

**From Action to Impact:
A Handbook for using Purpose, Principles
and Performance Indicators
To Improve Programs**

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Section 1: Developing Purpose Statements

- 1.) Do think about "purpose" as a vision of a preferable future. There should be an easily seen relationship between what is happening in the current situation and the preferred future, but your purpose statement need not be confined to only what is possible and practical in the present.
- 2.) Do focus on what people really care about in developing the purpose statement. The purpose statement ought to evoke a sense of pride and mission.
- 3.) Don't shy away from the tension between a purpose statement that is BIG enough to be inspiring but also big enough to often be "out of sync" with day-to-day limitations and year-to-year reductions in funding or staff. The question isn't "How can we possibly meet our purpose statement with all the forces lined up against it?" but rather "**How can we best progress toward our purpose DESPITE the restrictions and challenges we face?**"
- 4.) Do involve as many people as possible in conversations about what your real purpose is. My bias is that the leadership has ultimate responsibility to set the vision, but that the process of setting the vision will be more powerful the more fully engaged all levels of the organization are in conversations about purpose.
- 5.) Do expect that the process of talking about purpose will surface divisions and dissension in the organization over what is most important and what is possible. Focusing on purpose does open a "can of worms." Just remember that the disagreements that come out into the open are ones that have already been operating and represent all the places that people may have been working at cross-purposes with each other. It is difficult and painful to work through different ways of seeing things and coming to some common agreements. It is also difficult and painful for people in an organization to all work very hard without a clear common purpose or shared ways of understanding whether the work is successful.

There is an old story of a man who was visiting Italy and came upon four stonecutters working at a construction site. The first stonecutter was working slowly and had a sour look on his face. The man asked the stonecutter what he was doing and the sharply grunted reply was "I'm cutting stone, you fool!" The man asked the second stonecutter, who seemed to be somewhat more engaged in the work, and the reply was "I'm working to support my family." The man asked the third stonecutter, who was working hard at his task, and was told "I'm building a beautiful church!" Finally, the man asked the fourth stonecutter, who was humming a tune and working the hardest of all. The fourth stonecutter looked up and with great enthusiasm said "I am building a monument to God that will last centuries!" The different ways that the stonecutters saw their purpose had a great impact on how they approached their work.

6.) Don't try to skip over the pain and confusion in clarifying purpose. Do have outside facilitation of these conversations if at all possible, using a facilitator who is determined to honor BOTH group process and end results. A "good" purpose statement is inherently controversial because it will be clear enough about what direction you are taking and it will also be clear about what things you won't be focusing on. If no one challenges your purpose statement, you have probably ended up with a purpose statement that is so cloaked in generalities that it can mean anything to anybody. This is your signal to start over.

7.) Do expect developing a purpose statement to take longer than you thought it would, to be more difficult than anyone expected, to feel pointless at times and to feel far too risky at other times.

To keep going, ask yourself what the difference is between a organization filled with people who feel that they are just there to "cut stone" and an organization filled with people who feel that they are involved in creating a "monument to God."

8.) Questions that may be helpful in conversations about purpose:

- If our organization disappeared tomorrow, why would it matter?
- How would we describe who we are and what we do if we had only seven seconds?
- How would we describe who we are and what we do so that a 10-year-old could understand our purpose?
- Why do people show up for work here? What do they care about?
- How would the world be different if we didn't exist?
- What things do we do that feel like "cutting stone?" What things do we do that feel more like "building a monument to God?"
- What are the people who work here most proud of about what we do?
- If we had all the resources we needed, what would we accomplish?
- What would we do if we weren't afraid of failure?

9.) Do take every opportunity to practice a "purpose" orientation within your organization. Ask, "what is the purpose of this?" for meetings, activities and proposals. Help build the capacity of your people to think through what their purpose is, how they will measure whether they are making progress toward their purpose, what values will be important in carrying out the purpose, and what tasks and activities will be involved. Be a broken record, repeating over and over and over again that purpose is the focus, and that **all** tasks and activities must be supporting purpose and the performance measures that indicate progress toward purpose.

Section 2: Developing Principles

- 1.) Do begin with what exists. Unlike the purpose statement, which relates to a "preferable" future, the guiding principles you identify should be values that are already clearly in evidence in the organization and already driving behavior. Like the purpose statement, your statements of principle will reflect the "preferable" state — how you and your people operate on your best days rather than your worst days. None of us live our values perfectly minute to minute, but having a clear picture of what things would look like if we did helps guide our behavior in the right direction.
- 2.) Don't assume agreement on values will hold up to probing conversation. Initial conversations about "our values" tend to be easy and quick because people frame things in ways that everyone can agree on (who would disagree with the value of "Motherhood and apple pie" for instance?). Groups resist digging in deeper because they are adamant that there is agreement and don't believe a page of value statements is ever going to be really "used" in the organization, anyway. Showing ways that accountability to principles will be integrated into the organization is critical.
- 3.) Do emphasize that principles must guide "how" the organization makes progress towards purpose. If principles aren't made just as real and compelling in the organization (which means BOTH rewards and consequences are attached to how well people follow the principles) as other performance indicators, there is a strong tendency for the organization to consistently "make the numbers" but in ways that lose purpose and principles. People who work in organizations that are playing "numbers games" generally feel like they are "cutting stone."

