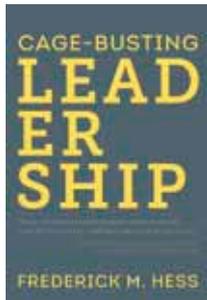


Cage-Busting Leadership. Frederick M. Hess. Harvard Education Press, 2013, 280.

The saying goes that if you keep on doing what you've always done, you'll keep on getting what you've always gotten. School leaders who make transformative changes do not do so by doing things "the way they have always been done." As Frederick M. Hess titled the book, these leaders do not remain "stuck in a cage" of policies, regulations, and contracts. These educational reformers drive improvement by working through the obstacles in their path.

In each chapter, of *Cage-Busting Leadership*, beginning with one titled, "It Doesn't Have to Be This Hard,"



Hess shares examples of how superintendents and principals have worked around the "cages" in their districts to escape the "culture of cant's."

Hess's book rests on the premise that too often, policies, rules, and regulations frustrate a leader's school improvement efforts. However, principals can work around these difficulties with creative solutions.

Throughout the book, Hess examines situations that administrators often feel they are unable to change, such as a collective bargaining agreement that doesn't allow for pay for performance incentives, or the obstacles to remove an ineffective teacher. In each case, Hess describes ways in which administrators have been able to work around the policies, procedures, and laws by just having a different mindset—that of a cage-buster.

While the book offers many great examples that administrators can learn from, I caution the reader to make sure that the cage you try to

bust is always based on what is best for students. For example, Hess shared a loophole around a state class size cap: allowing a district to increase their class size by adding college students to the room for work-study or internships. I disagree with this solution, based on my personal experience and the research on teacher effectiveness.

This book offers concrete examples of how administrators around the country are breaking the status quo to move their schools and districts forward. It is certainly not a quick read, but it's worth the effort if you find that your school or district is bound by bad policy, procedures, or contracts.

Reviewed by Jessica Johnson, principal of Dodgeland Elementary School in Juneau, Wisconsin.



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