



The Art of
School
Leadership

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Foreword by Roland S. Barth



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Foreword

Some dream. Some enact the dreams of others. Very few dream and then follow those dreams. Even fewer write about this.

In the pages that follow, you will discover that Tom Hoerr does all four. So sit back. You are about to embark on a field trip to New City School in St. Louis, Missouri, without leaving your comfortable chair!

Craft knowledge is the wisdom that educators necessarily accumulate by virtue of spending 6 or 8 or 10 hours a day, 220 days a year, under the roof of a schoolhouse. Craft knowledge is what we learn about teacher and principal leadership, relationship building, staff development, goal setting, power, and teacher evaluation. It's what we come to know about creating a culture of creativity, building teams, running effective faculty meetings, and increasing parent involvement.

I have long believed that if only teachers and administrators would unlock, celebrate, and disclose their abundant craft knowledge, we could transform our schools overnight. Regrettably, in our profession, very little craft knowledge *is* disclosed. Those teachers who retire next June will leave, taking with them all they have learned in the school of hard knocks over their careers—knowledge and skills that will never again be available to the school. What a tragic loss to the school, to youngsters, to colleagues, and to the educator who never had the opportunity to share.

There are good reasons, of course, why craft knowledge is not shared. The cruel reality is that our profession places us in

the role of competitors for scarce recognition and resources. The better you look, the worse I look; the worse you look, the better I look. So we keep our gems hidden away.

Too often, the educator who has the courage to disclose craft knowledge at a faculty meeting (“I’ve got this great idea I want to share about linking science and literature!”) is greeted by glazed eyes or critical glowers. “Who does she think she is?” So we soon learn to keep what we glean from our school experience tightly locked up.

What you are about to read is the revelation of Tom Hoerr’s craft knowledge and that of scores of teachers and parents with whom he has worked for some 28 years. You will soon discover here, as I have, helpful, concrete ideas about ways to expand your repertoire in dealing with recurring school issues, from underperforming teachers to leadership to parent involvement.

It’s a rare and welcome opportunity to be invited inside the school and the mind of a fellow educator and have that person hand over the “keys to the store.” I hope that others will follow and profit from Tom’s example.

Alas, here we run up against another enduring impediment so engrained in the culture of our schools. In our profession, we are gifted and talented at finding reasons and excuses why good ideas in one school cannot possibly work in “my” school.

- They have all that Title I money to spend on their program.
- They have more freedom with their curriculum than the central office gives *us*.
- They have all those rich white kids to whom you can teach anything.
- They have parents who will support teachers’ efforts.

And so it goes.

Tom Hoerr’s New City School is a nonpublic, independent school. A common belief within independent schools is that they *are* independent and therefore can innovate without

bureaucratic restraints. Many also believe their new ideas and practices will soon be noticed, valued, and emulated by those in public schools. I certainly never found this to be the case when I worked in either an independent or a public school! So it is very easy to dismiss what follows as irrelevant and impossible to relate to “my” school.

Don’t be deceived. For the important issues and opportunities that confront schools are generic. *All* schools deal with underperforming teachers, staff development, teacher empowerment, curriculum, and other recurring elements of school life. What is different is how each school responds to these similar conditions. Sadly, all too often the response is discouragingly uniform: A faculty meeting is a time when the principal stands at the front and proclaims while the teachers sit and listen (maybe!).

That is the gift of this volume. Its author, after nearly three decades, is still dedicated, energized, hopeful—and learning. What he has learned and continues to learn constitutes a compendium of refreshingly *different* ways of thinking about school and about how to lead adults and students in the service of the central purposes of the school. Here, after many turbulent years as a school leader, is one who not only respects teachers, he also likes them! His *is* a “new school” that offers new ways of thinking about promoting profound levels of human learning. These ideas can be replicated in other schools with no change in budget, only a change of heart.

Several conditions are necessary for a successful transfer of craft knowledge. One has to have some craft knowledge to share. One has to be courageous and willing enough to share it. One has to have others who will welcome and value the sharing. And there is a fourth necessary condition: One has to be able to make one’s craft knowledge accessible to others through oral and written language. Again, Tom Hoerr succeeds admirably in this regard.

A central theme of this book is that “leadership is about relationships.” Tom Hoerr walks the talk. He will succeed with

you, I suspect, as he has with me, in establishing a strong, engaged relationship. Through playfulness, joyfulness, honesty, and jargon-free authenticity, he earns credibility and respect. His depiction of life in the schoolhouse will resonate with the experiences of most teachers, administrators, and parents.

Aldous Huxley once observed, “Experience isn’t what happens to us, it’s what we *make of* our experience.” I think you will find here a multitude of school experiences. And you will find that Tom Hoerr has indeed made something of them. I would like one day to visit New City School and linger with this extraordinary educator and his faculty. Fortunately, none of us has to wait. Enjoy the field trip!

Roland S. Barth

Acknowledgments

Writing this book is another step in my professional journey. It has been a fun journey, sometimes frustrating, never boring, and always gratifying. Like most travelers, I have repeatedly been helped along the way by knowledgeable and kind others. Sometimes I knew that I was lost and asked for directions. At other times, I was positive that I knew the way, but, in fact, I was simply walking in circles; walking faster, but still in a circle. Whatever success I have is due to the many, many people who have taken the time to share their thoughts with me, to listen to my ideas, to agree and to disagree, and to cause me to reflect upon and question my ideas. This isn't as easy as it may sound. There is a reason why the saying on my coffee mug reads, "Often wrong, never in doubt."

Where to begin? Thanks go, first, to the faculty of New City School. I am extraordinarily fortunate to work with such a talented, caring, and energetic group of teachers. I am often in awe of the magic that they bring to their classrooms each and every day. They are tolerant of my ideas and puns, good and bad. The Board of Trustees of New City School has been wonderfully supportive, and I appreciate their confidence and wisdom. I never thought that I would work so long in one setting, but I find myself eager to go to work each day, simultaneously supported and challenged. Our students and our parent body, as well as the other staff members, also deserve thanks. New City School truly is an exceptional place, and I am proud of what all of us have accomplished.

Many individuals whose paths I have crossed have left a lasting imprint on me. Various drafts of chapters from this book were read by numerous others, and their feedback was always helpful. Scores of teachers from around the world offered comments that clarified and moved my thinking forward. At the risk of neglecting to mention someone to whom I am indebted (which will invariably happen, I realize), I would like to thank the following for their support and inspiration: Roger Perry, Barry Anderson, Maggie Meyer, Rudy Hasl, Tina Short, Frank Hamsher, Jim McLeod, Mimi Hirshberg, Polly O'Brien, Sue Schlichter, Jerry Dobson, Mary Ann Wymore, John Weil, Ed Soule, Mary Ellen Finch, Howard Gardner, Roland Barth, and my 1st grade teacher, Helen Mayfield. I also appreciate the major distractions in my life, including, but not limited to, my basketball-playing buddies and book group.

At ASCD, I offer special appreciation to Kathy Checkley, John Checkley, Scott Willis, and Genny Ostertag, my editor. I first came to know Kathy and John when they filmed a video to accompany my book *Becoming a Multiple Intelligences School*. I came to enjoy and respect them as colleagues. Scott deserves credit for helping me move this book from a vision to reality. His skill and encouragement have been invaluable. With a deft hand, Genny suggested, clarified, and molded.

Lastly, thanks go to my family members for their support. My mother, my wife, and my two standard poodles—Rita, Karleen, Casper, and B.J.—know that even though my name is on the cover of this fancy book, it's just me.