

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“The work of educators differs from that of professionals in other fields in its opportunity to influence the holistic growth of persons and their communities. Teachers and administrators, on a daily basis and over an extended period of time, work with young people as they pass through their formative years. They have the privilege of creating environments where persons can learn and develop as healthy, moral, responsible, competent spouses, parents, workers, citizens, friends, and individuals. This is education. Anything less or different represents a reductionistic, bastardized understanding of our field.”

—Lynn G. Beck

“Renewal is about the process of individual and organizational change, about nurturing the spiritual, affective, and intellectual connections in the lives of educators working together to understand and improve their practice.”

—Kenneth A. Sirotnik

In the words of Elaine Wilmore (2002), “Being a leader is not an easy job” (p. 90). As principals, we are confronted with ethical and moral situations that challenge our sensibilities and, at times, frustrate us to the breaking point. This book is

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written as a basic primer to alert you to issues that are too often taken for granted and rarely addressed. A variety of options were available to me in framing this book. I could have taken a deeply philosophical approach that grappled with numerous ethical dilemmas without presenting a specific direction for practice. Such an approach, although intellectually satisfying, would not, in my estimation, provide you with more concrete information for practically serving in your role as principal. I could also have taken a detailed theoretical perspective by highlighting and reviewing the work of scholars such as Martin Buber (1965), David Hume (1983), Immanuel Kant (1966), Lawrence Kohlberg (1971), Friedrich Nietzsche (1973), and, more recently, Nel Noddings (2003). But again, I wanted to provide a more practical approach; besides, many other excellent works have been published in this area for you to consider. Another tactic would be to provide you with several approaches for resolving real-world ethical and moral dilemmas by working through varied case studies. The works of Maxcy (2002) and Strike, Haller, and Soltis (2005) are perhaps the best examples of this approach.

The approach taken in this book is to provide an introduction to ethical and spiritual ideas related to the principalship that is content rich, encourages reflection, and presents practical ideas for school leadership. The work is not morally neutral, in that I have a definite viewpoint and approach that I advocate. Still, you are encouraged to develop your own approach to the subject. The purpose of the book, then, is fourfold:

1. Review key ideas of ethical and spiritual leadership by highlighting best practices.
2. Highlight leadership virtues that I deem essential for school leadership.
3. Present various approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas.
4. Champion moral imperatives for school leadership.

Included throughout the book are reflection and self-assessment tools encouraging you to examine your ethical and spiritual leadership proclivities and interests.

Ethics is not universal. What one principal may consider unethical, another may consider morally responsible. Like leadership, ethics is “not a neat and tidy concept,” explain Komives and colleagues (1998, p. 264). Leading ethically and adhering to one’s moral principles aren’t easy. Life and leadership are complicated. As a principal, you should expect to be continually bombarded and confronted with dilemmas that aren’t easily resolvable. As human beings, we are fallible; we make mistakes. Yet leading with conviction and integrity means making the tough choices even in the face of staunch opposition, personally and socially. We need principals with deep-seated convictions, a strong sense of morals, and an unwavering commitment to doing the right thing. As Komives and colleagues remind us, “leading with a moral purpose is central to the leadership process” (p. 271).

This work is also guided by eight assumptions of ethical leadership reviewed by Komives and colleagues (1998), citing Lucas and Anello (1995):

1. Ethics is the heart of leadership—leading with integrity.
2. All leadership is value driven—treating others justly and fairly.
3. The journey to ethical leadership begins with an examination of personal values—reflecting on one’s core values. These values serve as moral compasses to guide decisions you make about ethical dilemmas you face.
4. Ethical leadership can be learned in a variety of ways—through personal experience, trial and error, reflection, and so on.
5. Ethical leadership involves a connection between ethical thought and action—what is necessary is not to learn many ethical theorists and philosophical works, but rather to engage in reflecting personal values applied to real ethical dilemmas.
6. Character development is an essential ingredient of ethical leadership—“walking the talk.”
7. Members at all levels of an organization or community have the opportunity and responsibility to participate in

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the process of exercising ethical leadership—all members of the school have a responsibility to act ethically and to advance core values of the school.

8. Everything we do teaches—we are role models, and our actions speak louder than our words.

Reflective Questions

1. Consider leaders you have known. Assess their ethical leadership skills. What stands out as particularly noteworthy? Unworthy?
2. Assess the ethical climate in your school. How can you contribute to a more ethical climate?
3. What ethical or moral challenges do you face? Explain.
4. React to the eight assumptions listed above. Which make the most sense to you?

