

## WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

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*Leading With Intention delves into a complex topic, but makes it a “tight” read. Every chapter has charts, focused checklists, and reflective tools. Systemness is always helped by “interaction” effects of core factors. This book will help you focus and integrate through self-awareness and self-efficacy, connection and inquiry, and intentional professional learning that generates impact.*

—**Michael Fullan**, Professor Emeritus, OISE/University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

*Leading With Intention provides valuable insights that encourage “leaning in rather than leaning away” from our collective responsibility for student learning. DeWitt and Nelson have crafted a powerful guide inviting readers to harness thoughtful and genuine relationships to cultivate a legacy of learning.*

—**Kimberly M. Fry**, Assistant Executive Director, Professional Learning,  
Former School Principal and District Superintendent, Washington  
Association of School Administrators, Olympia, WA

*Education is in a tough spot. The only sustainable way out is through intentional leadership and connection. Peter M. DeWitt and Michael Nelson provide the roadmap here in Leading With Intention.*

—**Danny Bauer**, Ruckus Maker & Do School Different™ Designer, Better Leaders  
better Schools, Bestselling Author, Syracuse, NY

*Leading With Intention is an excellent resource for educational leaders aiming to deepen their impact on student learning and build stronger connections within their school community. Through a skillful blend of practical insights, research, and personal stories, authors Peter M. DeWitt and Michael Nelson articulate a vision for leadership that underscores the importance of self-awareness and human interconnectedness, providing a foundation for effective decision-making.*

—**Valerie Page Truesdale**, Senior Assistant Executive Director, The School  
Superintendents Association Alexandria, VA

*For Britt, who always knew.*

*For Doug.*

# Leading With Intention



# Leading With Intention

## How School Leaders Can Unlock Deeper Collaboration and Drive Results

**Peter M. DeWitt**

**Michael Nelson**

**Foreword by John Hattie**

**Afterword by Shelley Harwayne**





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# Foreword

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One of my passions lies in translating the messages of Visible Learning into the realm of sports coaching. We have successfully applied these principles to elite rugby, cricket, soccer, Australian rules football, baseball, and ice hockey. Coaching is a form of teaching, so it is no surprise that there is a great deal of overlap between the classroom and the sports field. Coaches, akin to teachers, can provide an amazing amount of feedback and often pride themselves on how well training sessions go. But in the game, things often turn to custard.

Sport is based on a simple premise – exploiting opponents’ errors and weaknesses. Elite players have a remarkably high level of game-savvy; they can efficiently exploit weaknesses and devise strategies on the fly. They capitalize on instant feedback during the game with the aim of hearing, understanding, and putting feedback into action. They know how to play the game alone and as part of the team, and they understand that lapses in attention or mistakes can be exploited by the opposing side.

Much of the feedback that coaches offer during a game goes unheard and, more importantly, is often given too late to provide any meaningful impact. The feedback is mostly about the game, the strategies, and the next moves. It is rarely about the thinking in the player’s heads as they play the game. Great coaches train for chaos, for mistakes, for optimizing opportunities, and for team bonding. Great coaches might advise a team player who makes a mistake that has important negative effects on the team, that it is ok to be upset for five seconds but then they must forget it. Great coaches help players to both acknowledge their emotions and also not let those emotions hinder future actions.

Timothy Gallwey, in his impressive book *The Inner Game of Tennis* (2015) argues that in competitive sports, we play not against one, but two opponents. The “outer” opponent is the other players/team, but we also play against an “inner opponent” – our own mind that can create obstacles like self-doubt, disappointment about letting down the team, low self-efficacy, concentration lapses, and nervousness. Gallwey noted tennis players talking to themselves with comments like “try harder”,

“why do I not know this?” and asked, “Who is talking to whom?” His answer was that we are speaking to two selves: Self 1 is the conscious mind, which is often judgmental and critical, and Self 2 is our body, nervous system, and unconscious mind. Self 2 physically performs and plays the game, but it is only when Self 1 and 2 are aligned that we get peak performance.

Gallwey’s coaching focused on bringing Self 1 and Self 2 into alignment: that is, bringing together the performance and the person. He identified four steps: (1) have the student/player observe without judgement; (2) make them think or relive the observations with images, feelings, and imagination; (3) have a go and try the thinking (“Just do it”); and (4) observe what they practices without judgement.

This philosophy can be extended to the inner game of leaders. Leaders, like elite sports players, are constantly observed and these observers intuit the leader’s motivations and beliefs. The message in *Leading With Intention* is that the leaders need to anticipate, know, and reflect on how others see and interpret them. Leaders need to spend more time seeing the impact of their performance and person – and preferably bringing these together into “one” person. Leaders have to be superb listeners – of their Self 1 and 2. They need to be internally and externally self-aware, hear what others are saying and thinking, and demonstrate to others that they have understood what has been said (although they do not have to agree). An example is trust – trust is what you are when you walk into a room, it is your being and credibility in the eyes of others, it is based on the actions you have made from prior encounters, it is a function of your skills at active listening, and it is the bringing together of your performance and person.

