

# Inner leadership

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERS ARE MORE THAN RATIONAL, EFFICIENT MANAGERS; THEY'RE EMOTIONAL PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND THEIR INNER SELVES, SAYS DAVID LOADER.

Effective and inspirational school leaders are not afraid to take the initiative, responding strongly to their perceptions of what is needed and acting according to their strongly held beliefs and the values espoused by the school. To some, this view of a school leader may seem too individualistic and potentially chaotic in a national school system.

Some assert that the new standards-based National Teaching Professional Framework is being introduced to regulate and normalise school leadership, but an effective leader has to be more than an efficient manager delivering on the priorities established by others. Effective leaders will show the way from their personal experience and perspective, from their thinking, reading, meeting, conferencing and journeying. They will lead from their inner person, not according to some externally set agenda.

Such a view is not at odds with the fact that leadership is a public activity. Leaders deliver on key performance indicators around observable tasks such as setting objectives, developing strategy, managing finances, creating performance cultures, building relationships, establishing business partnerships and acknowledging achievements, amongst countless other tasks.

Public leadership, however, requires a strong inner personal life that will cope with the scrutiny that comes with such a visible role. Leaders need such personal attributes as courage and resilience as well as the skills of insight and analysis. They need clear and considered values as a basis from which they can act, but effective leaders need more than resilience and courage; they need a strong and well developed sense of self built upon a strong inner emotional life. The leader's emotions are an integral part of the leader's tools of trade. Emotions affect how a leader

makes sense of the world. They are the frame through which leaders view the world.

Emotions such as frustration, confusion, anger, fear, envy, joy and passion bubble under the surface in schools. They cannot be ignored and neither can the emotions of school leaders. In some people's minds, however, leaders should be confined within their role and never show their emotions or personal reactions. As a result leaders, can feel dehumanised and constrained by others' expectations. On the other hand, some leaders prefer to be personally invisible. They project an image of how they think a leader should appear: dispassionate, objective and rational. This is the outer leader, but there is a matching inner person that is being hidden. They keep their emotions, doubts and concerns to themselves, either fearing personal vulnerability by losing the confidence of the community they lead or because of personal insecurity in revealing that they are not a super-person.

The truth, though, is that leadership combines both the rational, which includes how the principal organises knowledge, and the irrational, including attitudes, beliefs and values. Leader rationality needs to be personally mediated; it needs to be linked at a personal level to the leader's experiences, emotions and passions.

Leaders who understand that leadership is an emotional activity can relax a little and acknowledge that sometimes they *are* exhausted and emotional, and that stress *does* come with the job. Furthermore, it's important for leaders to understand their emotions since these could be blinding them to opportunities or deluding them into inappropriate responses. The study of one's inner life should be as important a study to a leader as new theories of leadership or

the development of a strategic navigation process.

When I was a principal I wrote about my experiences in *The Inner Principal*. I tried to catch the complexity of the interaction between person and role, describing the rational and the irrational, the professional and the personal, and the objective and the subjective aspects. It was my view that the leader's dominant style arises from their inner person, from their feelings, values, beliefs and experiences. So in describing my leadership role I used titles such as the paranoid principal who is always looking over their shoulder expecting the worst, the big-top principal who is strong on performance such as in a circus, the empty principal who has depleted personal resources and is struggling to cope with the pressures of leadership, the alchemist principal who thinks that they can perform miracles, the stumble principal who while searching for direction stumbles on answers and the Cinderella principal who is waiting for the saving intervention of the fairy prince or princess.

Today, more than ever, though, we need leaders who are comfortable with themselves and who can relate effectively with their community as compassionate whole persons. **1**

## REFERENCES

Loader, D. (1997). *The Inner Principal*. London: Falmer.

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