What can we say about spirituality? I wrote this book because I believe that leadership is a spiritual and intellectual calling. Leadership, like teaching, is both a science and an art. Many believe that principals are born great. Others maintain that one can become a great principal. Serving as principal affords you the opportunity to accomplish something special, to make a significant difference in the lives of many students, teachers, and others. Some educators value working only with students as a classroom teacher. Doing so is lofty and should be acknowledged and rewarded. Serving as principal, however, gives you the chance of making a difference on a larger scale. Many principals I have known care deeply about their work. They are involved in what Gary Zukav (2000) calls “sacred tasks.” In his words,

Your sacred task is part of the agreement that your soul made with the Universe before you were born. When you are doing

it, you are happy and fulfilled. You know that you are in a special and wonderful place. . . . When you are not doing your sacred task, you are miserable. (p. 241)

People have different sacred tasks. For some, starting a business might serve as a path for fulfillment; for others, it might be to raise a family, or to cook. For us, it is leading: inspiring, encouraging . . . touching another's soul . . . moving them to realization and understanding. As principals, we must recognize our sacred task. Never forget why you are a principal.

Reflective Questions

1. What does spiritual leadership mean to you?
2. How is serving as a principal a "sacred task"?

The major themes or underlying assumptions of this book and series on the principalship are as follows:

- As principal, you model ethical behavior and base decisions on a moral grounding aligned to school and district values. You openly engage faculty, students, and community in discussions of ethical issues and moral dilemmas. You remain proactive by engaging in such conversations by reviewing school policies or ethical codes for behavior. However, you don't rely on these stated codes to perfunctorily dictate behavior. Rather, you encourage critical thinking, intellectual discourse, and critical reflection about pressing issues or situations as they arise. You encourage a learning community in which these ideas are encouraged and supported (Starratt, 2002).
- As principal, you maintain an unwavering moral commitment to high achievement for all students. You serve as a champion for the rights of all students to receive the highest-quality education possible. You encourage high-quality teaching and set

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high standards for performance, socially and academically. In this role, you champion justice, equality, and opportunity for all students, teachers, parents, and community members (Starratt, 2003).

- The principal must play an active, ongoing role in ethical leadership. The comprehensive study *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship* (Portin, 2003) indicated that principals do not necessarily have to have expertise in all areas (e.g., instructional, cultural, managerial, human resources, strategic, external development, micropolitical leadership), but they must be master “diagnosticians,” able to provide the school what it needs at the right time and in the right context. Nevertheless, I maintain that ethical leadership is qualitatively different from most other forms of leadership. Although it’s difficult to separate each form of leadership from the others, because they all form an undifferentiated whole, ethical leadership can never be simply delegated to others. Every word you speak, every action you take shapes the ethical climate of your school. Others confront moral dilemmas and make ethical decisions, but you, as the principal, play a modeling role for the school community (Hopkins, 1997).

- The work you do as principal is spiritual in nature. Your work is buttressed by a firm set of values and beliefs about leadership. You act consistently on these beliefs. You are concerned with

“The principal is the ‘high priest,’ the one who seeks to define, strengthen, and articulate those enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its identity.”

—Thomas J. Sergiovanni

the growth of all people in your school—academically, socially, and emotionally. You realize that you prepare students for life, not just for school. You are people oriented and exhibit an ethic of caring and concern for all community members. You care deeply about assisting each

person to achieve her or his potential. You provide a conducive learning community that fosters holistic learning and development. You value aesthetics; the arts; and commonly held values of trust, respect, and tolerance. Human values are at the center of

your work. You break through mundane daily routines and help others see possibilities for personal growth and hope for a better future and world. These and other similar ideas are of utmost concern for you, as spiritual leader (Gallegos Nava, 2001).

- The relationship between ethics and spirit is obvious to you. Promulgating ethical behavior and affirming moral commitment are spiritual imperatives, because they go to the very core of your work. They are what drives and sustains you. They are important; they make a difference.

This book and series are also aligned with standards established by the prominent Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC). ELCC standards are commonly accepted by most educational organizations concerned with preparing high-quality educational leaders and as such are most authoritative (Wilmore, 2002). The ELCC, an arm of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, developed six leadership standards used widely in principal preparation. These standards formed the basis for this book and series:

1.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community.