The core notions discussed in DeWitt and Nelson’s book are the essence of being aware of Self 1 and Self 2 and include self-awareness, fostering human interconnectedness, engaging in collective inquiry, promoting professional learning and development, showing confidence and self-efficacy, and designing your own learning environment. The last element is core to schools – why should we make it compulsory for students to attend school and then not insist all adults in the schools also attend professional learning? You and your staff need to be continually growing, learning, and passionately working to improve your impact.

Every decision you make is up for queries about alignment with what you say you are with how others see you. The task is to lead others to do and think in ways that improve the impact we all have on our students, and this requires high levels of people management, high levels of trust, and great skills at convincing others that it is in their and everyone's best interest to enact that which you as leader ask them to do.

No one said being a leader was easy. It requires high levels of confidence, extensive experience with communicating what you are asking others to do, a relentless focus on improvement, and most of all it entails listening to oneself as well as to others, communicating your beliefs, passions and ideas, and bringing others along with you on a worthwhile set of actions, all deeply constructed within a climate and culture worth defending. This book on unlocking deeper collaboration has the potential to drive meaningful results in leadership, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, transparent values, and effective communication in creating a culture worth defending.

—John Hattie



# Acknowledgments

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**From Mike:** This is my first book. As a result, I think about the many people during my nearly 40 years as an educator who saw things in me that I didn't see in myself. This includes Jan Donaldson (in memory), Sandra McCord, Tom VanderArk, Dale Holland, Mary Holland, Nancy Merrill, and Art Jarvis. Throughout this same time, I have worked with hundreds of colleagues who have supported me in becoming a better educator and have become lifelong friends, for which I am grateful. I am appreciative of Helene Parroff, Pat Large, Gerrie Garton (in memory), and Jill Burnes.

It was at the launch of the Instructional Leadership Network almost three years ago that I began working with Peter in supporting the incredible teaching and learning leaders across the state of Washington. We encouraged and nudged each other as colleagues and quickly became friends. I am deeply honored that he would consider me as a co-author for a book. We are both grateful that the impact of the network continues to have a rippling effect in Washington.

I'm a self-admitted emotional person particularly when it comes to thinking about my own children. I stand in awe of our son, Hans, and daughter, Anna. They are kind, loving, and generous humans. I am tearing up as I write this. They have selected perfect partners in Amy and Brian and have gifted us with three grandchildren: Carter, Grant, and Maisie. Blessed doesn't even begin to describe the feeling I have when I think of them.

My biggest fan and champion as a person and a professional is my wife, Britt. She predicted this moment many times. I would laugh, but secretly I was hoping she would be right.

**From Peter:** I am grateful that Mike agreed to co-author this book with me. I could not have worked with a better co-author, colleague, and friend. As you read this book, you will learn from his stories and expertise, just as I did every time I had the opportunity to work with him. To me, this book is not just a co-authoring experience but a journey through our friendship and conversations.

Additionally, I am so grateful for the support of my family and friends. They have always provided me with strength and support and helped give me the confidence to do anything I wanted. We should always surround ourselves with people who support us and make us better, and my family and friends have certainly done that.

**From both:** We would like to thank Chris Beals, Tom Murphy, Jenni Donohoo, Kim Fry, Joel Aune, John Hattie, and Shelley Harwayne. Additionally, we spent time visiting schools talking with leaders and teachers about their practices while conceptualizing this book. Thank you to the leaders and teachers in the Woodland School District and Fife School District, which are both in the state of Washington.

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# About the Authors

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**Peter DeWitt (EdD)** is the founder and CEO of the Instructional Leadership Collective. He was a K–5 teacher for 11 years and a principal for 8 years. For the last 10 years, he has been facilitating professional learning nationally and internationally based on the content of many of his best-selling educational books.

Peter's professional learning relationships are a monthly hybrid approach that includes both coaching and the facilitating of workshops on instructional leadership and collective efficacy. Additionally, in the summer of 2021, Peter created a yearlong on-demand, asynchronous coaching course through Thinkific where he has created a community of learners that includes K–12 educators in leadership positions.

Peter's work has been adopted at the state and university level, and he works with numerous school districts, school boards, regional networks, and ministries of education around North America, Australia, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the United Kingdom.

Peter writes the Finding Common Ground column for *Education Week*, which has been in circulation since 2011. In 2020, he co-created *Education Week's A Seat at the Table* where he moderates conversations with experts around race, gender, sexual orientation, research, trauma, and many other educational topics.

He is the series editor for the Connected Educators Series (Corwin) and the Impact Series (Corwin) that include books by Viviane Robinson, Andy Hargreaves, Pasi Sahlberg, Yong Zhao, and Michael Fullan.

Peter is the 2013 School Administrators Association of New York State's (SAANYS) Outstanding Educator of the Year and the 2015 Education Blogger of the Year (Academy of Education Arts and Sciences), and he sits on numerous advisory boards.



“There is no more noble profession than that of an educator.” That was what **Michael Nelson’s** mom said almost every day of his childhood. For almost 40 years, Mike has been an educator. His mom would be pleased.

Even though Mike still considers “teacher” as his primary title, he has served as principal, district instructional leader, and superintendent, and currently serves as assistant executive director

developing programs and initiatives for superintendents and district leaders in the state of Washington.

