



## BOOK REVIEW:

# *What's your Leadership Story?: A School Leader's Guide to Aligning How you Lead with Who You Are*

By Susan M. Sibert, D.Ed.



It happens to all school leaders. The workload and busy days and nights of school leadership take over, and self-reflection of effectiveness dwindles. Every school leader has a leadership style and goals to lead a school, but the reality is that leaders sometimes have not clearly defined or updated the core

values, mindset and personal leadership style relative to the leadership situation. Furthermore, the realities and time demands of the job do not allow for weekly reflection, let alone reflection throughout the day. Principals are in the midst of leading, but also need to reflect on leading and desire direction on how to frame where they are within their own leadership stories. Once defined, leadership styles can be weighed against what is happening in the world, including post-pandemic changes in our students, families and schools, as well as the pressure and criticism school leaders face due to restrictive budgets, social media and litigation.

*What's Your Leadership Story? A School Leader's Guide to Aligning How You Lead with Who You Are*, an Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development publication, is available in digital or paper formats. The book is a type of workbook to guide school leaders to consider the effects and effectiveness of their school leadership. It also helps them define personal philosophy of leading, which is a good idea whether you are new to leading, new to a school or have been leading for many years and need to revisit your philosophy and goals. As times and situations change, school leaders should re-evaluate where they are in their leadership stories. This book provides scenarios school leaders face, questions on which to reflect and space to write about each scenario. The authors pose questions for reflection, including how you see yourself and how those you lead may see you. Reflections include consideration of both personal and professional identities. The exercises of reading and writing are designed for school leaders to form what the authors call a personal leadership philosophy (PLP), a one-page document that explains and defines your leadership, which should be revisited on a regular basis.

The authors identify eight steps to write the PLP (p.13):



## WHAT'S YOUR LEADERSHIP STORY?

A School Leader's Guide to Aligning How You Lead with Who You Are

GRETCHEN OLTMAN  
VICKI BAUTISTA

1. Identify your leadership style.
2. Define your core values.
3. Engaging with your mindset.
4. Exploring your real-life experiences.
5. Creating a draft of your leadership philosophy.
6. Reflecting on your leadership philosophy.
7. Revising your leadership philosophy.
8. Sharing your leadership philosophy.

The authors suggest independently reading each of the 10 chapters, then discussing them with trusted colleagues. I could see this book as the center of a professional development activity for a group of school leaders at a single school, district or across districts. It would even work well with two or three school leaders who felt comfortable coming together to share thoughts and ideas. The book could

be utilized during the school year, part of the year or during the summer.

For each chapter, there are three active engagement methods. The first are sections titled “Consider This,” with questions encountered in school leadership for consideration. The second feature of each chapter includes questions that the reader can answer independently or in a partnership or small group with other school leaders. The third feature outlines descriptions of actual situations that school leaders face and how each situation was managed, which assists the reader in determining their leadership style. The first step of creating or revising a PLP, the authors report, is looking in the mirror and identifying personal and core values and what matters most in your personal and professional backgrounds. New school leaders should be able to speak about their PLP to prepare for leadership employment. This book will also assist experienced leaders to reflect on why they became principals and where they are in their unique leadership stories and career paths, examining both past and future goals. Another area of reflection is the leader’s mindset and whether the leader believes that things can change and improve, which includes “accepting failure as a necessary part of learning” (p. 63). Chapter two covers the three main leadership styles, which the authors call directing, guiding and enabling, as well as several other well-known leadership styles. The authors present case studies as lists of questions relative to each leadership style. Readers can reflect on when each style has been used (or might be used) in leadership situations. Principals can work through their decision-making process, the leadership style used, whether the actions were effective and why the results were realized.

Chapter 8 of this 180-page book includes examples of PLPs with specific recommendations on how to improve a written PLP. Key questions suggested to evaluate a PLP include identifying the leader’s leadership style, core values, mindset and unique leadership experiences. The book focuses on

developing individual leadership style and a process to continuously reflect on the PLP and adjust it as situations and times change. First drafts of PLPs are offered, followed by critiques of those drafts, to demonstrate the specific clarifying process school leaders can use to write and define their own PLP. A key to a successful PLP is to continuously reflect on leadership experiences and how they fit into the leader’s PLP.

This book is written in a user-friendly style, with simple questions that generate significant reflection. The writing tasks could potentially be completed as a thinking reflection while doing mundane daily tasks, like getting ready for the day or waiting for an appointment to begin. This book could be used repeatedly over time, and it could be an effective way for busy leaders to learn the self-reflection process on a daily or weekly basis, so leadership skills and goals are continuously improved. Additionally, it could be used alone, as an independent study, or with any number of other school leaders. The use of this book could potentially start out as shared reading for a school leadership team and then become an independent weekly check-in for each of the team members.

All school leaders face challenges, but the authors of *What is Your Leadership Story? A School Leader’s Guide to Aligning How You Lead with Who You Are*, provide school leaders with the power to improve leadership on an ongoing basis. In a time when many aspects of school leadership are beyond the leader’s control, this book gives school leaders the power to write their own leadership stories and to continue to improve. ■

#### REFERENCE:

Oltman, G., & Bautista, V. (2021). *What’s your Leadership Story? A School Leader’s Guide to Aligning How you Lead with Who You Are*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (ASCD).

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## Submit an Article for The Pennsylvania Administrator Spring 2024 Theme Edition

The Pennsylvania Principals Association is seeking articles for the **Spring 2024 THEME issue** of *The Pennsylvania Administrator* magazine. The theme is: **“Reviving the Teaching Profession: Our Future in Education.”**

*What are the challenges in today’s schools that are keeping high school graduates and adults from entering the education profession? How can these challenges be overcome to revive the profession? How can we be a part of shaping a culture that promotes teaching and learning?*

**What impacts could the following have related to our theme?**

- Teacher Mentors
- Guidance Counselor influence
- Advisor/Advisee programs
- Pre-Apprenticeships
- CTC programs (Childcare and Support Services Management or Education, General)
- Articulation Agreements

To submit an article for this issue, please send it to [sherit@papprincipals.org](mailto:sherit@papprincipals.org) by **March 22, 2024**. For article specifications, please visit: <https://www.papprincipals.org/publications/the-pennsylvania-administrator/how-to-submit-an-article/>