



November 15, 2017

# The 10 Key Skills of Successful School Leaders



During my time in education, I have been fortunate enough to witness great school leaders (many of whom I have worked with) transform the fortunes of the young people who are in their care. They have worked tirelessly to bring to fruition their dreams, hopes and aspirations. So that every child, no matter their background or circumstance, could fulfil their potential.

I don't believe this happens by chance, but rather because over time (and with a lot of hard work and patience) these leaders have developed key skills (and qualities) that have enabled them to develop school cultures in which all individuals can thrive.

From my reflections on my work with these individuals and the outcomes that they have achieved for their schools, I have identified ten key skills/attributes (there may well be more!) that I believe help school leaders to be successful in their roles.

## 1. Ability to embrace their own vulnerability

When the emotional needs of school leaders are not met, it is the vulnerable self that suffers. Locked away behind a wall of self-preservation and sometimes fear, individuals end up neglecting that part of

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## 2. Ability to dig deep

Successful school leaders are not afraid to engage with the big questions around self and meaning. They are on a road towards Self-Actualisation and they know that the path cannot be travelled solely by providing answers to questions around school data and performance. They know that if they and every single child in their school is to fulfil their potential, then they are going to have to dig deep. They are going to have to be prepared to engage in challenging conversations that 'probe their sense of meaning and purpose about what matters most in good leadership.'

## 3. Ability to admit when they have made a mistake

Successful school leaders are not afraid to hold their hands up and admit when they have made a mistake. They know that in life risks have to be taken and the learning that follows thereafter, are simply opportunities for growth. They are skilled at conveying this message to those they lead. As a result, creativity and innovation become hallmarks of their schools. Trust becomes the glue for all relationships. As staff and pupils alike know that they will not be judged when things don't go quite to plan, but instead will be supported to discover new learning opportunities and avenues for growth.

## 4. An aptitude for Reflective Thinking

Successful school leaders recognise that reflection is a key tool for personal transformation. They know that by building in reflection as a part of the way in which they lead and manage they can accelerate their own personal growth as well as that of other members of their school community. As one of our Head teachers recently noted:

"I have rethought what it means for others in my organisation (staff, children, parents and other stakeholders) to be listened to and to be given quality time and space to reflect. As such we are creating new ways of working ... Leaders leading in a different way"

## 5. Ability to Communicate a Compelling Vision

The school leader's vision is often the catalyst for bringing people together and starting the process for change. The best visions are those which are compelling, aspirational and challenge every individual to

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are adept at engaging the hearts and minds of those they lead. In addition, they walk the talk. Their actions consistently align with their moral purpose. Even in the face of great challenge, they remain steadfast in their ability to weave into the fabric of school life their vision's narrative of hope, success and achievement for all.

## 6. Demonstrate Self-Understanding and Self-Management

Successful school leaders work hard to develop a good understanding of themselves and their related self-management skills. They know it is an on-going work that when invested in reaps dividends for themselves and their schools. These school leaders are at ease reflecting on 'who' they are as leaders and who or what circumstances have influenced them. They are willing to let go of ways of being that no longer serve them or others, in pursuit of becoming the leader that they really want to be.

## 7. Ability to Lead Authentically

Successful school leaders never try to be or lead like someone else. Every day they seek to be the very best version of themselves and not a "second rate version of someone else". They stay true to their values, in all contexts and in all situations. As a result, they learn to trust themselves. They are rarely dogged by self-doubt and lack of confidence. When negative thoughts or emotions do arise, they have developed enough inner strength to handle them effectively. As a result, when challenges arise, they are far less prone to adopting inauthentic coping strategies that have the potential to destabilise themselves and others. Instead, they maintain within themselves a deep core of peace and self-assurance. They remain consistent in their behaviours and continue to be seen as authentic.

## 8. Use Deep Listening Skills

Successful school leaders have learnt that listening goes beyond hearing. They have learnt that successful relationships are built when others are listened to deeply. As a result, they have come to see listening as the art of 'Humble Inquiry'. When in dialogue with another they use their listening skills as tools to draw someone out and to ask questions of which they may not necessarily know the answer. They do so in service of the relationship and the deeper understanding that they know will be generated when deeper listening skills are employed.

These leaders pay great attention to developing their coaching skills. They understand that listening is one of the greatest skills that a coach can deploy. They therefore work hard to develop this skill set,

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## 9. Display Emotional Intelligence

When you can successfully manage your own emotions, you are able to better manage the emotions of others. Successful school leaders know this. They work hard at ensuring they have a healthy relationship with their emotions. They don't push them aside or pretend that they don't exist. They find ways healthy ways to process them. As a result, they are not emotionally reactive, but instead can be emotionally responsive and display a high level of emotional intelligence in all situations.

These leaders have used coaching as a tool to help them develop their emotional intelligence. They have reflected on how their emotional intelligence had been developed when coaching another. They have used their insights to help them find more effective ways to respond to individuals who have differing levels of emotional maturity.

## 10. High Level Relationship Management Skills

Successful school leaders know that human beings crave connection and deep bonds with others. They have learnt how to create these connections and bonds. Every day, they do what it takes to nurture and build successful relationships across their school community. They use their skills to help staff bond with one another, disarm conflicts and to provide support and assistance. Difficult conversations, feedback, both negative and positive are delivered in ways that neither discourage or belittle those they lead.

Typically, through coaching these leaders have developed a good understanding of different personality types. They have learnt to recognise the emotional drivers and triggers behind different personalities. Their coaching skills and heightened levels of psychological awareness have equipped them with the skills necessary for building effective relationships with a range of personality types.

## Developing Your Coaching Skills

There is all kinds of advice out there about what makes a good school leader, from certifications to strategies to taking the latest seminar. But what so many people miss out on is actually the most fundamental elements of good school leadership — relationships.





Conversely, when relationships are strained or neglected, school teams can struggle to effectively work together and staff can find themselves increasingly becoming disconnected from what the school and their leaders are trying to achieve. In turn, leaders can find themselves spending a large amount of their time dealing with people management issues, rather than focussing on the more strategic aspects of the role.

Yet in spite of this, many leaders have not received significant training or opportunities to develop skills that could help them to deal with difficult conversations, identify how best to manage and maximise the performance.

That's why one of the key ways that we support School Leaders fulfil their vision is by offering a **4 Day Coaching Programme** designed to provide senior school leaders with the knowledge, skills and confidence to apply a range of coaching skills that can help improve the performance of those they lead and manage.

#### **Our four-day coaching programme that will equip you with the skills for:**

- Managing difficult conversations
- Understanding how to get the best out of individuals with challenging behaviours
- Understanding yourself better and knowing how to draw upon your strengths to get the best out of others
- Developing your relationship management skills by helping you understand how to identify and respond to different personality types
- Nurturing a Coaching Culture in your School so that you can support members of your team

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**Jean Ramsey** on April 24, 2019 at 6:51 am

Your inspiring posts make my heart sing

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**Dr. Ishrath Begum** on May 23, 2019 at 5:33 am

These 10 keys, inspired me a lot. I hope more keys will be released in future which helps others a lot. Thank you.

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**Kelly Linus** on May 30, 2019 at 12:19 pm

Very important guide for school administrators and teachers.  
We need more.

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**Marie-Josephine** on December 31, 2019 at 12:13 pm

These are indicative skills for school principals to be effective in improving teaching and learning  
Thank you for the sharing, it's very inspiring

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Integrity Coaching

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