



# TURNAROUND LEADERS

# Turnaround Leaders

## 1. ENERGY

- Stamina and staying power – can get a second wind
- Enthusiasm and optimism
- Passion for achievement
- Motivate others with forward momentum

## 2. BIAS TO ACT

- Focus on solutions
- Sense of urgency
- Opportunity-driven
- Impatient with another plan, meeting, or committee

## 3. RESULTS ORIENTATION

- Outcome matters more than process
- Need for achievement (more than power or affiliation)
- Clear and compelling targets for success
- Ability to get and use performance data

## 4. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Take more than fair share of responsibility
- Acknowledge errors and mistakes as basis of learning
- Focus on personal as well as group responsibility
- Look to internal more than external causation

## 5. INCLINED TO TEAMS

- Seek creation, not agreement
- Form teams from differences, not the like-minded
- Share credit as well as information
- Encourage solutions that meet outcomes

## 6. EDUCATIONAL KNOW HOW

- Know how to create effective learning in classrooms
- An educational leader more than administrator
- Strong diagnostic and development skills
- Effective at applying curriculum and tools for learning

*There is no change in the world that's ever come about because of a plan or a mandate or a funding stream. Or even a good idea. People make change happen. In reality, educational projects, like other ventures, are largely determined by the mettle of the specific individuals who lead them. Plans can specify targets but only individuals can reach them.*

*When we started ST we kept this at the forefront of our minds and looked for the people who had turned around schools and districts. And before we even looked at the strategies they employed (which you will hear about over the next few days) we looked at what characterized who they were as people.*

*Think of your own experiences. Consider any example of effective human enterprise, a church, civic organization, organizational bureau, or whatever. Ask yourself why it works so well when compared to others of its kind. The chances are high that the answer is probably a person.*

*Here are six factors that appear strongly associated with those individuals who have turned around failing schools: **1) energy; 2) a bias toward action; 3) a results orientation; 4) personal responsibility, 5) desire for teamwork and 6) core educational know-how.** In each case, we think of the factor, not as a personality trait, but simply as a general tendency or disposition that can be defined in behavioral terms with indicators to signify its presence. We also add a few cautions for each.*

## 1. Energy

*Indicators of Energy:*

- *Reasonable physical condition. These are the principals and teachers where visitors are stopping to catch their breath when walking the building because they move quickly.*
- *Enthusiasm, optimism, self-confidence. While pessimists occasionally have strong energy, theirs is devoted to criticizing and tolerating conditions, not changing them.*
- *Sense of humor. Humor is one basis for both renewal and for insight. We have in mind not the practical or bawdy jokester but the person who sees humor and irony in situations. Most especially they can laugh at themselves.*

*Cautions:*

- *Pessimists have a lot of energy. Just not the right kind. They're the first ones in the room to raise their hands and they can keep them up a long time – but with the intent to derail and deflate.*
- *Energy can take quiet as well as frenetic forms. Remember The Little Engine that Could?*
- *Some forms of human energy remain dispersed and diffuse, as in nervous energy. We are looking for the person who can harness energy in a specific direction to achieve.*

## 2. A Bias To Act

*Many people are at heart critics, planners, or observers. Our sparkplugs are actors. They want to solve a problem, not bemoan or even fully define it.*

*Indicators of Action Bias:*

- *Focus on solving a problem rather than discussing it.*
- *A sense of urgency.*
- *A focus on opportunities.*

**EXAMPLE:** *Let's say I offered each of you \$10,000 today to solve an issue at your school. But if you're willing to wait until Thanksgiving I'll make it \$50,000. And if you're willing to wait until May of next year I'll make it \$200,000. Which would you take? (ask how many would take the \$10k, the \$50k, \$200K – and call on a volunteer from each to explain why – looking for answers that make it clear that not only is the problem now but the opportunity to solve it is now – and so are the kids – and by May the opportunities and kids will have passed them by)*



*Cautions:*

- *We are looking for the person who pivots from problem to solution, not for the person who simply shows the most impatience.*

**3. A Results Orientation**

*Effective sparkplugs are those who believe that the outcome, not the process, is what matters most. They define and believe in achievement and are turned-on by the challenge of a finish line. This orientation helps to overcome the emphasis on process while giving a strong and intense focus.*