Mike’s leadership is based on the foundation value that is it necessary to develop a kind, compassionate, and empathetic culture rooted in belonging and equity. He describes his leadership work as building human connectedness, recognizing you must always model what you lead as you build teams of individuals supporting students in their learning. The Muckleshoot Indian Tribe awarded him with their official blanket for building a collaborative partnership between the Tribe and school district, the highest honor of the Tribe and the first time a non-Tribal member was selected to receive this blanket.

He has received many state and national awards during his time as a principal and superintendent. As a principal, he was acknowledged by Pacific Lutheran University as its Outstanding Recent Alumni in 1997. At the same time, the school he was leading as principal received the National Blue Ribbon Award from the U.S. Department of Education. As a superintendent, he was named Washington state’s 2019 Superintendent of the Year. During his tenure as superintendent, Mike was elected president of the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) by his peers.



While WASA president, he was one of two superintendents in the nation selected to participate in the Embark Program facilitated by the U.S. Navy. He spent time on the USS *Ronald Reagan* learning from all levels of the men and women serving on this aircraft carrier. He also has received the Washington State Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development Educating the Whole Child Award.



# Glossary of Terms

In schools, we often have a common language but not a common understanding around that language. When we look at educational leadership through an international lens, we know that we often don't even have a common language when it comes to the words used in schools.

To create a common language and common understanding, we here define the terms used in this book. This will help us as we work through international and cultural contexts.

**Building leader:** This is an administrative position where the leader must perform management duties as well as practice instructional leadership. Building leadership positions include school principals in the United States, Canada, and Australia and head teachers in the United Kingdom.

**Collective leader efficacy:** Collective leader efficacy is a school or district leadership team's ability to develop a shared understanding and engage in joint work that includes evaluating the impact they have on the learning of adults and students in a school.

**District instructional committee:** At the district level, there is often a district leadership team that may include the director of teaching and learning or assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, along with other district and building leaders, depending on the makeup of the district.

**Faculty/staff meeting:** A school gathering that may take place once or twice a month, where teachers and leaders learn together about ideas or innovations that impact students in positive ways.

**Human interconnectedness:** Human interconnectedness happens when individuals unite to build a stronger learning culture by

authentically communicating with each other and challenging each other's thinking to create deeper and more intentional contributions.

**Instructional leadership team:** Instructional leadership teams are school-based or district-based teams. At the school building level, an instructional leadership team includes a principal, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and school staff such as school psychologists.

**Joint work:** Judith Warren Little (1990) defines joint work as "encounters among educators that rest on shared responsibility for the work of teaching (interdependence), collective conceptions of autonomy, support for teachers' initiative and leadership with regard to professional practice, and group affiliations grounded in professional work" (p. 519).

**Knowledge:** "The fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

**Metacognition:** How individuals think about their own thinking.

**Professional learning and development:** In *Call to Action: Bringing the Profession Back In*,

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves (2016) write, “*Professional learning* is often like student learning—something that is deliberately structured and increasingly accepted because it can (to some) more obviously be linked to measurable outcomes... *Professional development* involves many aspects of learning but may also involve developing mindfulness, team building and team development, intellectual stimulation for its own sake, and reading good literature that prompts reflection on the human condition” (p. 3).

**School building:** This is a smaller system housed within a larger system such as a school district. In the United States, school leaders are sometimes referred to as school building leaders. School buildings, for all practical purposes, include grade levels or departments.

**School district:** A system that usually includes elementary, middle, junior high, and high schools. In countries like Canada, we may refer to these systems as divisions or school boards.

**Skill:** The ability to perform a task using previously acquired knowledge.

**Teacher leaders:** Teachers within a part-time or full-time leadership position where, in most cases, they do not have to evaluate their peers. Some teacher leadership positions are professional learning community (PLC) leads, department chairs, or middle-level leaders (Australia).

**Understanding:** An assimilation of an idea into what is already known.

## CHAPTER 1

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# Self-Awareness

### By the end of this chapter, you will

- Engage with a metacognitive strategy that will help activate prior knowledge
- Process the elements of leadership self-awareness and consider two or three actions you can take today
- Be able to name two categories of self-awareness and relate them to your own self-awareness
- Identify four archetypes of self-awareness and how they are related to context
- Identify how leadership self-efficacy impacts what we do as leaders

Take some time to consider what you know about the topic of leadership self-awareness. Use the following KWLH chart to engage in that thinking. Write down some notes in the first two sections: “What do I *know*?” and “What do I *want to learn*?” Then turn that thinking into success criteria in the “By the end of this chapter” section.

At the end of the chapter, you can fill out the last two columns.

SELF-AWARENESS KWLH CHART

K	W	L	H
WHAT DO I KNOW?	WHAT DO I WANT TO LEARN?	WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?	HOW DID I LEARN IT?

By the end of this chapter, I want to...

## WHAT IS YOUR SELF-AWARENESS ARCHETYPE?

There are multiple ways to look at and understand self-awareness. It's not as simple as knowing yourself because we may have blind spots when it comes to how we lead or interact with others. James Clear (2018) says, "We're so used to doing what we've always done that we don't stop to question whether it's the right thing to do at all. Many of our failures in performance are largely attributed to a lack of self-awareness" (p. 64). Fei Wang (2021) writes, "Self-awareness is a critical trait for school leaders and a significant predictor of the level of intrapersonal intelligence" (p. 406). And Elizabeth Perry (2022) suggests, "Self-awareness has two categories: internal and external self-awareness."

