

**THE 8TH HABIT in the 8th Grade:
Applying Stephen Covey's Leadership Models to Education
Rich Haglund,¹ September 2008**

In his book, THE 8TH HABIT, Stephen Covey takes the principles for individual success outlined in Covey's earlier book, THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE and applies them to organizations. I'm going to apply the principles for empowering individuals throughout organizations to education, through the foundational principles of the Tennessee State Board of Education's [Master Plan](#).²

Vision

The highest challenge inside organizations, including families, is to set them up and run them in a way that enables each person to inwardly sense his or her innate worth and potential for greatness and to contribute his or her unique talents and passion—in other words, voice—to accomplish the organization's purpose and highest priorities in a principle-centered way. We could call this the *Leadership Challenge*.³

It's the *leadership beliefs and style of the manager*, not the nature of the job or economic era, that defines whether a person is a knowledge worker or not."⁴

Where is the best place to give trust, to communicate people's worth and potential? Without any question, it's the family. If the family is dysfunctional, where is the next best place? The school."⁵

"*Vision* is seeing with the mind's eye what is possible in people, in projects, in causes and in enterprises."⁶ Vision is more important than expertise for any leader. Covey notes that integrity is paramount,⁷ and that, in a survey of 54,000 people, being visionary is fourth on the list of essential qualities of a leader, while being expert was eleventh.⁸

What leadership beliefs and styles do our school leaders have? What characteristics should they have to enable teachers and students to succeed? Do our school leaders believe that the adults in education are or can become knowledge workers? Do they expect the same of the students?

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² Available at http://state.tn.us/sbe/Final_MP_Booklet_FY09.pdf.pdf (last visited Sep. 8, 2008).

³ *Id.* at 99.

⁴ Stephen Covey, THE 8TH HABIT: FROM EFFECTIVENESS TO GREATNESS 265 (2004).

⁵ *Id.* at 182.

⁶ *Id.* at 65.

⁷ Indeed, he explains that "90 percent of leadership failures are character failures." *Id.* at 147.

⁸ *Id.* at 148.

Effective Leaders

Leadership is, according to Covey, “communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.”⁹ The roles of leadership “are simply four qualities of personal leadership—vision, discipline, passion and conscience—*writ large* in an organization.”¹⁰

Leaders must be focused and skilled at executing. Focus includes two key roles: modeling and pathfinding. Execution includes aligning and empowering.¹¹ “[E]ach role directly or indirectly affirms people’s worth as whole people and empowers the unleashing of their potential.”¹² The Master Plan states, “Effective school leaders model continuous professional growth.” They also “must be able to develop dynamic leadership teams to share responsibility and ownership of the school mission.”

Preparing “all Tennessee children for successful post-secondary work, education and citizenship”—the stated vision of the State Board of Education—is arguably synonymous with enabling each student “to inwardly sense his or her innate worth and potential for greatness,” so that each student can “contribute his or her unique talents and passion” to our communities.

To empower others, leaders “[f]ocus talent on results, not methods.”¹³ “[Y]ou cannot hold people responsible for results if you supervise their methods. *You* then become responsible for results and rules replace human judgment, creativity and responsibility.”¹⁴ Effective leaders “set up the *conditions of empowerment* and then . . . get out of people’s way, clear their path and become a source of help as requested.”¹⁵ Leaders can legitimately hold people accountable for results only if they follow that pattern. If they dictate methods, it will be too easy for teachers to say, “well, what do you need me for?”

School leaders who understand and apply these principals will have more satisfied and effective teachers: “meaningful empowerment significantly reduces turnover.”¹⁶ Empowerment in organizations means employees are “doing work they love, in a way that meets their deepest needs and the essential needs of the organization.” Employees should strongly agree with this question, “at work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?”¹⁷

Consider this statement by Arthur W. Jones: “All organizations are perfectly aligned to get the results they get.”¹⁸

Now think about a school district near you: one that seems to be struggling to get the right staff, to attract customers (students and parents) and produce quality results (students prepared for post-secondary success). Now apply Covey’s analysis of what happens when “an organization neglects the mind, body, heart or spirit of its people.” See if the same traits are evident in that school district.

