What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

"This timely book explores essential leadership topics with practical guidance and reflective insights. A must-read for education leaders, it promotes collaboration, emotional well-being, and growth. From refining coaching systems to embracing feedback, it equips leaders to adapt, thrive, and foster thriving communities—offering a transformative journey toward resilience and sustainable leadership excellence."

—**Jennifer Benson**
Assistant Principal, Rochester Public Schools
Rochester, Minnesota

"This book is like hiring your own personal leadership coach. The authors understand that real learning follows a metacognitive cycle of self-reflection, goal-setting, and new learning, and it means that the very practical lessons for leadership from this book won't be read and forgotten—they will lead to powerful changes in your leadership practices."

—**Mark Hillman**
Director of Teaching and Learning,
Georgetown International Academy
Georgetown, Guyana

"This book is a must-read for every school leader looking to nurture their resiliency skills, while empowering educators to do the same. Discover practical strategies to lead with self-care, grace, and resilience, even in the most challenging times! This book will help you be the leader every educator needs."

—**Jessica Johnson**
District Administrator, Dodgeland School District
Juneau, Wisconsin

"*Habits of Resilient School Leaders* offers educators a roadmap to self-care and personal sustainability. Packed with practical strategies for daily, weekly, and yearly leadership challenges, this book compassionately reminds leaders that prioritizing themselves isn't selfish—it is essential. A must-read for educators seeking sustainable success, it's like having a supportive coach in your corner."

—**Jessica Lee Lovell**
Principal, Sierra Vista High School
Las Vegas, Nevada

"This is one of the best books I have had the privilege to read in some time. It offers suggestions for how to thrive as a leader within one of the most challenging eras in education. It is chock-full of strategies and suggestions that can be immediately implemented and measured for impact."

—Lynn Lisy-Macan
Retired Superintendent
Bluffton, South Carolina

"This book provides a road map for leaders by defining resilience as actively leveraging difficult experiences for personal and organizational growth. It provides the right habits; leaders can create a positive and empowering environment that benefits everyone involved. This is a resourceful tool that won't sit on a shelf."

—Debra Paradowski
Associate Principal, Mukwonago High School
Waukesha, Wisconsin

"This book is ideal for school administrators and aspiring leaders seeking practical tools to balance personal well-being with professional impact. It is a comprehensive, empowering resource that inspires growth, resilience, and lasting change in schools. Ten thoughtfully crafted chapters provide simple strategies for school leaders to balance priorities, overcome challenges, and elevate their impact on school communities."

—Katie Ann Schafer
Principal, Pine Island Middle School
Pine Island, Minnesota

"As a veteran administrator, this book helped me reflect on where I have been as a leader (strengths and weaknesses), where I am now, and what I can do to be better moving forward. It left me energized and reminded me of my *why* for being an educational leader."

—Leslie Standerfer
Assistant Superintendent of Academics,
Buckeye Union School District
Litchfield Park, Arizona

Habits of Resilient
School Leaders

Habits of Resilient School Leaders

Personal Practices That Drive Professional Impact

Lindsay Prendergast
Piper Lee

Foreword by Dominique Smith

A Joint Publication

CORWIN *learning forward*

CORWIN

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Contents

online
resources

Visit the *Habits of Resilient Leaders* companion website at
https://companion.corwin.com/courses/resilientleaders
for downloadable resources.

Foreword

Early in my career as an aspiring leader, I saw Principal Baruti K. Kafele speak. He asked the audience a simple question: "Is your school better because you lead it?" That question sparked a drive in me to make sure I was doing everything in my power to make sure the school I led was better for our students, colleagues, families, and community. That question still guides my daily work in our school and the way that I plan for the future of our organization.

Now, over ten years later, I still have that spark. I work every day to ensure that I live up to those expectations, which requires that I address the new issues that arise daily. Unfortunately, I have seen some of my colleagues struggle during their first years of leadership. They experience the frustration that comes with leading adults and burnout generated by long days and family expectations. Although these emotions can come to the front of every educator's mind, the one area we can continue to focus on, and which is this book's backbone, is leaders' resilience. As leaders we can make the changes needed, and support our teachers and students, if we are resilient during the hard times and celebrate the times of success.

Leadership should be a praised position in our field, and we need to reclaim that feeling. *Habits of Resilient School Leaders: Personal Practices That Drive Professional Impact* by Lindsay Prendergast and Piper Lee helps leaders reexamine their own resilience by producing practical habits that leaders can use to have a successful career. The real-life examples and vignettes put you directly into a reflection mode to help you as a leader explore your own values, beliefs, and ideas. As a leader, I appreciate the return to habits and the focus on the small areas that can slip our minds as we go through the everyday life as a leader. The authors push you to think of how you set your own boundaries and create a meaningful space for feedback, protecting your own personal well-being while navigating your school toward a true vision. With years of experience in leadership, these authors have created a book that is resourceful for any leader no matter the experience. This book is not built for just administrators but anyone who is exploring or currently in a leadership role. I appreciated that practical habits can hold myself and the team I lead in a space to have success. After reading this book, I have

seen myself refocus on being a lead learner, checking my blind spots and making sure I balance my work-life experience. As I was questioned in the beginning of my career, "Is your school better because you lead it?" I believe by working on these habits I could say, "Yes." I encourage every leader to take the time to dive deeper into this book because this is not just a book, but a guide to your journey as an educator. This work will never be the easiest, but by having a road map like this book to guide our practices, I hope to see more and more leaders not wanting to leave this profession or leave their schools but rather thrive as resilient school leaders.

