
In this well-written book, Cade Brumley frames the work of school leaders as the most difficult and rewarding work there is. She writes, “[T]he principalship, as a noble vocation, is a moral obligation that requires a humanistic approach to leading the organization toward collective purposes. When correctly practiced, the principalship carries beauty that balances the science of relevant knowledge and the art of graceful implementation.”

Throughout the book, Brumley underlines principals’ sincere desire to help others. Her accounts of intimate visits with professionals in the field can remind us why we do this work, and how every decision we make impacts our stakeholders, from the children (always first) to teachers, parents, and community members.

For those of us who lead schools, our reality is that it is so much more than a job. It is a vocation—and our families and friends know this from the day we take the position. They all understand this truth more than we know. It means missing dinner to take the last phone call from a concerned parent, or showing up late to one of our own family events, always wearing that look that says, “Sorry.” Those who love and know us understand that our decisions always put children first—that is the easy part. The more difficult part, which Brumley covers, is managing all the other stakeholders and keeping the core of the school community in touch with this.

In part one, Brumley outlines the eight national core leadership standards: principal, servant, visionary, instructional, organizational, collaborative, ethical, and political. Part two provides examples and stories that are gripping, compassionate, and real.

Readers will enjoy learning about Wayne Warner of Chalmette High School in Louisiana and his experience during Hurricane Katrina. For those who haven’t had to guide a school and community through a crisis of fire, flood, or other tragedy, reading about the power and purpose of a school leader can remind us why we do this in the first place: to make a difference, and to value and develop people.

Reviewed by Sonya Hemmen, Head of School, Ross Montessori Charter School, Carbondale, Colorado.

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