Principles are a key balancing factor in accountability when quantifiable performance indicators are used to define "success."
- 4.) Do require people to speak specifically about how they know a value is being upheld. While everyone agrees that "respect" is a good thing, it is usually the case that nearly everyone also has a different picture of what "respect" might look like in operating a program. This is especially true in situations where different cultures are represented. Leaders must continually engage staff and students in conversations about how to make the principles "alive" in the organization.
- 5.) Do actively manage expectations of staff and students about what it means to follow your program principles. Be as specific as possible about how you are measuring program progress in terms of values. For example, "responsiveness" might be translated to returning calls to students within two days. This may be the most reasonable level possible given your resources. **Living your values doesn't mean meeting everyone's definitions or expectations** — it means establishing a common understanding of what is reasonable to expect day-to-day and then measuring how well you are living up to that.

Section 3: Developing Performance Measures

- 1.) Do include performance measures that are established by funding sources as well as internally developed performance measures that indicate progress toward purpose.
- 2.) Do expect that it will take several years for an organization to develop the capacity to consistently focus on performance indicators rather than simply on activities accomplished. Generally, organizations begin by creating many, many performance indicators to track. Over time, the organization and people within it learn which indicators are key drivers of overall performance and which are interesting but not as critical to track. While having "too many" measures is a problem because people can only focus on a handful or important indicators, it is not a problem that I believe can be solved by arbitrarily limiting measures at the beginning.
- 3.) Do pay attention to the things that people within the organization care about measuring and care about improving. Performance indicators that no one is passionate about are of little use in focusing energy.
- 4.) Do be relentless in connecting performance indicators back to overall purpose and principles. If you are "making the numbers" but losing the purpose, you haven't kept purpose as the driver but have allowed "the numbers" to guide what people do.
- 5.) A good performance indicator is one that is clearly connected to purpose and principles and is generally recognized among staff and students as a reasonable measure of progress. **While there may be different interpretations of why the measure is moving up or down, there should be general agreement that progress in the measure is synonymous with progress toward purpose.**
- 6.) Do develop a strategic approach to performance measurement. Some things are important to measure but to measure them is so difficult and expensive that you need to find an alternative. Some things are easy and quick to measure but no one cares enough about the data to have it influence behavior. Some things are routinely measured but nothing is done with the information so it has no impact on continuous improvement.
- 7.) Don't measure anything unless and until you have an idea of how you would use the resulting information for program improvement. How will you make meaning of the information you get? How will you decide what actions should be taken based on the meaning you make? Who will be responsible for carrying out actions related to the information? How will you measure whether the actions resulted in improvements?

Performance measures have no importance in and of themselves — they are only indicators of progress toward a preferable future.

Section 4: **Danger! Danger! Danger!**

Cautions about Performance Measurement

- 1.) Do understand that nearly any set of numbers can be interpreted to mean many different things — and not everyone who sees the numbers will have the experience and context that you do for coming to the "right" interpretation. If you are going to gather and report numbers about your program, you need to think about how to present the numbers so that people have some context and "guidance" for interpretation.
- 2.) Do find a few trusted, unsophisticated folks who are inexperienced in the world of education and use them to help you "see" your numbers with new eyes. Take their advice on how to help make the numbers make sense.
- 3.) Don't underestimate the danger of a particular interpretation about your numbers, made by a person of influence or power (even if the interpretation is ridiculous), taking on a life of its own and being difficult to counter. It is critical to a continuous improvement, performance-oriented system to share numbers widely so people can understand what is going on. It is also critical to spend the time and attention necessary to make sure you try to prevent or moderate the damage done by negative interpretations. Further, it is equally important that you are just as vigilant about guarding against overly positive interpretations, since they can come back and hurt you just as easily!
- 4.) Like most things (guns don't kill people, people kill people. . .), the numbers you gather can be misused by people in ways that can put your program at risk. Don't blame the numbers and don't take this as a good argument for ignorance about what you are doing in your program. It is, however, a good argument for making sure you are *strategic and skilled* in gathering, making meaning of, reporting and responding to data.
- 5.) Do understand that any system using common performance indicators, even across very disparate programs, will find that the programs are compared and that attempts are made to distinguish the "good" programs from the "bad" programs. This drive toward hierarchical ranking will be a fact of life that must be **managed**. It is another reason why it is as important to make meaning of the data and put context around it for "outsiders" as it is to gather and report data.
- 6.) Do be aware that education cultures tend to have an especially strong reaction against hierarchical rankings and simplistic comparisons, responding with waves and waves of in-depth arguments for why the data are stupid and shouldn't be used. After being hammered by those waves, you will likely wonder why you ever started to use data in the first place. Do ask yourself the question "Were unsubstantiated opinions, untested assumptions and unspoken expectations — *all of which were being used to "measure" whether our program was successful* — really more fair or accurate than this data is? Is it easier to build continuous improvement on some

kind of numerical measures of progress or on widely varying "hunches" among program leaders and staff about what is going well and what is not going well?