*Indicators of a results orientation:*

- *A sense of achievement. Many people have great needs for power or affiliation. Schools where leaders have need for power you'll hear the bells ring on time and very clear policies and procedures. Often student achievement is flat at these schools. Schools where leaders have need for affiliation (aka seeking to be the popularity contest winner) there will be a well-decorated staff lounge and an active social committee who makes sure that everyone gets a present on teacher appreciation day. Often achievement is on a roller coaster because work is dependent on "What have you done for me lately?" It's the schools where the school leader has a need for achievement that things may be a little messy. The leader might not be liked but will be respected. Note – when research team went into PS 63 and asked the staff what they would've done about Gillian if it at been up to them after the first semester, 80% said they'd have gotten rid of her because she was a pain in the neck. When asked what they would've done at the end of the year 80% said they absolutely wanted to stick around because the school was successful for the first time in 13 years.*
- *Some competitive instincts. In many instances achievement is defined as a competition, if not with what other communities or state government might attain then as internal competition to set the best target or get the best deal.*
- *Desire to keep score. Those preoccupied with setting and hitting a target will want a way to know where they stand.*

*EXAMPLE: Ask who has played basketball. Give a ball (use an orange or other object if ball isn't handy) and have three human wastebaskets (holding their arms in circles in front of them) - One right next to "ballplayer"; one out about 15 feet; one far across room. Ask "Which one would you throw at?" If they say the close one say "No! That's gravity!" For far one, "No! That's luck!" Middle one is the only one where you have agency and can affect the outcome.*

*Cautions:*

- *A results focus is not necessarily just accumulating or counting data points (as you'll learn more about later in the weekend when you look at data use)*
- *There is a profound difference between setting a target in advance of a project and defining achievement at the endpoint.*

**4. Personal Responsibility**

*EXAMPLE: Who has coached football here? (get person to come up – paint picture of homecoming game and in the final seconds, down by 3 points with a receiver wide open in the end zone, an easy pass on the part of the QB, and he blows it – buzzer sounds and the hometown press is all over you asking, "Coach! What happened?" – what do you say? – looking for answers that have the coach taking ownership and saying it's his responsibility) After that what will happen at practice on Monday? Players will work harder because the coach didn't throw them under the bus.*

*Indicators of personal responsibility:*

- *Ability to acknowledge error and mistake as the essential basis for behavior change.*
- *A focus on personal as much as on group accountability.*

*Cautions:*

- *There is a difference between taking responsibility and taking credit.*

## **5. Desire for teamwork**

*Mark Twain said “If you have five people in the room who think alike then four of them are redundant.”*

*Indicators of teamwork focus:*

- *Collaboration – versus communication, compromise, or consensus (talk a little bit about what each of those mean and what’s different – collaboration means what you get in the end is something that no one person could have come up with on his or her own)*
- *A willingness to share information and influence*
- *A tendency to see interdependence more than either independence or dependence in relationships with other people.*

*Cautions:*

- *A team is not simply a group of people with a common interest.*
- *Getting “buy-in” is not creating a team*

## **6. Core Educational Know-How**

*Indicators of Core Educational Know-How*

- *Successful experience at creating effective learning.*
- *Knowledge of curriculum and available tools and programs – can you connect teachers to what they need to get better.*
- *Diagnostic and personal development skills and the ability to size up the current skill set of teachers and others and to help people get better at their craft quickly.*

*Cautions:*

- *Don’t confuse content knowledge with the ability to know good teaching. Don’t have to have even taken physics to know whether learning is happening in a classroom*
- *Educational know-how is not a matter of degrees or theory. It is a matter of what a person can practically achieve that promotes learning in a school, not how much they know.*
- *Years of experience is also a poor predictor of know-how. Experience can as likely be a bad experience as a good experience.*

*Activity*

- *Split principals into separate group from their team members. In separate rooms with one specialist giving charge to one group and another to the other group.*
- *PRINCIPALS: Ask them to fill it out on themselves. Be clear that NO ONE is all fours or fives. And that by being honest with selves around where they have room to grow means that they CAN grow and as a result student achievement will as well.*
- *TEAM MEMBERS: Let them know they need to fill it out (independently from each other) on their principals. Assure them that this is the way that they are going to set the stage for the weekend – by being honest and direct and honoring that real desire for teamwork. Be clear that NO ONE is all fours or fives. And that by being honest with principal around where they have room to grow means that they CAN grow and as a result student achievement will as well.*