2.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practices to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.

3.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

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4.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

*5.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner.

6.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

*This standard is addressed in this book.

Readers should also familiarize themselves with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium and National Association of Elementary School Principals standards (see, e.g., http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_School_Leaders_Licensure_Consortium/ and <http://www.boyercenter.org/basicsschool/naesp.shtml>).

Another important point to make in this introduction is for you to realize that although with other forms of leadership (e.g.,

“One aspect of a student’s moral education lies not in the curriculum but in the behavior of the faculty, staff, and administration and in the policies of the institution.”

—Harold T. Shapiro

instructional, operational, and strategic) you must take specific actions to address them and at times you don’t actually have to actively engage in them, as an ethical and spiritual leader you are continually affecting school culture and climate 24-7. Your daily activities, actions, memoranda, e-mails, personal con-

tacts, decisions, and so forth reflect, shape, and influence school culture and climate.

Your actions as an ethical and spiritual leader are affirmed by these general core values (which are meant to serve as examples, not as an exhaustive list):

- Respect for the dignity of all persons
- Emphasis on an ethic of caring
- Belief in the power of education to transform lives
- Dedication to support educators as change agents
- Affirmation of social justice, equity, and educational opportunity
- Commitment to appreciating and celebrating diversity and cultural understanding among all people in a free, democratic society
- Belief that quality learning for all students depends on quality learning for all educators
- Development of the whole person
- Commitment to professional excellence, integrity, collegiality, and ethical behavior
- Support for a milieu that encourages intellectual curiosity, critical inquiry, and rational pedagogy
- Emphasis on a constructivist, hands-on approach to learning
- Belief in lifelong learning
- Dedication to making a difference in the academic and social lives of students

These general core values are actualized in your commitment to core values related specifically to leadership, as exemplified in these ideas:

- Strong leadership has the power to improve schools.
- Everyone is able to lead in some way to some degree in a given situation at some time.
- Leaders are not the same—leadership styles, personalities, or traits vary greatly.
- No one way of leading is better than another—each leader is talented in a different way.
- Effective leadership depends on the context—matching the right leader to a particular situation is most important.
- Building-level leadership is critical to improve teaching and promote student achievement.
- Effective organizations need all types of leaders—different leaders positioned strategically throughout a school or district can contribute greatly to organizational effectiveness.
- Effective leaders possess key virtues that mark who they are and what they care about.

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Reflective Questions

1. Which of the themes or core values above make the most sense to you?
2. Which of the themes or core values above make the least sense to you? Explain.
3. How do you perceive your role as ethical and spiritual leader? What specific actions must you take to be effective?
4. What do you do on a daily basis that affirms your commitment to ethical and spiritual leadership? Provide details with examples.

Allow me to offer a word on chapter format and presentation of information. Information in each of the three main chapters is presented as concisely as possible to make for easy and quick reference reading. Each chapter begins with boxed material called "What You Should Know About." The box will list and briefly explain the concepts covered in each chapter. Certainly, each chapter will not cover every bit of information there is to know about a given topic, as mentioned earlier. Each chapter culls, though, essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for a successful principal.

A brief word on chapter organization is in order to facilitate reading. The second chapter includes some "best practices" for helping you create a sense of ethical behavior in your school, for developing a moral grounding in life in general, and for tapping into a spiritual dimension. After this introduction to some practical ideas of ethics, morality, and spirituality, the third chapter highlights five virtues for leading with a sense of spirit and ethics. The extent to which you actualize these virtues will determine your leadership success. The fourth chapter focuses on helping you address those thorny, practical ethical dilemmas you face on a daily basis. This book is not meant to be the definitive treatise on ethical and spiritual leadership, but rather to raise some relevant issues for your consideration. It is my hope that the ideas in this book will give you pause to think about your own sense of ethics

in your interactions with others and encourage you to ponder the spiritual side of your work.

As a concluding activity to this Introduction, read the boxed material below, which contains 15 quotations meant to inspire, but also, and more important, to provoke critical thinking about your role as ethical or spiritual leader. Read each quotation and ask yourself these questions:

- What does the author convey about ethics or spirituality (in other words, what's the message in a nutshell)?
- Critique the quotation. Does the thought reflect your beliefs? Explain.
- What practical step(s) could you take to actualize the idea behind each quotation?