- 7.) Don't be afraid to tell the truth as you see it about the data you are gathering and what it means. Sometimes the questions used to gather the data turned out to be the wrong ones — say so and declare you'll use what you learned to make the next questions better! Sometimes the methods used to gather the data had unexpected problems — point those out! Sometimes the interpretations of what the data means are so diverse — and all so plausible — that all you can do is say you don't really know what the data means. *Data is just a tool for seeing whether you are getting closer to fulfilling your purpose and for helping you to continuously adjust your program for maximum progress toward purpose.* **Don't make the tool more important than the purpose.**
- 8.) Do understand that your job as a leader will be to constantly keep "the numbers" connected with overall purpose and principles. The downside of developing a system skilled at data collection and reporting is that "the numbers" can take on a life of their own and people can begin to do whatever is necessary to "get the numbers" rather than to stay focused on the real purpose of it all. What gets measured **does** get done — you need to make sure it gets done in a way that serves purpose and principles.
- 9.) Do balance the dangers of performance measurement with the expected benefits and make strategic and reasoned choices about what to measure and report. The purpose of performance measurement is to enhance your ability to progress toward your vision of a preferable future, your overall purpose. Manage the risk and downside of performance measurement in the same way you manage other leadership challenges.

Section 5: Measuring Progress Toward Purpose: Gathering Data

- 1.) Do remind yourself that gathering data is difficult, expensive and can be risky. Data gathering ought not be undertaken until and unless you believe data results will be responded to. If your program or system isn't "ready" to hear or act on certain things, having data that "proves" there is a problem will not magically lead to an appropriate response. Just remember all the things in your life that you "know" you should do, things that have been proven over and over and over again by unambiguous data (such as: eat many servings of fruits and vegetables each day, exercise daily, floss after every meal, etc.) and ask yourself whether you consistently ACT upon your knowledge.
- Systems are no better than individuals at easily translating "knowing" to "doing."**
- 2.) Be strategic in determining how high your standards need to be in data gathering. If you are gathering data for state reports that relate to funding levels, you need to make sure that you use very high standards for accuracy and consistency. If you want to do a quick read of your student population to see how a particular approach or schedule is working for them, you don't need to gather data in a way that will "prove" anything to a researcher or legislature. It is important to be clear about the approach you've used and your reasons for it. It makes no sense at all to use "million dollar" data gathering approaches to inform "thousand dollar" decisions. The opposite is also true.
 - 3.) Do return to simple questions to stay on track with data gathering. Examples include:
 - What has changed in the situation or in our priorities that makes it important to gather data on this issue at this point in time?
 - What level of accuracy and consistency do we need to use in gathering data on this issue? What types of decisions are likely to be related to the data we gather?
 - What are the questions we hope this data will help us answer? Which of these questions are "nice to know" and which are critical to getting the outcomes we need in our programs?
 - How will we decide what data gives us the "most bang for the buck?" Who should be involved in negotiating the tension between the best data possible and using data-gathering resources for other program needs?
 - Are there people we need to talk with about how best to gather data to address these questions? Is it possible that data already exists somewhere that will help us answer these questions?

- How will we evaluate whether the data-gathering process and the data we gather is appropriate to address the questions or requirements we've identified? Who is responsible for developing , monitoring and improving the data gathering process?
 - What will our process be to make meaning of the data once we have it? Who will be involved? Who is responsible for making sure meaning is made of the data?
 - What will our process be for acting on the data once we talk about what we believe it means? Who is responsible for this process? How will we evaluate if the actions are being taken in response to the data?
- 4.) Do expect that the more data you gather to help you explain and understand what is happening in your program, the more the “answers” you get will lead to additional questions. The unsettling truth is that the more you learn, the less you may feel you know!