—Dominique Smith

Acknowledgments

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This book also stands as a testament to the remarkable individuals who have graciously shared their stories, insights, and experiences with us. Their willingness to engage and collaborate has been instrumental in the creation of the valuable lessons and knowledge presented within these pages. We are deeply grateful for the support and leadership of our colleagues at Corwin who have provided unwavering moral and professional encouragement and enabled us to bring this project to fruition. Special thanks to our fellow Corwin authors, Dr. Jeffrey Wilhelm, Dr. Thomas Guskey, and our incredible thought partners including Lindsay Deacon, Lori Stollar, and many others for their invaluable expertise and support throughout the journey.

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About the Authors

Lindsay Prendergast brings nearly two decades of experience in global education, where her roles have ranged from leadership coach to principal, consultant, and classroom teacher. As the assistant director of strategy and development with the Danielson Group, she collaborates with districts, schools, and educators to promote equitable teaching and learning through the Framework for Teaching. Lindsay's work centers on leading systems change and advancing instructional leadership with practical and impactful insights. Recognized as an ASCD Emerging Leader and Champion in Education as well as an AAIE Fellow, Lindsay is an established thought leader who frequently shares her expertise on leadership development, growth-centered supervision, and assessment practices through ASCD, Learning Forward, Edutopia, AAIE, EARCOS, AMLE, Cognia, and more. She coauthored best-selling *Habits of Resilient Educators: Strategies for Thriving During Times of Anxiety, Doubt, and Constant Change* (Prendergast & Lee, 2024), as well as dozens of articles and manuscripts in the field of education. Driven by a commitment to impactful change and global competence, Lindsay's work empowers educators to navigate complex challenges, fostering environments where both teachers and students thrive. Lindsay holds a bachelor's degree from Wofford College, a master's degree in education leadership from Colorado Western State University, and a doctoral degree in education leadership from Wilkes University.

Piper Lee has more than twenty-five years of experience in education, including teaching, administration, instructional coaching, professional learning facilitation, and leadership coaching. Her passion for student and adult learning and improving effective teacher instruction and student success in learning ignited her pursuit of working as an instructional leadership coach nationally. Over the course of her career, Piper has served students, families, teachers, leadership teams, and undergraduate and graduate students. Most recently, Piper has been supporting district leaders, principals, and educators in one of the largest school districts in the country. While partnering with educators across the country, Piper has learned and lives the philosophy that rigorous relationships help create transformative schools and impact every aspect of our lives. Piper received her bachelor of arts degree in elementary education, her master's degree in curriculum and instruction, and her education leadership certification and licensure from Winona State University in Minnesota.

Introduction

WHY THIS BOOK? WHY YOU?

Leadership, like teaching, can and should be a joyful profession where practitioners feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in their work. Yet worldwide, there is a sense of hopelessness around changing the contemporary culture of chaos. Studies show that the attrition rate of education leaders in K–12 schools worldwide has been steadily increasing at an alarming rate (NASSP & LPI, 2022), and systems may struggle to fill leadership roles for years to come. While similar to the data seen around classroom educators exiting the profession, this issue is receiving far less media attention. Therefore, we must shift the narrative. As authors, we are a team of eternal optimists with deep experience and endless admiration for education leaders. We aim to empower education leaders with a framework that enables them to regain control of their mindset and their practice despite their daily encounters with factors outside their control. The habits of personal and professional practice described in this book focus on adult well-being as seen through the lens of effective learning environments in schools and districts. In support of every leader's right to experience sustained confidence, fulfillment, and joy in their career, you will find that the chapters of this book provide authentic, proven practices that extend beyond self-care or managerial skills and provide a framework for you to sustain your journey without impacting your health. Let us dive in!

THE IMPERATIVE TO ADDRESS LEADER WELL-BEING: RESILIENCE IS KEY

Education leaders today need simple, proven habits that will equip them for the contemporary educational landscape. Administrators' well-being matters to themselves and the teachers, communities, and students they serve. School leaders are expected to support students, teachers, and the broader school community. This emotional labor, including managing

crises, conflicts, and the well-being of staff and students, often takes a toll on their own mental health. Stress and burnout are closely associated with high turnover rates among school leaders, which disrupts school continuity and affects student learning outcomes. Resilience, however, is an effective mindset comprised of many factors that may be intentionally developed and serve to mitigate the effects of stress, burnout, and environments characterized by constant uncertainty.

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands" (American Psychological Association, n.d.). These processes are critical for leaders striving to sustain well-being amidst their myriad complexities and challenges. Education environments are constantly evolving due to curriculum changes, policy shifts, technological advancements, or unexpected events (like pandemics). Leaders who have developed resilience can better adapt to these changes while maintaining stability for their staff and students. A resilient leader models perseverance, optimism, and emotional intelligence, which can foster a school culture that encourages these same traits in teachers and students. By understanding resilience through the habits related to leading an education system within these chapters, leaders can invest in their well-being and that of their entire community.