Internal self-awareness is crucial because it is the foundation for personal growth and self-improvement. When you deeply understand your thoughts, emotions, values, and behaviors, you are better equipped to make informed decisions, set

meaningful goals, and manage your feelings effectively. This self-awareness allows you to align your actions and values. Additionally, it helps you as a leader identify your strengths and weaknesses, which will help you grow personally and professionally. Without internal self-awareness, you are at risk of struggling with self-doubt, inner conflict, and a lack of direction.

External self-awareness is equally as important because it relates to how others perceive you as a leader and how you interact with the community around you. Understanding how your actions and words impact others is vital to building strong relationships, developing effective communication, and engaging in impactful collaboration. External self-awareness enables you to adapt to diverse group dynamics and work effectively in collectives. Without external self-awareness, you are at risk of unintentionally alienating others, experiencing communication breakdowns, and missing opportunities for personal and professional growth. Perry (2022) adds, “We might think we don’t need to worry about internal self-awareness if we have external self-awareness or vice versa. But balance is key. They require different strategies and skills to understand. We should aim to balance our vision of ourselves with how others see us.” A combination of internal and external self-awareness is vital for achieving a well-rounded and emotionally intelligent approach to life and interpersonal relationships.

We believe there are four different ways to look at self-awareness through the lens of internal and external self-awareness. These four ways are organized in Figure 1.1.

**FIGURE 1.1 • Self-Awareness Through the Lens of Internal and External Self-Awareness**

	HIGH EXTERNAL SELF-AWARENESS	LOW EXTERNAL SELF-AWARENESS
High Internal Self-Awareness	Individuals deeply understand their thoughts, emotions, values, and behaviors. They are also highly attuned to how others perceive them, and able to accurately gauge the impact of their actions and words on those around them. These individuals are effective communicators, empathetic, and skilled at building solid relationships. They are often seen as emotionally intelligent	Individuals have a strong understanding of their own thoughts, emotions, values, and behaviors (high internal self-awareness). However, they may need to be more attuned to how others perceive them, or struggle to accurately gauge the impact of their actions on those around them (low external self-awareness). These individuals may be very self-reflective and clearly

*(Continued)*

Figure 1.1 (Continued)

	HIGH EXTERNAL SELF-AWARENESS	LOW EXTERNAL SELF-AWARENESS
	and capable of quickly navigating complex social situations.	understand their own identity and values. Still, they could find navigating social dynamics and adapting to various social contexts challenging.
Low Internal Self-Awareness	Individuals have limited insight into their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (low internal self-awareness). However, they are highly perceptive of how others perceive them and are skilled at reading social cues and adjusting their behavior accordingly (high external self-awareness). While they may excel in social situations, they may struggle with understanding their motivations and emotions, potentially leading to inner conflict or a lack of authenticity in their interactions.	In this quadrant, individuals have limited insight into their own thoughts, emotions, values, and behaviors (low internal self-awareness). They may also need help understanding how others perceive them. They may need to be more skilled at reading social cues or adapting their behavior in different situations (low external self-awareness). These individuals may face challenges in personal growth, building strong relationships, and effectively communicating with others.

Source: DeWitt and Nelson (2024).

It’s important to note that self-awareness can be developed and improved with practice and self-reflection. Each quadrant represents a different starting point, but individuals can enhance internal and external self-awareness to become more well rounded and effective personally and professionally.

This is a good time to pause and ask you to engage in the first set of Leading With Intention action steps. The action steps in this chapter focus on ways you might deepen your understanding of your own leadership self-awareness.

### LEADING WITH INTENTION

If we don’t know who we are as leaders, how can we understand which of our actions are successful or not successful? Looking at the four self-awareness archetypes in Figure 1.1, ask yourself, “How do I know for sure what category I am in?” To explore the answer to that question.

- **Send an anonymous leadership survey out to staff.** Only do this if you are prepared for how they might respond. Use the information to take meaningful action.



- **Take video.** During a district meeting, several one-on-one conversations, a professional learning session, or a faculty/staff meeting, videotape yourself. Prior to recording, explicitly identify what you want to learn.
- **Conduct empathy interviews.** Randomly select a group of individuals who you believe will tell you the truth, and have one-on-one conversations asking them to describe your level of leadership self-awareness. Know that these interviews take a great deal of trust.

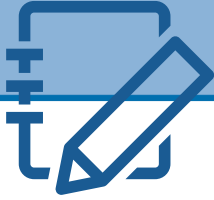
Self-awareness is positively associated with job-related well-being, a greater appreciation of diversity, improved communication with colleagues, and increased confidence (Sutton et al., 2015), and we believe that the three suggested activities in the Leading With Intention section will provide some good avenues to improve your self-awareness.

## LEADER, LEARNER, LISTENER

Practicing intentional leadership means having deeper relationships and focusing on developing interconnectedness. Use those relationships and connectedness to ask challenging questions, not because you want to cause conflict, but because you want to learn more. Additionally, intentional leadership means pursuing the expertise to have more impact on district, building, and classroom practices. Aim to see yourself as both the teacher and a learner.