Section 6: Is It Progress? Making Meaning of Data

- 1.) Without a clear, shared vision of program purpose and performance indicators, you will find it very difficult to come to a common interpretation of whether data indicates progress or problems. People will have different views of what “should” be happening and will interpret the data through an individual lens. This is a critical problem because it is only when you can negotiate shared meaning from the data that you can move on to negotiating the right action to take in response to the data.
- 2.) Do include as many diverse perspectives as possible when you invite a group to “make meaning” of the data. Don’t be surprised if there is resistance to “making meaning” of the data because most people will be adamant that “the data speaks for itself” and of course everyone sees the “truth” of the data (which will of course be defined in their minds as their interpretation ...). If you don’t draw out the meanings people are making of the data and ask for very specific interpretations, you can easily have a meeting where there appears to be agreement but where people are, in fact, deeply divided over fundamental issues.
- 3.) Don’t lead the witnesses in making meaning of the data. Leaders often end up with a limited and skewed view of what is going on because they tell the troops what they think the data means and the troops outwardly agree – even if they inwardly have another opinion. Resist the temptation to tell people about the meaning of the data and instead be clear about your intention — you want THEM to tell YOU what they think it means.
- 4.) Do use some simple questions to guide the discussion about what the data means. Examples include:
 - Do you see anything that surprises you or that you didn’t expect in the data?
 - What aspects of the data are exactly as you expected? What do you think it means?
 - Are there things about the way we gathered the data that might have had an impact on the results we got? What might those be?
 - Are there things about the questions or survey instrument itself that might have had an impact on the results we got? What might those be?
 - Are there things about what was going on at the time we gathered this data that might have had an impact on the results?
 - What meaning do you make of the results to (each) question?
 - If the meaning of this is (fill in meaning), what actions would it indicate we should consider in response to this data?

- How do you think (legislators, public, funding source representatives, other constituencies) would interpret this data?
- How can we help others make meaning of this data?
- How can we moderate the risk of this data being used inappropriately? How can we help people understand the meanings we've come to?
- If we carried out the same data gathering effort six months from now, what would we like the responses to look like? What will it take to make that happen?
- Does this data indicate we are making good progress in fulfilling our purpose?
- Does this data indicate we are following our principles?
- Does this data indicate we will meet our performance indicators?
- Using the data, what would be the most positive case someone could make for our program?
- Using the data, what would be the most negative case someone could make about our program?

Section 7: Checklist for Implementation

- 1.) Define scope of establishing purpose, principles, performance indicators, and tasks/activities. Decide if you want to look at a regular meeting, a class, a series of classes, a program, a department, etc.
- 2.) Explore why it is important to you to implement this at this point in time. Remember that it will be a difficult, messy, enlivening, frustrating, risky process and you will only build cynicism in your system if you do it as a “flavor of the month” effort. Examine how strongly you feel about this and don’t go any further if you aren’t convinced that this will create a breakthrough difference.
- 3.) Gather materials that currently exist that speak to purpose, principles, performance indicators and tasks/activities.
- 4.) Convene meeting of key individuals to present model and get commitment to pursue developing purpose, principles, performance indicators. Review existing materials to determine if they can be used in work.
- 5.) Develop purpose statement.
- 6.) Make explicit the guiding principles that are alive in the system and need to be honored.
- 7.) Develop appropriate performance indicators.
- 8.) Review tasks and activities within the context of the model. Are there things you should stop doing? Are there things you should start doing? Are there things that are positive and beneficial BUT are not aligned with your purpose, principles and performance indicators?
- 9.) Develop data gathering that supports continuous improvement related to purpose, principles and performance indicators.
- 10.) Develop structures for making meaning of data and acting upon data.
- 11.) Monitor whether people are measuring proposed activities and tasks against purpose, principles and performance indicators.
- 12.) Be rigidly relentless in your focus on purpose and principles and extremely flexible in your approach to what activities/processes are used to achieve your purpose.

Implementation of a performance-driven system generally takes a minimum of 3-5 years. You can track progress of implementation by noticing how often people USE purpose, principles and performance indicators to make decisions about their actions.

Section 8: Examples and Models

A. Overall model with definitions

Purpose

(What am I here for? What am I called to do?
What is my vision of my preferable future?
What is my vision for my highest purpose?)

Progress (Performance) Indicators

(How will I know I am getting closer to my vision?
How will I measure my progress to my preferable future?)

Principles

(What are the values and beliefs that will guide **how** I make progress toward my vision?
What are the principles that must be honored even when [often especially when] they seem to get in the way of activities or progress measures?
What principles will be so important that they will offset the tendency for performance indicator numbers to replace overall purpose in driving activities and tasks?)

Activities and Tools

(What are the processes, procedures, models and tools that I will use in service to reaching my vision?
How can I make sure the activities/tools I use are in alignment with vision, principles and progress measures?
Where am I diluting my ability to achieve highest purpose/greatest progress through continuing with activities and tasks that may be valuable but are not part of my most important mission?)

B. White Consulting Example

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Purpose

(What am I here for? What am I called to do? What is my vision of my preferable future? What is my vision for my highest purpose?)

To help myself, individuals and organizations discover and follow the path to their highest purpose.

Progress Indicators

(How will I know I am getting closer to my vision? How will I measure my progress to my preferable future?)