> *A resilient leader models perseverance, optimism, and emotional intelligence, which can foster a school culture that encourages these same traits in teachers and students.*

The habits described in this book each play a unique role in contributing toward your ability to develop and experience resilience. For example, a distinct aspect of resilient individuals is the experience of efficacy or belief in their ability to do their work well (Goddard et al., 2004). This construct links to the broader observation of sociocultural theory that we all have a vast network of influences that encourage or discourage us from believing in our ability to affect change. The habits of resilient leaders described herein are all focused on creating a positive and supportive network of influences that can enable those beliefs for individual leaders and support them in creating that social context for those they serve. In this way, we hope to show that these habits aren't *life hacks* capable of solving any problem but small

practices that collectively create a context within which leaders can grow and develop as influential instructional leaders while navigating the complexities of contemporary education.

HOW DO HABITS INFLUENCE YOUR RESILIENCE AS AN EDUCATION LEADER?

Habits play a crucial role in shaping resilience for education leaders, as they form the foundation of how you react, adapt, and persist in all situations. As you navigate the extreme unpredictability of a job that demands your utmost clarity of mind and complete focus, your habits will provide you with a calm, predictable foundation for ways of thinking and acting that require almost no bandwidth to engage. As with the *Habits of Resilient Educators* (Prendergast & Lee, 2024) book, you will focus on building psychological capital, a practice supported by research on positive psychology, to support your ability to withstand change and uncertainty, become proactive, and develop a sense of control amidst chaos. Intentionally mastering skills, for example, around the habit of setting boundaries (Chapter 1) will empower you to apply healthy responses in demanding situations without almost any cognitive demand, easing your brain's levels of stress and protecting your attention for more impactful tasks such as casting an ambitious vision for your community (Chapter 3). You'll experience the opportunity within these chapters to draw connections across the habits, recognizing that becoming an expert in the art of seeking feedback and applying it to your personal and professional growth (Chapter 8) will amplify your efforts to develop the habit of checking your blind spots (Chapter 4) to ensure you improve at predicting how your community may react to new initiatives or ideas. Each of these habits has been carefully selected to support your growth at any stage of your career and to be revisited throughout your career as an iterative cycle of continuous personal improvement. As author Clear (2018) shared in *Atomic Habits*, "Habits are the compound interest of personal improvement" (p. 118). As you engage in the interactive activities within these chapters, you are investing small moments of your time and energy toward your broader goals of succeeding as a leader in education, and your daily efforts will multiply into a greater impact on both your well-being and the effect your leadership may have on the students and families in your school.

Build
Boundaries,
Not Walls

Manage Change,
or It Will
Manage You

Fill Your
Bucket

Don't Travel
Alone

Be the Vision
Caster

**Resilient
Leaders**

The Art of
Feedback

Check Your
Blind Spots

Data Tells a
Story:
What's Yours?

High
Expectations
For All

Lead as
a Learner

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Perhaps you find yourself reading this book at the start of your career as an education leader, or maybe you are well into your journey and seeking renewal and inspiration to offset the stressors and challenges around you. No matter the case, this book offers learning opportunities and fresh ideas applicable in any setting and for any individual. Though organized in a sequential manner, the chapters need not be explored to have an effect. Rather, the habits within these chapters are best understood as a web of practices and mindsets that intersect across and throughout the environments and scenarios you lead. As a result, consider each of the chapters and determine your ideal learning journey based on your needs and goals. You may explore habits based on the time of the school year when you

are most likely to apply them or as a deep dive during a school holiday to gain insight into where each habit might be applied across your work. Without question, the concepts in the book are deeply amplified when explored in a setting with others: coach, mentor, fellow leaders, professional learning network, etc. For example, the opportunity to implement activities within each chapter will be enhanced with reflection conversations, bringing diverse perspectives and experiences to your personal approach. Regardless of how, when, and with whom you embark on the learning journey, prepare to grow and invest in your resilience as a leader so you may better serve your community!

In **Chapter 1**, you will begin your journey toward resilience by studying the merit of creating personal and professional boundaries as a leader. You will also learn strategies to clarify priorities; determine healthy boundaries across different environments and roles; and communicate with others around the "why," "who," and "how" these boundaries will ensure effective school leadership.

In **Chapter 2**, you'll explore how leaders who can sustain a high level of function in their professional lives often invest equally in nurturing a healthy personal life. This chapter presents practices and strategies to identify all aspects of one's identity, develop routines that balance personal and professional pursuits, and connect a leader's investment in their overall well-being to their impact on the students they serve.

Chapter 3 examines the habit of long-range *vision casting*. You'll explore the integration of data use, the practice of zeroing in on your purpose as a leader as it pertains to leading the school's vision, the crucial need to foster hope for the community, and many other leader actions that not only streamline your efforts but amplify your impact.

Chapter 4 centers on the habit of recognizing and addressing *blind spots* as a leader. It will introduce explicit practices such as identifying implicit biases, applying the concept of blind spots toward crucial leadership priorities, and building the most effective staff to achieve your highest outcomes for students.

In **Chapter 5**, you'll delve into a study of efficient, impactful practices for becoming a lead learner in your system. Practices and ideas will be presented around prioritizing *must know* information and strategically involving team members in the learning, reflecting on stakeholder behaviors across a consciousness/competence matrix, determining effective support actions, building leader credibility, and becoming an authentic activator of learning in your school or district.