Taking on the role of learner means that you need to find a balance between your confidence to lead in a situation and your openness to hear dissenting opinions. This is not easily done. Albert Bandura (2010) suggests, “Individuals who are highly assured in their capabilities and the effectiveness of their strategies are disinclined to seek discordant information that would suggest the need for corrective adjustments” (p. 183). Self-awareness also means understanding your level of confidence but being open to listening to dissenting opinions.

We would like to pause right here and give you a moment to reflect on your leadership. In the introduction, we said that we want you to think about your legacy as a leader. Because this is hard to do during day-to-day activities, take the time to stop and do so now. This book is meant to be both one part learning from us, and one part learning from yourself.

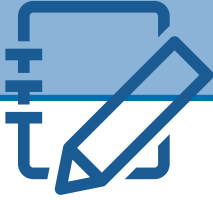


# WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Who am I as a leader?

How do I find a balance between management and instructional leadership  
(a focus on learning)?

As a building leader or teacher leader, what do I need to understand whether  
our focus as a school transfers to the classroom?



# WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

How do I respond when others challenge my thinking? Does my response depend on the person doing the challenging of my thinking?

As a district leader, what do I need to understand whether our focus as a district transfers to each school within the district?

What are my success criteria as a leader? What do I believe a successful and impactful leader looks like, acts like, or sounds like?

We would like to offer one more space for you to practice self-awareness. James Clear (2018) affirms, “One of our greatest challenges in changing habits is maintaining awareness of what we are actually doing” (p. 64). He suggests we keep a list of our daily habits, and then write a + if it’s a positive habit, a – if it’s a negative habit, and an = if we see it as a neutral habit.

We believe that there is power to Clear’s suggestion. An example might look like this:

MY DAILY HABITS AS A LEADER	
Entered the office	+
Turned on the coffee	=
Checked email	– (negative because it wasn’t an emergency or crucial to do so)
Looked at social media focused on educators I follow	–
Walked around the building to say hello to teachers before the students entered	+
Stood in the foyer to welcome students	+
Had a meeting with admin team	+



Write a list of your daily habits as a leader, and indicate with a +, −, or = whether the habit is good, bad, or neutral. Self-awareness is about truly understanding ourselves and our actions. Being intentional about examining those actions is crucial to leadership.

MY DAILY HABITS AS A LEADER	POSITIVE + NEGATIVE − NEUTRAL =

Only when you understand yourself as a leader can you engage with people on a deeper level, which requires seeking feedback. Bandura (2010) goes on to say that “the challenge is to preserve the considerable functional value of resilient self-efficacy, but to institute information monitoring and social feedback systems that help to identify practices that are beyond the point of utility” (p. 183). This is the heart of self-awareness.

Matthew Eriksen (2009) says that

Self-awareness is having conscious knowledge about one’s self, about one’s beliefs, assumptions, organizing principles, and structure of feelings and their consequences on one’s day-to-day lived experiences. (pp. 748–749)

Self-awareness is vital to engaging in deep and intentional leadership. In the following excerpt from a blog post Mike wrote in June 2023 called “How Superintendents Can Engage Board Members to Benefit Their Districts,” you will see how Mike showed the self-awareness as a leader that his job was to get transitioning board members actively engaged in the professional learning of teachers and leaders so that the priorities of the district were not just clear to everyone but supported by the board and community as well.



## Knowledge Through Storytelling

### **How Superintendents Can Engage Board Members to Benefit Their Districts**

How can we get school board members to become advocates for the professional learning teachers need to have a deeper impact on student learning?

Too often, board members are seen as being disconnected from the day-to-day learning needs of teachers and students. They are seen as the people who focus on how the

district spends money or how to keep a district from raising taxes. Although those are important aspects of the job, so is a focus on student learning—and the necessary learning teachers need to be more impactful in the classroom.

During my nearly 14 years as the superintendent in one district, a five-person board supervised me. And during those 14 years, 15 different people filled those five seats. Even though tenure of board members is generally

longer than that of superintendents, it often feels like there is constant change. Gene Sharratt, a former superintendent in Washington state, shares, “If one member of a board and superintendent team is new, then you have a new team. Even though the change is one person, you must acknowledge and respond as if it is a new team.”

In my case, I was the anomaly and the constant member of the team, serving about a decade longer than the average superintendent tenure (which recently retired AASA—The School Superintendents Association executive director Dan Domenech says hovers in the five-year range). Some may say it must have been difficult having so many different individuals supervise me. But from my perspective, all those transitions helped me stay focused on leading the board to home in on student and adult learning because I was always working with a *new team*.

In the state of Washington, the board sets local school district policy based on state law and supervises the superintendent. That’s its purpose, as I heard so many times during my tenure. But if a superintendent only focuses on that function, they are not leveraging the influence that a united team of superintendent and board members could have in propelling the learning for both students and staff. This is where the influence of the “superintendent teacher” comes into play.

### What Is a Superintendent Teacher?

A board and superintendent can move the focus on student and adult learning forward through their response to the necessary professional learning experiences that engage their staff members. However, the board should have a clear focus on what professional learning

experiences staff members need to do that work, and the board needs to take part in some of that learning to truly understand the needs of their teachers.