- ✓ % of repeat customer on client list
- ✓ % of new clients per year
- ✓ # of new client referrals
- ✓ % of personal goals list achieved
- ✓ % of work evaluation scores >45
- ✓ # of days travel per month
- ✓ % of evaluations with high satisfaction
- ✓ % of work completion scores >30

Principles

(What are the values and beliefs that will guide how I make progress toward my vision? What are the principles that must be honored even when [especially when] they seem to get in the way of activities or progress measures?)

- Build Trust
 - Support Courage
 - Express Joy
 - Honor Balance
- Only work with clients I like, trust and respect
 - Money back guarantee on all work
 - Continuous improvement in competence and character
 - Win/Win or No Deal

Activities and Tools

(What are the processes, procedures, models and tools that I will use in service to reaching my vision? How can I make sure the activities/tools I use are in alignment with vision, principles and progress measures?)

Tools I use to explore the questions: Where am I now? Where do I want to be? How will I get there? How will I know I'm making progress on my journey?

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Training | Customized Models |
| Stories | Coaching |
| Policy Development | Intuition |
| Process Consulting | Kitchen table consulting |
| Leadership support | Program Design |
| Program Evaluation | Research Applications |
| Collaboration Facilitation | Vision & Values Focus |
| Performance Measurement | Conflict Facilitation |
| Strategic Planning | Shift "knowing" to "doing" |

C. Nevada ABE example

Purpose of ABE in Nevada

The purpose of Adult Basic Education in Nevada is to increase the reading, writing, speaking, comprehension, mathematics, and problem-solving skills of adult learners so they can achieve their life, work, and educational goals. —*ABE Directors, August 2003*

Performance Indicators

- ✓ Statewide: Required core outcome measures per National Reporting System
- ✓ Programs: Per AELFA-funded grant objectives

Principles Guiding How We Lead Our Programs

Principles Guiding Our Programs

1. We value quantitative and qualitative information to guide and improve our programs.
2. We value accountability from students, staff, and leaders.
3. We value ongoing evaluation and improvement of our programs.
4. We value the dignity of each individual.
5. We value a positive environment.
6. We value the inherent ability within all students to succeed.
7. We value student feedback.
8. We value sharing what we learn with others.
9. We value integrity in how we do our work; we are trustworthy in our actions.

—*ABE Directors, December 2002*

Section 9: Selected Resources for Program Improvement

Compiled by Sharyn Yanoshak, Professional Development Coordinator, 2003

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1. *How Are We Doing? An Inquiry Guide for Adult Education Programs*
http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/teach/inquiry_guide.pdf
A step-by-step, inquiry approach to program improvement. The 134-page manual includes six sessions: 1) Examining our Goals; 2) The Documentation Matrix; 3) Performance Accountability; 4) Inputs-to-Impacts; 5) Documenting Outcomes, Measuring Performance; 6) Considering Next Steps.
2. *Continuous Improvement Measure (CIM)*, CASAS, 2000.
The CIM provides a comprehensive program needs assessment, planning tool, and evaluation instrument. It also helps programs develop an action plan that meets WIA requirements to demonstrate continuous program improvement. The model provides a framework for systematic evaluation of adult education programs including the respective roles of program managers and instructors. More information: CASAS Training and Implementation Department, (800) 255-1036, training@casas.org.
3. "Data-driven Decision Making," *Technology & Learning* June 2002.
Unfortunately, only issues from August 2002 are archived on the Web site (www.techlearning.com). Previous issues can be purchased for \$9 per copy by calling (800) 790-5970.
4. *The Adult Education State Director's Going to Scale Guide*, McLendon and Polis, National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, Inc.
Although developed for statewide initiatives, this guide is useful for carrying any program improvement initiative to scale. ("Going to scale" involves identifying the system that needs to be improved, selecting alternatives, pilot testing and adapting the alternatives to your situation, and integrating the improved system.) Order hard copy (\$10) or disk (\$5) from NAEPDC, 202/624-5250, http://www.naepdc.org/publications/pub_order.html
5. The Pelavin Research Center of the American Institutes for Research has produced many program improvement tools. Go to <http://www.pro-net2000.org/>, click on "information resources," then on "adult education publications from AIR". Some examples of available documents:
 - [Instructor Competencies Assessment Instrument \(2002\)](#).
Renee Sherman, Dionne Dobbins, John Tibbetts, & Judith Crocker. This publication introduces an instructor assessment instrument designed to help programs verify and validate competencies with their staff. The instrument has many uses including as a needs assessment, as a tool to help in planning and evaluating professional development, as a hiring tool, to document need for retention and dismissal, as a tool for program evaluation, to facilitate

communication among staff, and to determine the need for systematic change.
4/11/2002

