

Charles A. Bonnici
With a Foreword by Bruce S. Cooper

Creating a Successful Leadership Style

Principles of Personal Strategic Planning

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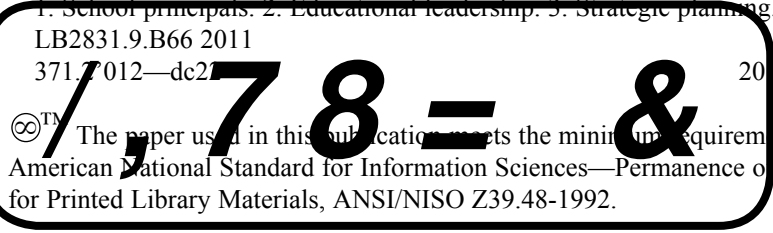
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To my LSW (long-suffering wife), Christine, and my children, Stephen and Danielle, who had less of me as a husband and father than they deserved.

Even when I was home, I was emotionally drained from the day and often not there for them.

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Foreword

Attracting quality new leadership in education, particularly for those becoming effective school principals, is a truly difficult but important task. But, convincingly, Charles A. Bonnici, in this creative new book, tells and shows us just how to make leadership work in education, in living color, using poignant examples in real schools.

He uses a term not always found in the education leadership and the social science literature, the term *talented*—having those qualities that make good leaders. *Talented* is not so easily defined, but we know it when we see it. He brings this leadership preparation to life, using on-the-job examples to describe what good principals are, how to find and educate them, and then how to help them in their critical work.

Bonnici begins each chapter with strong, clear, practical advice and then gives examples that support this wisdom—in no uncertain terms. And the sage suggestions all make sense; the book begins by acknowledging that being a good school principal is a full-time, active, complex job: interacting with teachers and students; being everywhere at once (e.g., in the hall, the office, the schoolyard, and, don't forget, the classroom, to watch and interact with the teachers and their kids); and modeling and interacting positively with a wide range of adults and children.

In the first chapter, Bonnici urges principals to be “role models,” consciously and subconsciously acting on, and speaking up for, what they believe in and stand for. Using two real examples—Mr. Thelen, who is a principal of an inner-city school, and Ms. Rivera, a large suburban high school leader—Bonnici helps us to live and feel the experiences of these administrators as they worked to give form and substance to teachers’

curricula and instruction, without trying to overmanage the staff in the classroom.

These real examples give life and meaning to what Bonnici is saying and advising, as when Thelen's school had an active Keep Your School Clean campaign, and the principal stopped to pick up paper in the hall. Kids asked him what and why he was doing this. He replied, "This is our home for most of the day. It's our job to keep it clean." Some kids followed suit, picking up paper, while other looked wary and walked away. Mentoring and modeling are never easy, but the tone and direction, according to this book, start with the principal.

The second chapter, in much the same way, deals with real problems, and is entitled with ways to deal with them: "Don't Exacerbate; Defuse." Again, Bonnici uses living, poignant case stories to illustrate this advice.

For example, rather than fight with students about "elevator passes" in a school with several floors, the principal gives simple advice to make things work more smoothly, such as "Hold the elevator open until the student produces the pass for inspection. Simply say that none of us will go anywhere until you see the pass. In 90 percent of the cases, this will end the matter. A student without a pass will simply get off the elevator." No battles necessary, as the leader cools down the situation instead of inflaming it.

The other chapters are similar, revolving around giving advice on various topics, for example, listening more, speaking less (chapter 3) and giving more credit to others, and taking the blame for things oneself, when things go well or fail (chapter 4). Chapter 5 is about caring for people, not "shuffling paper." Chapter 6 covers finding the right people and then "letting the people fly," so they can do what they were hired to do. In chapter 7 Bonnici then urges principals to remember what teachers do and need, calling on their background and skills from when the administrators were themselves teachers; and in chapter 8 he urges principals to seek input from their teachers, using a School Leadership Team, based on "advisement and input" from those closest to the decisions (i.e., in the classrooms).

In chapter 9 Bonnici focuses on the need to accentuate the positives and to minimize the negatives, while in chapter 10 he stresses the need to "monitor the communication"; from there, Bonnici advises to remember support staff (chapter 11), remind details (chapter 12), and finally "stay

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within the box,” not breaking the larger rules and contexts, for fear that a leader will go too far and possibly lose his or her job. For life can be unfair, Bonnici explains, so be careful and minimize the risks.

The book ends with many practical, useful details, including actual program schedules, helpful forms, and models for school leaders in a series of appendices. For example, appendix C is a real document (a sample parent newsletter article) for principals, done by a principal, explaining health and medical policies in the school: how students who are taking prescribed medications can come to a health clinic in the school if they cannot do the treatments themselves or are embarrassed to take the medicines in public. It is a very useful and thoughtful article.

This kind of advice and practical materials in the appendices tops off this highly useful book, which readers should find interesting, helpful, and worthwhile. The book thus puts the talents of real school leaders in full view and highlights the principles for the principal, those techniques and strategies for doing a superior job as a leader.

Share this book with others who might be interested in leadership in American schools, thus making a difference for their families, students, and teachers. For school is family, and talented leadership can make the community of children and adults work. Hence, as Bonnici shows, wisdom—passed to the next generation of leaders—is presented in this book and is important to the future of successful schools in our changing society.

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