This is where the superintendent can take on the role of teacher for their board. The superintendent can provide the professional learning to the board that they need to help support teachers and students. Nancy Merrill, one of the longtime school board members with whom I worked, noted the experience of working collaboratively and the difference it made for them in terms of understanding the needs of students and staff—and, more generally, for the “power” of professional development.

For superintendents, here are five strategies for guiding board members to be advocates of professional learning in their districts:

- *Questioning*
- *Being present*
- *Listening to dialog*
- *Being a researcher*
- *Honoring*

### Questioning

Most board members do not have a background in education. I have found that most want to support school district professional learning initiatives, but because of their background, they often remain quiet during staff presentations. That leaves staff members often wondering how the board truly feels about their work, and as a result, they make up their own narrative. *Wait, What?* by James E. Ryan (2017) is a book that I used to encourage board members to ask questions. Its premise focuses on five key question stems:

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

1. Wait, what?
2. I wonder...?
3. Couldn't we at least...?
4. How can I help?
5. What truly matters?

The first time we used this book, we read it as a team of six studying each question. After that, it was the first book given to new board members. We created a poster of the five questions that was placed near the board table so members could see them during presentations and help keep the board focused on student learning.

### Being Present

From a superintendent's perspective, there is nothing more exciting than having board members who want to study and learn about best educational practices. In our system, our board members were invited to professional learning events. More frequently than not, a board member or two would join. This accomplished several things. First, our staff appreciated learning side by side with them. Second, the board members at the event would frequently report about it during their public meeting, which eventually made its way to all staff members and the district website.

### Listening to Dialog

All elected officials need to be good listeners. I found it critically important to build background knowledge for my board about professional learning occurring in our system. When asked about professional learning in schools or out in the community, having background knowledge allowed board members to build a greater understanding of our district's work. Whether it was with a student,

a staff member, or a community member, the board's ability to engage in conversations about the work built an important level of credibility that spread throughout our system and community.

### Being a Researcher

I never expected board members to read complete research articles or books. I would, however, offer both. Whenever we did a whole-staff book study, our board received a copy of the book. As superintendent, I felt it was my job to highlight snippets of importance for the board at board meetings and in my weekly Friday updates. During our board workshops or retreats, I could go deeper into the content of the book or article, processing the research using similar protocols that a principal might use with staff members.

When you create a team of six who want to be learners and support professional learning in the district, board members become learners themselves and will send you books, articles, and links to research they found. I embraced that. Many times, it was very good information with complementary insights to the professional learning going on in the system. I would share how this connected to our work. Even when the research didn't specifically match, fantastic dialog occurred to help us better solidify the vision of our professional learning purpose.

### Honoring

Boards across our nation honor the professional learning going on in their districts. This is necessary as staff want to hear they are engaged in good work. The community also wants to hear that early



release time for professional learning and money being spent on professional learning are valuable.

There is a difference in how the message is received. If the message is being given by a board that is not engaged in professional learning, staff and community know this. If, however, staff and community know the board's active role in professional learning, it is received in a more positive way.

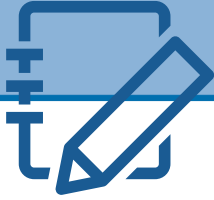
The words may be exactly the same but felt and responded to differently. A staff member is more likely to feel honored

when they are acknowledged by a board that is actively engaged in the professional learning process, too. The words are genuine, and the response is positively felt, rippling from staff and into the community.

The five concepts of *questioning*, *being present*, *listening to dialog*, *being a researcher*, and *honoring* are simple, yet led by a "superintendent teacher," a board can profoundly impact a school district in becoming one that supports and empowers professional learning.

*Source:* Adapted from Nelson (2023).

Mike's story highlights the importance of having leadership self-awareness. Many superintendents do not look at new school board members as an opportunity to learn about their own leadership, nor are they self-aware enough to inspire school board members to engage in the same professional learning teachers and leaders are engaged in to help develop a deeper understanding among their main priorities as a district.



## WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

In Mike's story, he used the phrases *questioning*, *being present*, *listening to dialog*, *being a researcher*, and *honoring*. Write down your own story here describing a time when you engaged in those actions for others, whether as a teacher leader, a building leader, or a district leader.

## FIVE SELF-AWARENESS QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

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Self-awareness gives you the ability to foster collaborative relationships that engage in joint work to identify a challenge or an innovation and take it from the surface level to a deep level of transfer within a classroom, school, or district. Peter Drucker (2005) writes,

To do those things well, you'll need to cultivate a deep understanding of yourself—not only what your strengths and weaknesses are but also how you learn, how you work with others, what your values are, and where you can make the greatest contribution. (p. 2)

To do this work of self-awareness, Drucker says you need to answer five important questions.

1. *What are your strengths?*

Drucker suggests that people are more likely to know what they are *not* good at than what they *are* good at. He recommends we write down our actions that are tied to our priorities and reflect 9 or 12 months later to see our actual results.