- [Management Competencies Assessment Instrument \(2002\)](#)
Renee Sherman, Dionne Dobbins, John Tibbetts, Judith Crocker, & Michael Dlott. This publication introduces an assessment instrument to help managers verify and validate their competencies. The instrument has many uses including as a needs assessment, as a tool to help in planning and evaluating professional development, as a hiring tool, to document need for retention and dismissal, as a tool for program evaluation, to facilitate communication among staff, and to determine the need for systematic change. 4/11/2002
- [Management Competencies and Sample Indicators for the Improvement of Adult Education Programs](#)
Renee Sherman, John Tibbetts, Dionne Dobbins, Danielle Weidler. Identifies a set of recognized skills and knowledge areas possessed by effective administrators of adult education programs. 5/31/2001
- [Professional Development Coordinator Competencies and Sample Indicators for the Improvement of Adult Education Programs \(2002\)](#)
Renee Sherman, Dionne Dobbins, John Tibbetts, Judith Crocker, & Michael Dlott. Identifies a set of recognized skills and knowledge areas possessed by effective professional development coordinators in adult education programs. This publication provides a brief overview of the professional development competencies, including the development process, the overall organization of the competencies, and suggested uses. 4/23/2002

6. Leadership Books

Debbie White's *Bibliography of Leadership Books* (Spring 2003), supplemented with Nevadans' recommendations, lists current resources that support effective leadership, with a particular focus on materials that emphasize the importance of purpose, principles and performance data in achieving success as a leader. See Appendix A: Bibliography of Leadership Books

Appendix A: Bibliography of Leadership Books

Compiled by Debbie White, White Consulting, 2003

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Purpose: To provide leaders of adult education programs in Nevada with current resources that support effective leadership, with a particular focus on materials that emphasize the importance of purpose, principles and performance data in achieving success as a leader.

Bellman, G. (2002) *The Beauty of The Beast*. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler. ISBN: 1576750930

"Organizations are the world's 21st-century dilemma. They are magnificent and mad, wonderful and wretched, crazy and compelling. They make so little, and so much, sense. ... Our ability to create organizations exceeds our ability to control them; they have power beyond imagining."

How is it that groups of well-intentioned people, joined by common purpose, can so often drive each other crazy and create organizations of deep "dysfunction?"

Bellman has a deep understanding of both people and organizational systems and strong compassion for the damage we do and the damage done to us in organizations. This book is powerful because it reframes so much organizational and personal "dysfunction" in terms of underlying "positive" motivations that go astray.

Bellman provides numerous lists of questions and suggestions for exercises designed for both individuals and work groups. He presents a model of leadership based on developing the capacity of the organization, rather than maintaining the control of the leader.

For those who are feeling "burned-out" by all that needs to be fixed in their organizations, this book provides a lifeline of hope and help.

Block, P. (2001) *The Answer to How is Yes*. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler. ISBN: 1576751686

Peter Block is a consultant and a philosopher. The title of this book suggests he has spent time with a Zen koan or two. However, unlike many philosophical tracts, this book explores complicated concerns using simple, understandable language.

Block believes we spend so much time focused on how to get things done, how to make changes in ourselves and our organizations, that we are rarely clear about why we are doing what we are doing. He suggests that until we have clarity and deep commitment to our personal purpose in life, it is unlikely we will be able to create it in our organizations.

This book is often at odds with popular notions about leadership and creating change. Noticing what is most challenging or provocative about Block's approach is one way to shed light on one's beliefs and assumptions about leadership.

Collins, J. & Porras, J. (1994) *Built To Last - Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. New York, Harper Business. ISBN: 0887306713

"Yet, much of what we found surprised us — even shocked us at times. Widely held myths fell by the dozen. Traditional frameworks buckled and cracked. Midway through the project, we found ourselves disoriented, as evidence flew in the face of many of our own preconceptions and prior "knowledge." We had to unlearn before we could learn. We had to toss out old frameworks and build new ones, sometimes from the ground up. It took six years. But it was worth every minute."

This book is based on data, not opinion. It looks at what makes companies successful over the long term using numbers to tease out trends and themes. What the authors found was surprising, even to them. It may not be to you.

What are the impact of vision and values over the long term on profitability and stock value? At first glance, this may not seem to have much to do with the education environment, but the lessons learned from examining the long-term performance of the for-profit companies can be applied to challenges in the education world.

While doing things based on vision and values is often an "easy sell" within educational settings, those who fund education programs may want assurances that the resources being used by educators are giving the most "bang for the buck." *Built to Last* provides a framework for a research-based argument demonstrating that even the most hard-hearted capitalist would do well to focus on values as a key foundation for economic performance in a company.

Collins and Porras highlight what the research says about the "habits" of successful companies. These companies tended to be more "both/and" than "either/or;" they knew how to both preserve the core values while stimulating progress; they set "big, hairy, audacious goals;" they had cult-like cultures; they tended to "try a lot of stuff and keep what works;" they generally had home-grown management; and they believed "good enough" never is good enough.

