadership is about leading, motivating, monitoring and managing teachers. None of these skills are taught in your teacher training programme, so like most people, you will have picked up these skills and learned them 'on the job'. Ask lots of senior leaders and they'll probably tell you that they haven't had a lot of specific senior leadership training and anything they've had pales into insignificance compared to the training they received in their teacher training year. However, as we'll discover in the forthcoming chapters, leadership is the key to school improvement, so we should be investing more time in high-quality professional development for our current and aspiring leaders.

Put simply, great teachers don't always make great senior leaders. And certainly, great teachers, without any specific attention to the skills they will need to lead a school, will not make great senior leaders. Leadership is a craft of its own, just as teaching is, and it takes time and practice to get it right. There is also such a diverse range of leadership opportunities in most schools that some skills are very specific to some roles. Even if you've been a senior leader responsible for one area of school improvement, the chances are you'll need to learn a different set of skills to be successful in leading a different area of school improvement.

There are, however, leadership lessons that we can learn from outside of education. Great leaders know how to get the best out of the people in their organisations, irrespective of the context they are working in. Education is no different from any other profession in this respect. For years I used to coach American football and was lucky enough to coach for Great Britain. The leadership skills that I learned in the school setting were easily transferable to the coaching field – vision, organisation, motivation and personal accountability. We should therefore be open to learning from great leaders not only within our profession, but outside of it too. Watching a great leader at work, either on the television or in a business or service that you come into contact with in your personal life, can be a model of excellence for you to aspire to. However, you have to be looking through the right lenses to spot the intricate detail that makes them great. The naked or uneducated eye will miss the vast majority of things that are happening, but if you watch through a leadership lens, you'll begin to spot the things that others don't.

This book will guide you through the initial steps to becoming a great senior leader, from applying and obtaining your first role, to enabling you to flourish in that role when you get there by providing you with the advice and training you'll need in a range of school improvement areas.

PART 1

Preparing for senior leadership

1

Choosing the right senior leadership pathway

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this chapter we will look at:

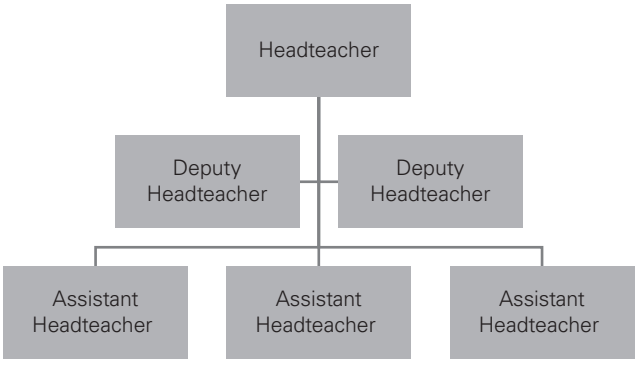
- the structure of senior leadership
- individual and collective school leadership
- roles and responsibilities.

Hopefully you are reading this book on the back of a successful career to date, working up from day-to-day classroom teaching into middle management, and after several successful years with a clear record of impact behind you, you feel the time is right to move into a senior leadership position. In my experience of doing just that, I have felt that the opportunity to lead a school has given me the greatest pleasure and personal satisfaction due to the much wider and significant impact that you can have on a group of young people. As a successful classroom teacher, you only have an impact on 30 students at any given time, whereas as a school leader, the changes and strategies that you put in place can benefit the whole school. Thus, your impact can be felt and seen so much more widely.

The other significant difference in moving into senior leadership is the need for vision. In most schools, middle leaders are the backbone of an organisation, but they are there to manage the school policies, ensuring compliance and the smooth running of the day-to-day operations. It is the senior leadership team that have the licence to be creative in determining the direction in which the school will travel, setting out their vision for constant school improvement and leading the school on its journey towards it. This can be daunting for some and exciting for others. The knowledge that you have a blank canvas in some schools to lay down your vision, tear up procedures that have become stale and use innovative approaches to bring about whole-scale change is not for everyone. But for those of us who get excited by this prospect of taking a key role in moving a school forward and having a significant role in improving the life chances of a generation of a whole community, senior leadership is our ticket to complete job satisfaction.

The structure of senior leadership

Most schools operate with a three-level structure at senior leadership:



Assistant headteacher

Assistant headship is the first level in this model where leaders have distinct roles and responsibilities. Depending on the size and context of a school, you may find numerous assistant headteachers operating in one senior leadership team. This is the level that most people progress into from middle management.

Deputy headteacher

The next level up usually comprises a deputy headteacher (sometimes there may be more than one in larger schools). Although in some cases people can transition from middle leadership straight into deputy headship (this is usually dependant on the context and size of the school, together with the experience of the individual), it is normally seen as a stepping stone upwards for assistant headteachers once they have had experience of successfully leading a school at that level.

Headteacher

Finally, the third level is principal, head of school, headteacher or executive headteacher, depending on the size and context of the school. Although there is no written rule, especially now that the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) is no longer an essential requisite for headteachers, professionals at this level normally come from having worked previously at the deputy headteacher level in a school. However, there have been moves in some parts of the country to look at appointing highly successful leaders and CEOs of organisations outside of education to fill the voids that some schools find.