2. *How do you perform?*

Drucker (2005) believes you need to spend time focusing on how you perform in your position:

Amazingly few people know how they get things done. Indeed, most of us do not even know that different people work and perform differently. Too many people work in ways that are not their ways, and that almost guarantees nonperformance. (p. 4)

Part of what you need for practicing intentional leadership is an understanding of how you best take in information. Some of you do this through reading. You read research, long emails (you don't scan them!), and reviews about programs you wish to implement. Others of you do it through listening. You have listening tours where you engage in conversations with stakeholders, or you have committees where you use protocols to help you engage in in-depth conversations with those around the table. The importance is to know which one you are best at.

Drucker (2005) asks,

The first thing to know is whether you are a reader or a listener. Far too few people even know that there are readers and listeners and that people are rarely both. Even fewer know which of the two they themselves are. (p. 4)

3. *What are your values?*

What are your values, and do they line up with the values of your organization? Drucker (2005) says that if your values do not align with the values of your organization, then you will “not only be frustrated but also will not produce results” (p. 6).

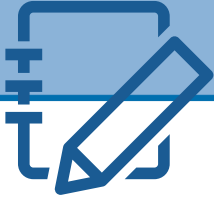
4. *Where do you belong?*

“A small number of people know very early where they belong. Mathematicians, musicians, and cooks, for instance, are usually mathematicians, musicians, and cooks by the time they are four or five years old” (Drucker, 2005, p. 7). For those of you in education, it may come down to understanding what position within a school works best for you (e.g., moving from teacher to principal or from principal to director) and knowing what position does not work for you.

5. *What can you contribute?*

How do our strengths and values help us connect with ways to contribute to the greater good?

Drucker’s work around self-awareness, along with what we are laying out here in this chapter, means being aware of your strengths and blind spots. The only way to engage in that behavior is to surround yourself with diverse-minded people and set the conditions necessary to invite them to provide you with their perspectives even if those perspectives are different from your own.



# WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Take some time to reflect and write answers to Peter Drucker's (2005) questions.

**What Are My Strengths?**

**How Do I Perform?**

**What Are My Values?**



# WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Take some time to reflect and write answers to Peter Drucker's (2005) questions.

**Where Do I Belong?**

**What Can I Contribute?**

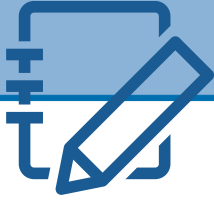
## DO I NEED TO JUMP IN OR OBSERVE?

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Let's take these questions from Drucker (2005) and go a little deeper. As a new school principal, I (Peter) was hired without any leadership experience. I had been teaching in a high-poverty city school district and was hired to take on a principalship in a rural area about 15 miles from my home. I engaged in a lot of proactive work before I officially started this position, like spending two days at the school, going over one late afternoon a week after my students went home for the day, or attending some board of education meetings in what would be my new school district. Those are examples of jumping right in because I was eager to learn and also develop relationships before I officially started the role.

However, I also knew when to wait and see where I fit in. I did not go in and try to make changes right away, because I knew that I first needed to understand where I fit into the school. Too often new principals want teachers to fit in around them, whereas the opposite is true. New leaders need to understand where they fit in, and take time to reflect on their own leadership practices and what they can learn from the situations taking place around them.

This takes self-awareness. Leaders who lack this level of awareness are more at risk to make hasty decisions that may lead to initiative fatigue because they may try to plug a hole in a problem without a true understanding of the root. This is where we see reactive (as opposed to proactive) leadership play out. We want leaders who take time to process and engage others before they define an adaptive challenge and try to solve it. To do this, leaders have to consider their own level of self-efficacy.



# WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Do you jump, or do you sit back to see where you fit in? Take some time to think of a situation where you jumped right in. Then think of another situation where you waited to see where you fit in.

**I Jumped Right in When...**

**I Waited to See Where I Fit in When...**



## LEADERSHIP SELF-EFFICACY

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Knowing when to jump in and when to see where we fit in takes self-efficacy. A common understanding of self-efficacy comes from Albert Bandura (1997):

Self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. . . . Such beliefs influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress or depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize. (p. 3)

It's important for all of us to understand self-efficacy because people who seem resistant to ideas or initiatives may just lack the self-efficacy to do the work, but they don't feel comfortable sharing that fact.

We are mindful of the "overplayed song syndrome." The more researchers and school leaders focus on self-efficacy, the more it seems to become like a favorite song. We all have favorite songs when they are first released, but after a while we hear them so many times, we begin to change the station or hide it on our playlist. Self-efficacy is at risk of suffering this fate. This would be unfortunate, as it explains so much of how people move in professional settings; it's all based in human behavior. Bandura (2010) writes,

Human behavior is extensively motivated and regulated through the exercise of self-influence. Among the mechanisms of self-influence, none is more focal or pervading than belief in one's personal efficacy. (p. 179)

Internal self-awareness and external self-awareness play critical roles in shaping an individual's self-efficacy. Internal self-awareness involves a deep understanding of one's own strengths, weaknesses, values, and emotions. When individuals possess high levels of internal self-awareness, they can more accurately assess their competencies and limitations. This self-awareness allows them to set realistic goals and make effective plans to achieve them. Consequently, their

self-efficacy tends to be higher, as they have confidence in their abilities and can channel their efforts effectively toward desired outcomes.