Collins, J. (2001) *Good to Great* . New York, Harper Collins. ISBN: 0066620996

In *Good to Great*, Collins expands the databased inquiry into key factors in the success of extremely high performing companies. The question he explores here is what differentiates the good companies from the great companies — what are the factors that allow companies to make the leap to greatness?

Again, this is not a book of unsubstantiated opinion. Collins kept a 21-person research team busy for five years — reading articles, interviewing key people and creating 384 megabytes of computer data for analysis.

The data contradict many familiar myths about what makes leaders and organizations successful, and provide specific guidance regarding where leaders should direct their time and resources to support maximum success.

While this book uses the experience of for-profit companies, the themes uncovered are important to leaders of any organization.

Good to Great provides a detailed picture of how successful companies actually approach purpose, principles and performance measurement. While many books talk about the importance of "vision and values," this book provides a concrete view of how companies that operate from vision and values actually "walk the talk."

Of particular interest to public sector leaders will be the finding that the greatest companies did not start with vision, but instead started by getting the "right people" on board. This finding has serious implications for leaders who may have little ability to influence who is on their leadership team.

Drucker, P. (1990) *Managing the Non-Profit Organization— Principles and Practices*. New York, Harper Business. ISBN: 0887306012

"Leadership is accountable for results. And leadership always asks, 'Are we faithful stewards of the talents entrusted to us?' The talents, the gifts of people - the talents, the gifts of money. Leadership is *doing*. It isn't just thinking great thoughts; it isn't just charisma, it isn't play-acting. It is doing. And the first imperative of doing is to revise the mission, to refocus it, and to build and organize, and then abandon."

Drucker lays out a clear summary of the challenges and opportunities for non-profit organizations, and develops his themes in a series of interviews with key figures in the world of non-profit organizations. The book consists of five parts:

- The Mission Comes First
- From Mission to Performance
- Managing for Performance
- People and Relationships
- Developing Yourself

Throughout the book, Drucker emphasizes that leadership isn't enough, that mission is the critical foundation for success in a non-profit. His concept of leadership echoes Greenleaf's in that he sees the leader as being in service to the mission.

If you are only going to read one book this year about leadership in a non-profit organization, this is the one I'd recommend. Drucker understands the incredible overload most leaders experience and how this can lead to both avoiding critical action or to frantically acting on as much as possible. He hammers home the few key things that leaders must focus on, and provides a specific blueprint for screening out the rest.

Gardner, J. (1990) *On Leadership*. New York, Simon & Schuster. ISBN: 0029113121

This book looks at what leadership is and isn't, whether or not there are leadership "traits," the myth of charismatic leadership, and the need for leaders to be adept at "both/and" thinking and action rather than "either/or" reactions. Gardner emphasizes

the importance of context in leadership success, and looks at leadership through a systemic lens.

Gardner is clear that organizations are not healthy when they have an exceedingly strong leader "at the top," with little leadership exhibited at other levels. He is equally clear that emerging models of organizations built on very widely dispersed leadership are unlikely to be much better. He makes the case that organizations will be best served by a combination of centralized and decentralized leadership.

Gardner is a seasoned realist, writing from the perspective of deep experience with how difficult leadership is. But he is also a relentless idealist, reminding again and again of the power of purpose and principles in changing the world.

Goleman, Daniel P. (2001) *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books. ISBN: 0553104624 (Recommended by Terri Kaulentis)

Greenleaf, R. (1998) *The Power of Servant Leadership*. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler. ISBN: 1576750353

"Why are liberating visions so rare? Because it is so difficult to give them. The other half is: because so few of those who have the gift for summoning a vision, and the power to articulate it persuasively, have either the urge or the courage to try! And it takes all three. "

This is a fairly utopian vision of leadership, and Greenleaf acknowledges in his book that he was able to develop his vision of leadership by being spared heavy executive responsibilities in the positions he held in organizations. Don't expect this book to reflect the realities most leaders must contend with. In Greenleaf's view, leadership is about service, and a particular type of service. He doesn't shy away from framing his concepts in broad religious and spiritual terms, though I would not characterize this collection of essays as a "religious" book.

I believe the value of this book is that it so clearly and beautifully talks about leadership from the perspective of mission or vocation.

Even if you have no interest in a more expansive view of leadership, it is worth picking up this book just to read his final essay "Old Age: The Ultimate Test of Spirit."

Harvey, Eric and Lucia, Al (no date) *Walk the Talk ... And Get the Results You Want*. Dallas, TX, *The Walk the Talk Company*. ISBN: 1885228511 (Recommended by Sharyn Yanoshak)

Organizational "guru" Ken Blanchard writes in the forward that although he is a veteran proponent of empowerment, integrity, and quality, he found this book to be an "ah-ha" experience. The book uses allegorical techniques to show the impact of values-conflicting behavior on performance. It addresses the conflicts and tensions between values and behavior — between what we say we believe and what we actually do.

