



# PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLS AND STAFF

*"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader."*

— John Quincy Adams

## OVERVIEW

School leaders reflect on a set of questions to help them assess their ability to focus on and promote the development of their school and staff.

## PLANNING FOR IT

### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To develop your leadership skills
- To promote the growth and development of school staff members
- To help create a long-term plan for the school
- To intentionally cultivate a positive and moral school environment

### TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes over multiple sessions (consider using one set of questions at a time)

### LEVEL

- Adult

### MATERIALS

- Optional: [PDF](#) of reflection questions with rating scale

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

School Leaders will:

- Examine and rate their own ability to focus on and promote school and staff development
- Discuss the insights gleaned from this process
- Use the results to identify strengths and areas for growth

- Develop a strategic plan for personal improvement based on the results

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Challenging
- Enriching
- Foresight
- Stewardship

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Non-Judgment

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Before you begin (whether on your own or with a colleague or small group), pause, take a few deep, conscious breaths, and consider the following:

- Why do I want to do this practice? Because I want to become a better leader, foster the development of my school and staff, improve my relationships with school staff and students, cultivate a positive school climate, make the world a better place, or something else?
- Am I ready to reflect on my ability to foster and promote the development of the school and staff?
- How will I navigate feelings of vulnerability if they emerge?
- Is there a critical friend I can debrief with to get feedback?

### INSTRUCTIONS

For character education and other kinds of prosocial development initiatives to be optimally effective and for it to have the optimal impact on the flourishing of human goodness and academic success, school leaders need to make their own character development a personal priority. In this way, they encourage other adults in the school to commit to their own self-examination and development, in turn, becoming models for students.

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## BEFORE BEGINNING

There are several ways the following questions can be used:

- Simply answer them for yourself, as a self-reflection activity.
- Rate yourself on each question (here is a [downloadable version](#)).
  - Circle the items that you rated “Never or almost never” and “Sometimes but not often” and that you would most like to improve.
  - Then, choose one or two as top priorities.
  - Next, use a [goal-setting worksheet](#) to start an Action Plan for improvement on each of these priorities.
- Use the questions to rate another person, either by simply answering them or by using the rating scale.
- Have a group of school leaders engage in a self-rating, and then discuss as a group the insights people gleaned from doing this. If your time is limited, you might choose one quality to focus on at a time.
- Ask staff to rate you using the rating scale, and then compile the results. If you are very brave (courage is a leadership virtue), present the summed results to the staff and discuss them together.
- Do a 360-procedure where you rate yourself, your supervisor rates you, and those you supervise rate you. Then compare the results, and ideally discuss them with others.
- Use the results of any of these procedures to identify strengths and areas for growth. Then create a strategic plan for personal improvement based on the results. What specific characteristics do you want to work on? Create SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely). Consider having an “accountability buddy” to check in periodically to help monitor your progress and keep you on track.

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## THE QUESTIONS

### *Challenging*

Schools are about learning and growing for both children and adults. One critical way of creating an adult culture that promotes becoming one’s best and most competent professional self is to make the school productively challenging for all, including the adults. Leaders who are also ethical and inspirational can more easily challenge others and push them harder.

- Do you present questions and experiences for others that will challenge them and help them grow?
- Do you see the possibilities in others and act to make them more likely?
- Do you create an environment where people will have to take on new tasks and roles? Do you scaffold such experiences and situations?
- Do you model and support experiential pedagogies for students? Do you do the same for staff?
- Are you okay with failure, and have you created a safe culture where staff and students are not afraid to fail?
- Do you encourage and support staff in earning degrees and certificates and taking on new and challenging roles?

### ***Enriching***

We all need new learning and challenges in life to grow and flourish. It is the leader's role to model enrichment by providing new opportunities and roles and resources. There is deep truth to feeding the minds and spirits of all stakeholders. Providing quality professional development is a key way to enrich and feed the staff.

- Do you prioritize innovation, especially toward enriching the learning and developmental contexts in the school?
- Do you focus on the professional growth of your staff?
- Do you lead book studies and other study groups with staff?
- Do you seek newer and better methods and structures?
- Do you lead in ways that will contribute to the flourishing of others and the world in which we live?
- Do you strategically bring to the school new ideas that will enrich the culture, methods, and outcomes of the school?

### ***Foresight***

Psychologist K. Warner Schaie once claimed that a hallmark of adult thinking was the capacity to think long term and to monitor progress over time. This is especially relevant for principals. We need leaders who have a long-term vision, for oneself, the individual members of the school community, and for the whole community. They also need to monitor progress of the development of the school along that long timeline.

- Do you care deeply about the future, beyond yourself?
- Are you passionate about, do you advocate for, and do you act to support broad issues such as peace, environmental health, the moral messages we send to children, etc.?
- Do you think and plan about how you will fulfill your responsibility for the long-term flourishing of the school (even after you have left the school)?
- Do you embrace "Tikkun Olam" (to heal the world) by devoting yourself to the long-term improvement of that which you have been given responsibility?
- Do you have a sustainability plan for the school?
- Do you look for future leaders among your staff?

### ***Stewardship***

Each school leader is being given the responsibility of all the people in the school, especially the children, and the school itself, now and into the future. Your stewardship for that which is put in your trust should be salient, motivating, and deeply felt. It is a profound and sacred trust, a great responsibility. We all stand on the shoulders of the giants who came before us, which is why we can see further than they did. We all create ripples in the pond of life. We need leaders who understand that and take that responsibility very seriously.

- Do you have a strategic plan?
- Is it long-term?
- Do you regularly/periodically monitor progress?
- Do you feel responsible for the long-term well-being of the school?

- Do you have a clear sense of the steps along the journey for your strategic goals?

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did you and/or your colleagues respond to this reflection process?
- What did you learn about yourself and each other?
- Do you notice a shift in your approach to the development of the school and staff after engaging in this reflection?
- Do you notice any changes in your relationships with students, staff, or parents and caregivers?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Servant leadership](#) focuses on the development and well-being of the employees first and the outcomes of the business second. Driven by their own ethical, and if relevant, spiritual compass, servant leaders see themselves as [stewards of the organization](#), focusing on long-term sustainability.

In a [study](#) of 700 primary school teachers at 29 schools in Turkey, researchers found a positive and significant relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and principals who exhibited elements of servant leadership.

Other studies have shown that servant leadership, which includes the development of workers, is positively associated with [employee thriving](#), [engagement](#), [inclusivity](#), and [psychological health](#).

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

As research has shown, how school leaders lead matters—a lot. Indeed, numerous [studies](#) have found that supportive leadership is a critical factor, if not the [most important factor](#), for teacher retention.

With their emphasis on human development, schools are a natural setting for [principals to become servant leaders](#). However, the focus should not be limited to the students; the adults, too, need to be constantly growing and developing, both in their understanding of academic content and as human beings committed to their own and others' flourishing. For this, they need leaders who provide encouragement, modeling, support, and opportunities for personal growth—the heart of servant leadership.

## SOURCE

Adapted from [PRIMED for Character Education: Six Design Principles for School Improvement](#) by Marvin W. Berkowitz. Copyright © 2021. Published by Routledge. Excerpted by permission of the publisher.