Some Key Quotations Related to Ethical and Spiritual Leadership

"I am assuming that to behave ethically is to behave under the guidance of an acceptable and justifiable account of what it means to be moral."

—Nel Noddings

"I use the word *soul* . . . to call for attention in schools to the inner life; to the depth dimension of human experience; to . . . longings for something more than an ordinary, material, and fragmented existence."

—Rachel Kessler

"We need heroes, people who can inspire us, help shape us morally, spur us on to purposeful action—and from time to time we are called on to *be* those heroes, leaders for others . . . we seem to need moral leadership especially, but the need for moral inspiration is ever present."

—Robert Coles

"Not everyone in an organization is prepared or willing to do the right thing or has a moral orientation. Some would prefer to take

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the easy way out, do what is more economical, or take the path of least resistance.”

—Susan R. Komives, Nance Lucas, and
Timothy R. McMahon

“Being a school leader is not an easy job. In many ways, the moral and ethical decisions are the hardest ones we make. . . . The key is taking time to reflect and genuinely examine our behavior, our goals, our mission—and ourselves.”

—Elaine L. Wilmore

“By clarifying personal beliefs about schooling and learning, resolving ethics issues, keeping physically and emotionally fit, reflecting on practice and continuing to grow professionally, the person who is becoming a principal will be able to carry out day to day duties and enjoy life. Nurturing the inner person is not easy, but it is imperative if the principal is to be truly successful and effective in helping the school learning community grow.”

—Marsha Speck

“A moral way of being is a moral way of being human. Hence, one’s morality will flow from one’s humanity.”

—Robert J. Starratt

“Even under the best of circumstances, leading in tomorrow’s organization won’t come easily. It will be a constant struggle resulting in large part from the changing conception of leadership. Each of the previous chapters captures a piece of the struggle and includes ideas for overcoming it. But there is one more piece that we haven’t yet looked at. It is the difficulty of wrestling with paradox.”

—Jerry L. Patterson

“Ethical thinking and decision making are not just following the rules.”

—Kenneth Strike and Jonas F. Soltis

“The soul is where the inner and the outer world meet.”

—Novalis

"Some people say that the universe is dead (they call it 'inert'), and that everything that happens is accidental (they say 'random'). Other people, like me, say that the Universe is alive, wise and compassionate. Looking at the universe as dead is one story. Looking at it as alive is another. Which story is true for you?"

—Gary Zukav

"Integrity is a fundamental consistency between one's values, goals, and actions."

—Robert Evans

"Leadership . . . involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings. Such is the core of leadership."

—Linda Lambert

"As a school leader, your ethical decisions are observed by others within the school—students, teachers, and staff. Your decisions affect these individuals and the school as a whole. The success or failure of the moral space of the school is affected by your moral and ethical leadership."

—Spencer J. Maxcy

"An abundance of caring is a signal quality found in most educators. This propensity to step outside of oneself, to see, hear, and appreciate another human being, increases insight, aids communication, and promotes excellence in instruction. Learners served by caring educators feel more important, demonstrate higher motivation, learn faster and better, and reveal greater confidence about their future. That is education as its best."

—Donald R. Draayer

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CASE STUDY AND REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

(The following case is modeled after Drake & Roe, 2003, pp. 35–36.)

It was a bright sunny morning as Jean Baptiste awoke from a deep sleep. His vacation was wonderful, and returning to work after such a respite was onerous. Jean had no idea what challenge awaited him as he returned to work, arriving at 5:45 a.m. Silver Lake High was a school located in a fairly conservative upper-middle-class neighborhood in a suburb of Wisconsin. Although the student body was primarily white, in recent years the numbers of people of color had increased, although they still made up less than 5% of the population. The Parent Teacher Association was always very active, surprisingly so for such a large high school. Such active participation was due primarily to the outreach and genuine sincerity of its principal. Well liked, gregarious, and diligent, Jean Baptiste had enjoyed his 4 years as principal of the high school. Although his first 2 years were difficult, because he had completely reorganized the traditional school scheduling to the blocked approach and had met with some opposition to his efforts, things had settled down recently. Teachers and students had become accustomed to the new routines. Teachers unwilling to deal with the change had transferred out of the school. The principal had attracted some new teachers trained in differentiated instruction and accustomed to block scheduling. Jean Baptiste had a reputation as a tough but fair-minded principal. This morning when he arrived, the school building seemed like any other, routine and uneventful . . . or so he thought.