In **Chapter 6**, you'll investigate how leaders may be at risk for inadvertently allowing a slow, gentle decline in expectations of their community and how that can have devastating cumulative effects. This chapter will provide strategies for building team maturity and understanding around the causes and effects of adult expectations, examine the effect of martyrdom in a school setting, and offer tools for *giving away the work* so others may become equal owners of the impact.

Chapter 7 will lead you on a journey toward effective use of data as a leader. You will learn strategies around using the data sources to *get curious*, seek powerful practices, identify sources of excellence to replicate, determine who and what needs attention for support, and continuously communicate with stakeholders the connection between data and instruction.

Chapter 8 addresses the key characteristics of feedback for education leaders, specifically examining the importance of seeking feedback for leaders in pursuit of their professional and community growth. You'll gain unique strategies for soliciting feedback and utilizing it to accelerate personal impact as a leader and connect feedback to overall school culture.

Chapter 9 will establish that leaders cannot have the fullest impact on their schools without comprehensive support from a network of mentors and coaches, fellow leaders, and the greater education community. You'll gain strategies for determining the type of networks that serve individual needs, how to build them, and practices for intentionally leveraging their value to foster your continuous growth as an education leader.

Chapter 10 culminates your study of the habits by examining how to skillfully navigate change as a leader. Building on the skills and mindsets developed across each of the other habits, you will develop approaches toward leading and managing change that empower you to confidently guide your community toward a vision of utmost success for every stakeholder.

Throughout this book, you will also experience practical stories from educational leaders, opportunities to apply your learning in the Pause and Reflect sections, and opportunities for journaling and reflection at the end of each chapter.

TAKE YOURSELF ON A PERSONAL GROWTH JOURNEY

As you begin the book, you will notice an early emphasis on the habit of investing in yourself. We invite you to embrace this mindset throughout every chapter as you create time and

space to reflect, understand, and apply the practices within each habit. While much of your work as a leader inherently positions you to be the caretaker of those around you, without feeling fulfilled and healthy yourself, your efforts to support the teachers, families, and students in your community will further drain your precious energy reserves and put you at risk for ultimately being unable to take care of yourself, let alone of others. Thus, consider the learning experiences in this book as an entry point into the mindsets and practices that you may apply on a daily basis throughout your career to nourish your personal well-being and your professional capacity to lead. Rather than isolate self-care's personal and professional aspects, the habits you will study are situated at the intersection of the two. For example, as you learn the habit of utilizing data as a leader, you will not only apply practices that foster efficient data analysis to understand the effect of academic learning initiatives but you will also apply the habit of gathering data to inform how you interpret interpersonal interactions with those in your community. As such, you will understand that data may support your ability to be realistically optimistic in even the most challenging situations, a mindset recognized as an attribute of resilient individuals who navigate uncertainty with confidence and control. This is but one example of the myriad ways in which each of the habits applies to your work as an instructional leader and your own personal well-being. You deserve the time and space to learn these skills, and by investing in a conscious effort to apply them routinely, you will grow as a leader and amplify your positive impact on those you serve.

> *Without feeling fulfilled and healthy yourself, your efforts to support the teachers, families, and students in your community will further drain your precious energy reserves and put you at risk for ultimately being unable to take care of yourself, let alone of others.*

COLLABORATE WITH A MENTOR, COACH, OR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COHORT

In Chapter 9, "Don't Travel Alone," you will study the habit of developing a thriving network of individuals and groups who may nourish your growth and support you in times of uncertainty. Before you reach that chapter, consider the opportunity to engage in your learning experience around all of the habits in collaboration with others. By partnering with a colleague, seeking a trusted mentor or coach, or perhaps gathering a group of fellow leaders to study the habits together, you will find that

your learning grows exponentially. Surrounded by the fresh perspectives of others with backgrounds and experiences distinct from your own, each chapter's specific activities will become much more meaningful. Further, by partnering with a peer who may serve as a personal *accountability partner*, you will benefit from the effect of feeling motivated to uphold expectations for someone else who is counting on you to share the experience with you. There is no recipe for a perfect collaboration method around the book's content, but without question, this book is well-suited to being studied in partnership with others.

GET READY, SET YOUR INTENTIONS, AND GO IMPROVE!

MY LEARNING INTENTIONS FOR READING THIS BOOK ARE . . .
1.
2.
3.

Build Boundaries, Not Walls

Monique, a middle school principal beginning her third year, sat in her office and felt her heart begin to race. There were emotionally charged parents outside yelling at the administrative assistant. Through the door she heard enough to know they were demanding to see the principal. In several minutes, Monique's leadership team would be arriving to begin their weekly language arts instructional rounds together. She winced, realizing these had already been postponed from the previous week when she had to cancel to support the Assistant Principal in a delicate student conflict that was likely to upset most of the teaching staff with its outcome. Monique wanted nothing more than to prioritize her instructional leadership, and yet she struggled to do so as she was constantly reacting to the emotional needs of others. Thinking about her goals of student academic growth and achievement in reading made the overwhelm grow even deeper. Her phone pinged, and a text from the administrative assistant appeared. Did she have time to see the frustrated parents? Did she remember that her leadership team was also waiting for her to do language arts instructional rounds? In a moment of clarity, Monique decided to send the parents home and schedule a meeting with them after school. She called in her leadership team and let them know that instructional rounds were going to become a high priority. Moving forward, these would not be interrupted unless it was a true emergency. Later, meeting with the upset parents after school, she realized that because she had allowed some time to pass before meeting with her, they were not as emotionally charged. In fact, everyone was calmer and able to discuss the student concerns more rationally. As she reflected on the drive home, Monique realized that by communicating some simple boundaries with staff and parents in this instance, she had arrived at a better outcome for everyone, including herself.