⁹ *Id.* at 98.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 114.

¹¹ *Id.* at 118.

¹² *Id.* at 271.

¹³ *Id.* at 114.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 286.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 264.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 138. See also the work of the Center for Teaching Quality: <http://www.teachingquality.org/twc/whatweknow.htm> (last visited Sep. 8, 2008).

¹⁷ Covey at 253-254.

¹⁸ Arthur W. Jones, quoted in THE 8TH HABIT at 108.

If an organization regularly neglects the spirit or conscience of its people, the organization will be filled with “backbiting, in-fighting, . . . information hoarding, and defensive, protective communication.”¹⁹

If an organization neglects the mind or vision, then there will be “no shared vision or common value system. . . . You would see people acting with hidden agendas, playing political games, and using different criteria in decision making.”²⁰

If an organization neglects the body (systems or processes), there will be “no alignment or discipline built into the organization’s structures, systems, processes and cultures.”²¹ Systems, including those of “accountability, reward and compensation, [and] promotion” that are profoundly misaligned “with the marketplace and with customers.”²² In schools, that means that what parents and students are seeking will not be what the district is offering. So, many of those students and parents—those who have the means—will go elsewhere: private schools, home schooling or move to another district.

This neglect is critical because when leaders and others throughout the organization feel the inevitable loss of control, “bureaucracy, hierarchies, rules and regulations will become like prostheses for trust.”²³

Finally, if the organization neglects the heart—when there is “no passion, no emotional connection to the goals or work,” there will be “profound disempowerment of the people.”²⁴

Effective Teachers

Everything school leaders do for teachers, teachers should do for students.

Rigorous, Relevant Curriculum

Leaders and teachers need to communicate clearly to students this message:

“Your security does not come from your job or from the patronage of other people; it comes from your ability to meet needs and solve problems. Keep investing in those abilities and you will have endless opportunities.”²⁵ Or, as the report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, from the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, notes:

This is a world in which a very high level of preparation in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, science, literature, history, and the arts will be an indispensable foundation for everything that comes after for most members of the workforce. It is a world in which comfort with ideas and abstractions is the passport to a good job, in which creativity and innovation are the key to the good life, in which high levels of education — a very different kind of education than most of us have had — are going to be the only security there is.²⁶

¹⁹ *Id.* at 107.

²⁰ *Id.* at 107-108.

²¹ *Id.* at 108.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.* at 109.

²⁵ *Id.* at 145.

²⁶ *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, Executive Summary, available at http://www.skillscommission.org/pdf/exec_sum/ToughChoices_EXECSUM.pdf (last viewed Sep. 8, 2008). Also

Sufficient Resources

To succeed, all organizations, including schools, must be “fast, flexible and flat.”²⁷ And they must “benchmark against ‘world-class.’”²⁸

In the industrial age and in the leftover industrial age approach to management—or schooling—“people are put on the [profit and loss] statement as an expense; equipment is put on the balance sheet as an investment.”²⁹ If we are to succeed in preparing children for success in post-secondary life, that perspective must be changed. Peter Drucker stated that, for the first time, large numbers of people “have choices. For the first time, they will have to manage themselves. And society is totally unprepared for it.”³⁰

After effective leaders and teachers have “develop[ed] dynamic leadership teams to share responsibility and ownership of the school mission,”³¹ they must execute their strategy. Execution of that strategy requires leaders to “set up the structure, get the *right* people in the *right* jobs with the *right* tools and support.” Leaders should then “get out of their way and give help as requested.”³²

see the recent story in a Nashville newspaper about this:

<http://www.nashvillecitypaper.com/news.php?viewStory=62605/> (last viewed Sep. 8, 2008).

²⁷ *Id.* at 115.

²⁸ *Id.* at 104.

²⁹ *Id.* at 16.

³⁰ Peter F. Drucker, “Managing Knowledge Means Managing Oneself,” *Leader to Leader*, 16 (Spring 2000), pp. 8-10.

³¹ SBE Master Plan, available at http://state.tn.us/sbe/Final_MP_Booklet_FY09.pdf.pdf (last visited Sep. 8, 2008).

³² Covey at 226.