External self-awareness, on the other hand, pertains to one's ability to understand how others perceive them, including their strengths and weaknesses. This external perspective can be a valuable source of feedback and insights that can help individuals improve their self-efficacy. When people receive constructive feedback and validation from others, it can boost their confidence and belief in their abilities. Additionally, external self-awareness enables individuals to build a support network and seek assistance when needed, further enhancing their self-efficacy. In contrast, those who lack external self-awareness may struggle to gauge their true capabilities and may have difficulty mobilizing external resources, which can hinder their self-efficacy. Therefore, a balance of internal and external self-awareness is essential in nurturing and sustaining high levels of self-efficacy.

Intentional leadership is about understanding your strengths and areas of growth. It requires you to engage in situations that will help you learn how to strengthen your areas of weakness and learn from others. This is important because when it comes to self-efficacy, Bandura (2010) writes,

When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have a strong belief in the capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenge. (p. 180)

One of the other reasons it is important for you to understand self-efficacy as a leader centers on how our self-efficacy can work against you. Bandura (2010) found that

individuals who are highly assured in their capabilities and the effectiveness of their strategies are disinclined to seek discordant information that would suggest the need for corrective adjustments. (p. 183)

What this means is that confidence doesn't always equate to competence. Due to this aspect of self-efficacy, we are suggesting that self-awareness also means understanding one's confidence but being open to listening to dissenting opinions. The bottom line is that just because you think you are right doesn't always mean you are actually right.

We would like to give you some time to reflect on this topic of dissenting opinions and being open to listening, so please engage with the Leading With Intention deep reflection activity. The activity is meant to bring two different topics together. We want you to reflect on your leadership self-awareness, and we want you to reflect on whether you are comfortable with people who challenge you as a leader.

## LEADING WITH INTENTION

Self-efficacy is the confidence we have in our actions. All of us, including the two of us authoring this book, have areas where we feel confident and areas where we don't. However, Bandura's (1997, 2010) research shows us that confidence is not enough, and that we must seek out "discordant information." You will notice a theme from our self-awareness conversation that surrounding ourselves with a diverse group of people who will disagree with us and "be real" is important. Take some time to consider the following:

- Who makes up your diverse group of people that will be real with you?
- How have they helped change your thinking?
- Consider one example of a situation where your level of confidence prevented you from asking the right questions because you thought you knew it all already?
- How might you move forward in your leadership practices knowing that confidence doesn't always mean competence?

Leadership self-awareness is not just about understanding how you lead and listen to those confidants that you keep close around you. Leadership self-awareness is about how you are open to the insight and opinions of those educators that you often find yourself disagreeing with as well. Why? Because educators who are disgruntled often are those who don't feel like their voices are valued. They feel less valued as time goes on. Those educators have something positive to offer you.

## CONCLUSION

Sometimes you may believe you are fully self-aware, and then you have a person close to you give feedback that surprises you. The first Leading With Intention activity asked

you to videotape yourself at a meeting or a professional learning session to see if your level of self-awareness matches up with how you really act. We don't intend this to create moments of self-judgment. Leaders have a tendency to judge themselves too harshly using their inner critical voice. What we want is for you to have insight into how you interact with others. Use that insight to help you improve; don't use it to judge yourself.

Understanding yourself as a leader gives you a window into your own self-efficacy, which is highly important. Every leader or educator needs to understand their areas of strength and areas of growth. What can make your life in education more fulfilling is to have something to focus and work on that will ultimately get you to meet that success criteria you set for yourself when it comes to leadership. Understanding self-awareness and self-efficacy provides you with an opportunity to connect with your staff, students, and community in deeper ways, which will enhance your leadership and practices. In the next chapter, we explore how to connect with your staff through the practice of human interconnectedness.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How did this chapter make you feel?
- Why is self-awareness as a leader important?
- In what ways might you have an internal level of self-awareness but lack an external level of self-awareness?
- Self-efficacy is the confidence we have in our own actions. Where do you feel the greatest level of self-efficacy?
- We explored self-efficacy focusing on confidence, which doesn't always lead to competence. In what ways can you make sure you are focusing on both confidence and competence?

Now that you have read the chapter, take some time to consider what you have learned, and then think about how you learned it. Fill in the L and H sections of the KWLH chart. Did something we wrote align with actions you have taken? Did you take time away from reading the chapter and find yourself right in the middle of one of the situations we wrote about? You will continue to see the KWLH chart as we move through the book, so be prepared to start considering how you learned the information you learned.

# HOW DID WE DO?

By the end of this chapter, you will have learned to

- Engage with a metacognitive strategy that will help activate prior knowledge
- Process the elements of leadership self-awareness and consider two or three actions you can take today
- Be able to name two categories of self-awareness and relate them to your own self-awareness
- Identify four archetypes of self-awareness and how they are related to context
- Identify how leadership self-efficacy impacts what we do as leaders

## Self-Awareness KWLH Chart

Take some time to consider what you have learned after reading the chapter, and then think about how you learned it.

K	W	L	H
WHAT DO I KNOW?	WHAT DO I WANT TO LEARN?	WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?	HOW DID I LEARN IT?



## Call to Action

Consider one of the strategies that we offered within the chapter (e.g., videotape yourself leading, use the habit tracker) and try it in the next week. Before you engage in the activity, consider the following questions.

- What do you want it to look like?
- What are you hoping to learn by engaging in it?