WHY HEALTHY BOUNDARIES IN LEADERSHIP MATTER

In the context of education, professional and personal boundaries are becoming an essential habit for leaders to understand and maintain. Over the last decade, the pressure for school and district leaders to give more and more of their personal time has grown extremely prevalent. Technology has allowed leaders to become more accessible and to build relationships with stakeholders but has also created more access to work twenty-four hours a day, every day of the week. Through our extensive coaching and collaboration with schools and district leaders in action, we have observed patterns emerge that distinguished those education leaders who are becoming burnt out from those who continue to demonstrate job satisfaction. These fulfilled administrators have developed the skills of establishing, communicating, and maintaining boundaries in both their professional and personal lives. Boundaries are best described as the invisible lines that help us to effectively function in a manner that sustains our personal agency. Dr. Sharon Martin, a psychotherapist, describes how "with every relationship, personal or professional, comes the need for boundaries. Boundaries are the invisible lines that keep us physically and emotionally safe while effectively functioning. They govern what we are willing to do and not do, say and hear, and give and receive. Boundaries come in many forms." (2018).

Boundaries are best described as the invisible lines that help us to effectively function in a manner that sustains our personal agency.

Despite being widely recognized as an important practice for leaders (Weiss et al., 2018), the habit of setting healthy boundaries is not commonly discussed in educational leadership circles or journals. Rather, in the field of education, leaders (like teachers and others working in schools), may find themselves susceptible to a societal perception that they are expected to meet the needs of their entire community at all times—even at the cost of their own well-being. Further, education leaders may be attracted to the work because of the profound potential for being rewarded by helping others. Education is a profession known to draw the interest of individuals who aspire to impact the lives of others and to have a positive influence on society by shaping the futures of

young people. By the very nature of the work, educators are often appropriately categorized as "servant leaders." With this prevalent mindset grounded in giving toward others, the profession is also at risk for positioning leaders as those who are easy to take advantage of by demanding unusually high outputs of time, attention to the needs of others, and even personal resources. Applying boundaries—a form of limits on external influences that serve to protect your needs—may feel unnatural or counterintuitive for leaders whose personal beliefs are grounded in taking care of others before themselves. However, learning to consistently and effectively apply boundaries serves to protect the capacity for fully giving love, attention, care, and expertise to a leader's community. Without them, no one is humanly capable of meeting all of the needs of every single stakeholder and burnout is inevitable.

Boundaries for all leaders are a critical habit that must be prioritized to ensure preservation of mental health, utmost effectiveness as a leader, and capacity to influence utmost high levels of student learning in classrooms. However, administrators, like many other professionals, may hold misconceptions about the purpose of defining and utilizing boundaries in the workplace. Consider the following characteristics that define what boundaries can, and cannot, offer school and district leaders for application in their setting (Figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1 ● Characteristics of Boundaries

WHAT BOUNDARIES ARE . . .	WHAT BOUNDARIES ARE NOT . . .
Boundaries allow you to prioritize your professional and personal needs and time.	Boundaries are not intended to control others' time.
Boundaries are a gate that allow those who are more responsible to gain more access to you.	Boundaries are not intended to control others' actions.
Boundaries allow for healthy communication.	Boundaries are not used to shut others' opinions or voices down.
Boundaries help to prioritize and protect your professional and personal goals.	Boundaries are not used to dictate others' goals.
Boundaries protect your happiness.	Boundaries do not stop others from acting irresponsibly.

LET BOUNDARIES BECOME YOUR SUPERPOWER!

Utilizing boundaries is not typically encountered in traditional leadership development courses, nor in educator certification programs. Further, the act of defining a boundary around one's personal needs, goals, interests, or preferences may feel downright uncomfortable to some. Establishing a boundary first requires understanding how it feels when your subconscious beliefs and assumptions about right and wrong are affronted and why those feelings occur in each situation. Examples of boundaries that may be crossed might include intrusions on your time, a conflict with your internal expectations about how a project should be accomplished, or a colleague consistently taking advantage of your perceived willingness to take on more of the difficult tasks at work. While your role is one that involves supporting others, setting limits is both necessary and healthy. Creating a boundary is not about making yourself unavailable; it's about managing your time and energy so you can be at your best for those whom you lead. When faced with an experience that feels like an intrusion on your unspoken expectations, a boundary can help! Specific practices that enable the creation of healthy boundaries can include the following:

1. Clarifying your priorities: When you are certain about what must happen to ensure success (for any type of scenario),

you can better ascertain what will hinder progress and more easily say "no" to those requests or tasks.

2. Communicating directly and kindly: Setting boundaries by telling others "no" can cause feelings of guilt. With clear communication as to why you are not able to accede to a request you avoid misunderstandings or assumptions and establish fair, clear expectations.

