

Foreword

Have you ever considered whether school is a happy place to be? Happiness is one of the most fundamentally important human aspirations: Governments attempt to legislate it, families support it, and individuals need it. And yet happiness may be one of the most neglected attributes of our schools. In our ongoing quest for academic excellence, higher student achievement, adequate yearly progress, and the like, let us not forget the value and validity of making schools good places to be.

In *People First: The School Leader's Guide to Building & Cultivating Relationships with Teachers*, Jennifer Hindman, Angela Seiders, and Leslie Grant set out to explore a key dimension of creating within our schools a positive environment and, by extension, a happier place to live and learn. The focus of the book, to a large extent, is the creation and nurturing of positive working relations.

If we take a macro view of school operations, *how* we work with one another is as indispensable as *what* work we do in order to help our schools flourish. This soft side of schooling—that is, the *how* we work together—can be so influential as to dictate the quality of teachers and staff we are able to attract and keep. Frederick Herzberg, in his theory of what motivates us and in subsequent studies related to his two-factor theory of motivation, described interpersonal relations with peers and supervisors as essential hygiene (or maintenance) factors that can lead to job dissatisfaction if not fulfilled (Hertzberg, 1966). When the working relationships are negative (rather than positive as advocated so well in this

text), people become dismayed and even choose to leave the organization. Simply put, relationships matter.

Related to the importance of positive relationships and high quality teaching, Michael Fullan and colleagues found in a study of high-trust cultures in the Chicago Public Schools that in trusting school cultures there is more, not less, likelihood of taking action against persistently uncaring or incompetent teachers in order to protect the well-being of the school. In fact, they found that “failure to act can poison the whole atmosphere” (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004, 45).

One need only to consider the key constructs that appear repeatedly throughout this book to understand the value the authors place on positiveness: good relationships, reflection, welcoming climate, thoughtfulness, team attributes, and the like. It is to this end—building and sustaining positive relationships in our schools—that Hindman, Seiders, and Grant have provided this valuable addition to the educational literature. I trust you find its conceptually sound and practical advice informative and influential in your own educational practice.

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