Heifetz, R & Linsky, M. (2002) *Leadership on the Line — Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*. Boston, MA, Harvard Business School Publishing. ISBN: 1578514371

"To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear - their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking - with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility. ... And people resist in all kinds of creative and unexpected ways that can get you taken out of the game: pushed aside, undermined or eliminated."

Heifetz and Linsky are academics and consultants who have written a surprisingly practical and readable book on leadership. This book builds on themes Heifetz explored in the much more theoretical book "Leadership without Easy Answers."

Unlike many leadership books, "Leadership on the Line" directly acknowledges the considerable danger that is attached to exercising leadership, and does not blithely assume that good intentions, emotional intelligence or a focus on important mission will provide protection from the dangers of leading people where they may not want to go.

This book will be most useful to readers who have some familiarity with group process and organizational dynamics from a system's perspective. It will be especially helpful to leaders who are concerned with power dynamics in their institutions.

I believe the most powerful material in this book relates to the guidance on how to "get on the balcony" and distant enough from situations to gain useful perspective. While there is nothing surprising in the suggestions, Heifetz emphasizes throughout the book how critical this skill is to effective leadership.

Johnson, B. (1992) *Polarity Management - Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems*. Amherst, MA, HRD Press. ISBN: 0874251761

"Many of the current trends in business and industry are polarities to manage, not problems to solve. These trends are often described as movement from one way of thinking to another. ... Seeing these movements as 'problems to solve' radically undermines our ability to implement them. We define the problem as what we are going 'from' and the solution as what we are going 'to.' For example, we need to move *from the problem of centralization to the solution, which is decentralization.*"

This book transformed the way I see organizational problems and my approach to "solving" problems. Johnson's simple and powerful models can be used at all levels of the organization to help people make sense of the forces that are creating "problems," and to radically shift the way they see "solutions." It is possible to read this book very quickly, skimming the content to get the basic concepts. However, I've now read the book several times and each reading has helped me utilize the material more effectively.

I believe this book provides both a conceptual framework and specific tools that many leaders will find immediately useful. These concepts and techniques are also extremely compatible with a focus on purpose, principles and performance.

Morgenstern, J. (1998) *Organizing From the Inside Out*. New York, Owl Books. ISBN: 0805056491

Morgenstern, J. (2000) *Time Management From the Inside Out*. New York, Owl Books. ISBN: 0805064699

Every leader I know has too much to do and not enough time to do it in. Most are struggling to maintain some order in the midst of a deluge of paper and electronic communication. While many time management and organization books detail tools and techniques that are well-suited to the "naturally organized," Morgenstern provides ways for each individual to assess their own style and choose approaches that are a good match to their personal strengths and needs. She also tackles some of the possible "pay-offs" people may be receiving from poor time or materials management, and suggests ways to overcome these psychological obstacles.

As a creative and sometimes chaotic person, I found these books tremendously helpful in finding tools that work for me. Morgenstern's refrain is the same as that found in the leadership books recommended here: first, decide your real purpose and most important goals and only then begin to explore the activities that are necessary to achieve your vision.

Morrell, Margot et al (2001). *Shackleton's Way: Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer*. Viking. ISBN: 06708919672001 (Recommended by Terri Kaulentis)

Robbins, H. & Finley, M. (2000). *The New Why Teams Don't Work - What Goes Wrong and How To Make It Right*. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler. ISBN: 1576751104

Every leader creates teams, serves on teams or disbands teams. Most leaders have experienced the downside of teams more consistently than they have the promised productivity and innovation that teams are supposed to deliver. This book clearly and pragmatically spells out why teams don't work and what leaders must do if they want to experience the benefits of productive teams.

There are far more scholarly books on teams but I appreciate the easy to use and remember models and stories included in this book, as well as their book *Why Changes Doesn't Work*.

Vaill, P. (1996) *Learning As A Way Of Being - Strategies For Survival in a World of Permanent White Water*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 0787902462

Vaill defines learning as "changes a person makes in himself or herself that increase the know-why and/or the know-what and/or the

My view is that every educator should read this book as a means of counteracting the tendency to see learning as too narrowly linked to "education."

know-how the person possesses with respect to a given subject." He goes on to show why many of our current models of how best to learn are completely inadequate given the level of change and "permanent white water" we live in.

Vaill devotes a chapter to "leaderly learning" and makes a strong case that the defining trait of leadership in these times will be focused, skilled learning. He suggests that neither the organizations leaders work in nor the educational institutions preparing leaders are supporting leaders in the level of learning that they will need to master.

I believe that any leader who is concerned with how to keep themselves and their staff members current with the skills and knowledge needed to meet emerging demands should read this book. I doubt any manager who does will ever approach staff training in the same way they did before.