3. Setting boundaries before intrusions occur: You may notice patterns in your interactions with others wherein they seem to make assumptions about how and when to interact with you. Preemptively establishing boundaries that will diminish these instances, such as clear blocks and open spaces on your calendar for when you're free for certain things, can fend off unintended dissonance from having to decline meetings or appear uninterested in collaborating.

While your role is one that involves supporting others, setting limits is both necessary and healthy. Creating a boundary is not about making yourself unavailable; it's about managing your time and energy so you can be at your best for those whom you lead.

Consider this scenario about VaShawn, an experienced Deputy Superintendent and former principal who ascribes to the belief that his purpose as an educator is to help all students achieve their potential, no matter what cost:

VaShawn left the meeting with the team of middle school principals with a deep knot in his stomach. The discussion had circled for two hours around the data suggesting the Emergent Bilingual population of students in the district were not growing academically from year to year; worse, they were declining in achievement for the third year in a row. The school leaders identified dozens of contributing reasons for the disturbing data, and VaShawn countered them with a long list of solutions he had prepared in advance of the meeting. Leaving that day, not one principal had agreed to adopt any of his solutions. He was adamant that he would never force the principals to do something against their will, but he was equally certain the family engagement program he had designed was one of the best solutions to the challenges at hand. Begrudgingly, he now landed on the notion that he would have to spearhead the initiative through his office and not burden the principals with his ideals. He felt the uncomfortable sensation of resentment growing in his conscience against the principals he began to judge as lazy and apathetic, yet it would be inappropriate to confront their

(Continued)

resistance directly. As he arrived home, he spent much of the evening venting his irritation to his partner. The next day, he initiated the first steps toward launching the family engagement project on his own.

While VaShawn is a talented and effective leader in many ways, he's apprehensive at establishing several types of boundaries in his work with his team of school principals, and this places him at risk for adverse outcomes that may cause his own well-being and job satisfaction to suffer. For example, the problem being discussed with the leaders was a set of data that belonged to everyone in the room, not just a few schools and not just VaShawn. His approach to offer a selection of solutions to the administrators was honorable, reasonable, and efficient. VaShawn also arrived at the meeting with an assumption about the outcome he desired to achieve: the leaders would assume responsibility for the data and elect the most effective interventions to adopt and implement in response. For VaShawn to effectively achieve his goals for an action plan, protect his own need to relentlessly pursue what is best for the district's students, and respect the rights of the group of principals to preserve their integrity and lead their buildings according to their expertise, he could shift the experience altogether by deploying his superpower boundaries! Consider the examples in Figure 1.2 describing ways VaShawn might use boundaries to achieve the environment most likely to ensure successful outcomes.

FIGURE 1.2 ● Boundary Examples

DESIRED STATE	EFFECTIVE USE OF BOUNDARIES TO ACHIEVE THE DESIRED STATE
VaShawn and the principals collaboratively develop an action plan for interventions in response to the data.	Clear definition of roles at the onset of the meeting. Implement meeting norms with the group to ensure equal participation, collective responsibility, and shared outcomes.
Principals retain agency over their respective school sites and implementation plans.	VaShawn preemptively determines a few *nonnegotiables* as well as explicit opportunities for individual choice.
VaShawn sustains his personal purpose of adapting to the current environment and responding effectively to meet the needs of all students.	VaShawn leads the meetings with frequent reiterations of the district mission and vision—the "why" for all decisions made. At the meeting conclusion, VaShawn communicates a long-range framework for implementation that incorporates regular feedback cycles from principals.

Pause and Reflect

As you journey through this chapter and those coming afterward, reflect on your own shifts within unique leadership experiences. These reflection questions may guide your examination of when boundaries may have been a superpower you could have deployed to achieve your desired state!

What assumptions or hidden expectations do you hold of others as you initiate a new decision, initiative, program, or other action as a leader? Why might others need to know those expectations?

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What emotions might you experience if not all of the stakeholders involved in your next project or initiative respond in accordance with your expectations?

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How might defining explicit boundaries for yourself and for others *before* beginning the project or initiative foster success for everyone involved?

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REAP THE REWARDS OF HEALTHY BOUNDARY-SETTING

It's crucial when learning to improve your habit of boundary-setting that you understand the different types of boundaries, how they might appear in the education setting, and the risks and rewards you may incur if you do, or do not, apply them. We created Figure 1.3 to guide you in this endeavor.

FIGURE 1.3 ● Types of Boundaries

TYPE OF BOUNDARY	BOUNDARY VIOLATION EXAMPLES	IMPACT WHEN BOUNDARIES ARE NOT APPLIED	BENEFITS OF APPLYING THIS TYPE OF BOUNDARY
Emotional Boundaries: What, where, and how much a person shares their emotional life and how your own and others' emotional needs are handled.	Staff expect you to always know, without being told, what they need and attend to those needs so that they feel supported when managing student behavior.	Leaders feel as though they are constantly disappointing their stakeholders, leading to frustration and diminished self-worth.	Clearly sharing with teachers that you cannot know their needs unless they are shared explicitly, then affirming efforts to share needs with positive support.
Material Boundaries: Treatment of possessions and property and how possessions and property are shared or withheld.	Colleagues assume because you are an administrator that you earn a substantial income and should always cover the bill for social outings.	Conceding to others' expectations when it comes to finances easily harms your personal budget and can lead to resentment toward others.	When a boundary is established, respect is formed and everyone involved is able to enjoy being together without hidden judgments or assumptions.
Time Boundaries: How you relate to your own and others' time and how time-related needs and preferences are treated.	Parents aren't sure how you spend your time and draw conclusions you are always readily available, becoming disgruntled when you don't respond to their needs as immediately as they are presented.	Giving your precious time to anyone who demands it and at the moment they demand it ensures you will never have enough time to attend to the demanding work of leading the entire school toward its vision.	Creating systems and structures, and then clearly sharing them and upholding them consistently, offers a healthy framework under which all stakeholders know the *rules* and can operate reasonably within them, thus you remain in control of your time.