Susan Neiman, one of the teachers, greeted Mr. Baptiste in his office. "Good morning, Susan. What brings you here so early this beautiful morning?" Anything but stoic, Susan nervously and anxiously alerted her principal to the impending controversy. "I don't think you are aware of the fact that several parents complained to me and some other teachers," she explained, "about Bill Smith and his committee's decision to honor gay history month. They intend to display material honoring gay history month on the bulletin board on the main floor near the school entrance. Some teachers also intend to post flyers and articles about gay issues in their classrooms."

"Well," reacted Mr. Baptiste, "it seems we have some time to speak to Bill and his committee about their decision."

Later that morning, Jean called Bill Smith into his office and asked him about the rumor he had heard about celebrating gay history month. "You know, Bill," explained Jean, "such a decision might not sit well with

some parents here. We need to first discuss the issue as a faculty and as a parent-teacher association." Bill listened respectfully as the one-sided discussion ended. Bill did inform Jean that he would speak with committee members. Jean responded, "And please, Bill, report back to me."

The following Monday morning, Jean arrived at school to find a lavish bulletin board display in honor of gay history month. Disappointed that he was not consulted, he called Bill into his office to communicate his dissatisfaction. "I thought we had agreed that you'd report back to me."

"Well," explained Bill, "I don't recall saying that I promised to report back to you. I did meet with committee members, though, and we all felt that this issue needed immediate action without having to seek prior approval. It's a matter of justice and equality for gay rights."

Incensed with Bill's response, Mr. Baptiste ordered him to take down the display. "I'm not necessarily against honoring the month, but I am perturbed about the way you and your self-made committee went about implementing the event. I want the board taken down immediately, and I don't want teachers posting articles in their classrooms before we have a chance as a faculty to discuss the issue."

Bill stormed out of the office in defiance. Jean told the custodian to remove the display. As Jean crafted a memorandum to faculty on the issue, unbeknownst to him Bill called the superintendent, charging Mr. Baptiste with censorship. Several committee members later that day called the local newspaper to report the issue. Before long, the headline read "Controversy at Silver Lake High over Gay Rights."

The superintendent, the PTA, and the editorial column of the local newspaper support Mr. Baptiste's actions, explaining that "the school administration has the responsibility to uphold the integrity of the school" and that "all students, regardless of their background or orientation, should be accepted, and to highlight one particular lifestyle over another is unwarranted."

The controversy did not abate, however. Committee members reached out to several local politicians and even to the state Anti-Defamation League, which hired an attorney to support the committee's actions. Despite Mr. Baptiste's attempts to quell the controversy by conducting public forums on the issue, activists staunchly repeated their accusations of censorship by school and district leadership. Activists reiterated their message in forum after forum: "It's a matter of free speech and censorship. Besides, we have a moral obligation to obliterate antigay sentiments in this community. You can't mandate that gay-rights issues disappear."

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At a closed-to-the-public parents' association session, one articulate parent rose and said, "Gays don't need a display to celebrate their history. Their subculture is a slap in the face to everything that is decent" (Drake & Roe, 2003, p. 36). She received thunderous applause from many participants.

Reflective Questions

1. What ethical issues are at stake in this case?
2. Do you as the principal have the right to order such displays removed?
3. Critique Mr. Baptiste's leadership in this case. What did or didn't he do correctly in your estimation?
4. How would you have reacted to this scenario? Be specific.
5. If you were the superintendent, what would you advise Mr. Baptiste to do next?
6. Assume parents keep demanding that Mr. Baptiste continue the ban on gay-rights displays and forums, and assume that he is in favor of such displays (although he disagreed with the way teachers went about the whole issue). How should Mr. Baptiste express his support of gay rights but at the same time engender parental support? Is such an attempt possible? Explain.
7. What other factors, not discussed, are implicated in this case?
8. How does the information presented in this book so far about ethical and spiritual leadership shed light on this case?

As mentioned in the Introduction, the next chapter builds upon the preceding information by highlighting some "best practices" for helping you create a sense of ethical behavior in your school, for developing a moral grounding in life in general, and for tapping into a spiritual dimension. These ideas are not meant to be exhaustive of the topic, but merely a means to encourage thinking about what it means to serve ethically, behave morally, and have a sense of the spiritual.