

Start Now to Become a Better Leader

Leadership book identifies 4 key behaviors of excellence

By Liz Garden

Do you strive to be an excellent leader or an excellent teacher? In *Start. Right. Now.: Teach and Lead for Excellence* (2017), the authors provide inspirational and practical strategies to move from “Should I?” to “How will I?” After interviewing educators from across the country, authors Todd Whitaker, Jeffrey Zoul, and Jimmy Casas identified four key behaviors of excellence: Know the way, show the way, go the way, and grow each day.

Yes, it's important to know your stuff as an educator, but “knowing the way” means more than knowing content and best practices. Excellent leaders need to plan for success and remember that people come first.

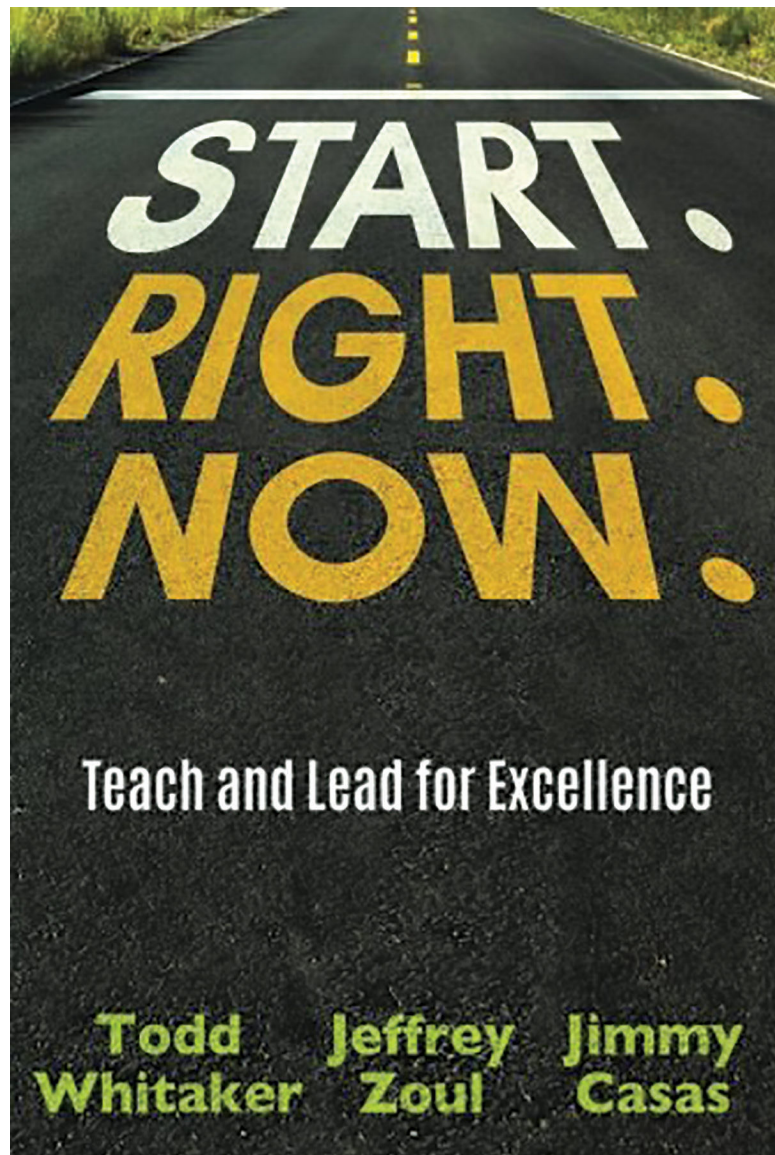
The authors write that to “show the way” and prepare for the future, the best leaders “attend to the present so that they can better prepare themselves—and others—for the future.” To “go the way,” they write, we need to make sure we are “walking the talk”; we should consistently model how to learn, listen, and lead. Finally, to be the very best leader or teacher, we need to grow each day. We should strive for continual improvement, “believing we can always get better,” they write.

In each of the four sections of the book, the authors define the key behavior, explain why that behavior matters, and describe what it looks like in practice. They also include a valuable resource at the end of each section: Teach 4, Lead 4, Learn 4. Here, the authors share info about four excellent teachers, four excellent school leaders, and four excellent resources or tools that can serve as

exemplars for each of the key behaviors of excellence.


Following in their footsteps, here are four key strategies that I plan to implement in my quest to become an excellent leader:

1. **Know the Way:** It's people, not programs. This is a mantra to remember as I work on knowing the way. I continually remind my teachers to get to know their students, to make connections



with each of them to better reach them. I must do the same; I must get to know each of my teachers to better serve them.

2. **Show the Way:** Communicate early, communicate often. As a leader, I need to show the way, sharing our vision by communicating to all stakeholders. I need to model communicating in various ways, such as using social media, blogging, sending emails, and making phone calls. I also need to make sure I include different kinds of communication, such as inspiring, challenging, and celebrating messages.
3. **Go the Way:** Time is always an issue in the field of education. The authors of this book remind us that we are in control of our time. I need to find time to connect with all students. I need to find time to show gratitude to others. Our jobs often require long hours, but we need to make sure we are finding time for what matters most in our schools.
4. **Grow Each Day:** Surround yourself with excellence. We have the chance to improve every day, especially if we surround ourselves with people who are committed to excellence. As a leader who is continually growing, I will keep reaching out to other strong leaders near and far. Another way to surround myself with excellence is to hire excellent educators who inspire my teachers to become even better.

Every leader and teacher should read this book. Don't delay. Start. Right. Now! 

Liz Garden is principal of Florence Roche Elementary School in Groton, Massachusetts.

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