TYPE OF BOUNDARY	BOUNDARY VIOLATION EXAMPLES	IMPACT WHEN BOUNDARIES ARE NOT APPLIED	BENEFITS OF APPLYING THIS TYPE OF BOUNDARY
Personal Limit Boundaries: How often you place your personal needs and desires as the last priority, making sacrifices of your time and effort predominantly to meet others' needs.	Your predecessor established the unwritten expectation that the principal should attend every single after-school activity, even traveling with student teams to events. Doing so means you have zero time for personal health pursuits, least of all your family.	Upholding high demands by others on your personal time for fear of disappointing stakeholders puts your own health at risk—both mental and physical—for being *hands on, mind on* beyond healthy levels for a job.	Ensuring meaningful engagements at some events as opposed to attending every single one shows stakeholders you care for the entire community, yet protects your nonwork time and models healthy work-life balance for your staff.
Social Boundaries: Alignment of your words and behavior with your values, and your responses to others when this alignment is violated.	Fellow administrators constantly disparage their district bosses and the superintendent whenever you are together, bringing down your optimistic attitude and calling into question your commitment to the work.	Allowing those around you to control the narrative of every conversation in a negative or disparaging direction drains your happiness, diminishes your confidence in your own leaders, and fractures trust at all levels.	Defining the impact of such behavior with peers informs them that their actions are harming you. Withholding your presence from their conversations preserves your mental attitude and sustains focus on areas that bring hope, joy, and optimism.

HOW SCHOOL STAKEHOLDERS BENEFIT FROM LEADERS' BOUNDARIES

While setting boundaries is generally a healthy practice, there are unique circumstances through which to consider the impact of boundaries differently for different members of your community. For example, setting a clear boundary with fellow administrators that you don't wish to spend time disparaging your supervisors together is likely to be unnecessary with the teachers in your school. Modeling boundaries with parents around how they are able to set time to meet with you, however, is likely a fantastic opportunity to model healthy boundary practices for those same teachers to use in their own practice. In this section, you'll examine

strategies and practices for setting healthy boundaries with the following groups:

- your leadership team
- classroom educators whom you lead
- students and families

Consider the intersections and distinct practices throughout each section as you look for opportunities to amplify your own growth journey within this habit and look forward to opportunities for deepening this work while practicing other habits such as upholding high expectations for all and the art of getting feedback.

MODELING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES WITH BUILDING LEADERSHIP TEAMS

Modeling boundaries with your leadership team helps demonstrate what good leaders say, do, and how we respond to others. As an education leader, you set the tone for your team's culture, so demonstrating how to establish and maintain boundaries is key. Start by being transparent about your own boundaries—for example, let your team know when you're unavailable for non-urgent matters, such as during family time or dedicated focus blocks. This helps others understand that it's okay to prioritize personal time without guilt. Another strategy is to be clear about meeting expectations—set agendas, keep discussions focused, and honor agreed-upon end times to respect everyone's schedules. Encourage team members to take regular breaks and respect their need for personal time, especially during high-stress periods. By modeling these practices with consistency, your team will understand their importance and be more likely to apply the approaches themselves.

Another area where leaders have an important opportunity to model healthy boundaries is in how you navigate experiences that are out of your control. For example, it is inevitable that in an era of great change someone will dislike any change you or the district makes and they will become angry. It is in those moments that you may want to just make people happy or become a people pleaser. However, not maintaining healthy professional boundaries in your response may briefly allow that one negative nagging voice to be happy, but you run the risk of violating the vision, goals, and needs of the rest of your staff and students. Further, you may find it comforting to process difficult experiences by verbalizing your frustrations or

disappointments with others as a way of fostering relatability and empathy. The absence of a boundary around how you communicate and with whom may invite your stakeholders to feel equally negative about an experience or, worse, convey your opinions to others as though they are concrete information. In the face of disruption, change, or uncertainty, support your team and your own needs instead by establishing space and time for courageous conversations, inviting others to have a healthy conversation so they can feel seen, heard, and valued while establishing those clear boundaries of how we talk about district decisions, staff, and students.

SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES WITH CLASSROOM EDUCATORS

Relationships between principals, educators, and school support staff can be polarizing at times. A principal plays many distinct roles as a building leader, which can complicate the delicate dance of creating healthy boundaries with school staff. Principals operate with a collaborative stance, a coaching stance, and a directive stance. However, they must also build trusting relationships with all staff members regardless of the role they are playing. "There is not a singular action that will lead to developing a trusting relationship, but rather multiple actions over an extended period to earn that trust" (Medor, 2019, p. 1). In other words, building relationships through a variety of actions with healthy boundaries takes time.

One action step that helps establish clarity and trust in professional relationships is a Clarifying Roles and Tasks workflow chart. This chart helps educators and principals determine who is responsible for tasks that may arise. The key is to clarify the roles of each task and identify which person is the key responsibility holder. By articulating each of these areas, team members are empowered to understand when they are expected to take action and each individual is aware of where the others are focusing their effort. These boundaries, or established rules of engagement, instill the confidence for all to move forward and trust that the goals are clear and other areas are not being ignored or left undone.

These boundaries, or established rules of engagement, instill the confidence for all to move forward and trust that the goals are clear and other areas are not being ignored or left undone.

Pause and Reflect

Use this chart to brainstorm specific ways that the roles different individuals might be defined when a group or team is focusing on different day-to-day tasks. Examples of tasks have been provided (though you may choose to create your own), and the subsequent columns provide space to journal your ideas.

Sample Clarifying Roles and Tasks Workflow

TASK	PRINCIPAL	EDUCATOR
Communication with students about before and after school procedures		
Communicating when a child is bullied		
Communicating academic celebrations		
Communicating PLC agenda		
Communicating expectations around implementing the new curriculum		

TASK	PRINCIPAL	EDUCATOR

SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Boundaries are an essential element of trust. When you have no boundaries, it leaves the other person guessing what the guardrails are (Lofgren, 2021). It is evident that in all relationships within the school that leaders must work hard to develop trust. Students and families come from many backgrounds and may have faced lots of trauma and overwhelm over the last decade. Now more than ever it is essential for leaders to help clearly define the guardrails or boundaries that will help all parties effectively function. We have more trust in those who help us by articulating the guardrails. For example, consider Monique's successful experience establishing a clear and simple boundary with the help of her administrative assistant to always ask parents to come back later in the day when she has availability on her calendar. Consider the merit of the formal structure for this boundary that adds further clarity for all involved: create a standing open time such as *office hours* exclusively to handle any parent or student challenges that may have arisen earlier in the day. Such a practice can serve to provide those clear guardrails so that parents and students can't constantly march into your office and command your attention at any time of their choosing. In the following chart, consider more opportunities that could steal time from your calendar and how you will want to handle those. Providing these guardrails to each member of your community will help build a trusting atmosphere.

Pause and Reflect

Use the chart to identify possible challenges and plans for boundaries when managing the relationships of students, families, and the school.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGE	DESIRED OUTCOME	BOUNDARY: GUARDRAILS TO SUPPORT THE DESIRED OUTCOME
Example: A teacher persistently arrives to team meetings several minutes late, commonly reporting being *stuck* with students after school.	All staff respect the sanctity of team meetings and one another's time by being punctual and prepared. Staff don't consume extra time with you to catch up on missed information from arriving to meetings late.	1. All-staff reminder of the purpose of punctuality for all team gatherings. 2. Individual conference with the specific teacher describing clear expectations and the impact of their behavior on you and the team. 3. As needed, prompt emails addressing the missed expectations following the communication, ensuring they are aware you *inspect what you expect*.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGE	DESIRED OUTCOME	BOUNDARY: GUARDRAILS TO SUPPORT THE DESIRED OUTCOME

As you develop your skills at identifying, utilizing, and upholding good boundaries, remember "Boundaries are only effective when we set and enforce them with ourselves and others. These

are the rules, and we have to be willing to accept the consequences of enforcing them, because the consequences are far greater than when we don't. We are not victims of our circumstances. Boundaries give us the power to choose and the responsibility to decide" (Cloud, 2013, p. 7). Putting the habit of using boundaries to work is an investment not only in yourself, but in the impact you may have on the students and staff in your school.

The Big Ideas

In this chapter, you explored the idea that identifying and applying boundaries in your personal and professional life can be a crucial practice toward ensuring that you are able to bring your best self to the work you want to do: elevate learning for every single student in your school. As you begin to move through forthcoming chapters, recall how you connected the strategies described herein to the people and structures in your current role. Chapter 1 laid the foundation to understand the importance of boundaries in creating realistic expectations of yourself and for others and shared ideas for communicating this intent across each of your school or district's different stakeholder groups. Prepare to examine the intersection of these practices and the range of skills you will develop in the chapters ahead on your journey toward becoming a resilient leader.

Let's Reflect

1. What new ideas have extended your prior knowledge on the concept of boundaries to support your professional growth and development?

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2. Who might you collaborate with as a learning partner or for additional support in your practice around utilizing boundaries to foster your professional and personal well-being?

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3. What strategy from Chapter 1 might you first apply to your daily work? How will you utilize the chapter content to gauge your progress thereafter?

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What's Next?

In Chapter 2, you'll examine the importance of investing energy and time into being fulfilled in all areas of your life, rather than being overly consumed by the demands of your role as a leader. By learning about boundaries first, you'll be equipped to apply the explicit strategies found throughout Chapter 2, such as effectively using feedback, as you investigate skills in leading the learning in your school or district. Look to Chapter 2 for ways to use boundaries to help foster an identity that is robustly developed with passions, hobbies, and relationships. But don't forget to check back to Chapter 1 for cross-application possibilities and watch your growth and impact as a resilient leader multiply!