Breaking Ranks Revisited 2
Transcript of Speakers

Module 6. Chapters 12 & 13: School Leadership
Topic C. FAQs on School Leadership

Clip 1: How do principals communicate a vision?

PHIL SCHLECHTY: There are a number of questions that are commonly asked when one makes a presentation like I have made here. And one of those questions is how do principals communicate a vision of their school both internally and with the broader school community.

I touched on it, but I want to elaborate that point just a bit. Cotter says you gotta say it over and over and over and over again until you get tired. You have to have, I call it a 33/30. Again, I stole that from someplace; but I really don't know where this time.

And the 33/30 is a 30-second statement about what you envision and hope that somebody will ask you by what you mean by that, because it’s sufficiently intriguing that they allow you to talk to them for three minutes. And then you need to have a 30-minute presentation when somebody says that’s so interesting, I'd like you to come to my club or my group or my organization and make a presentation. And it has to be very clear and precise, and you need to say it over and over again. It has to contain some simple messages.

If you watch top-level CEOs that are really moving organizations, people like Welch and GE or people like Oz Nelson was at UPS or Grove. They really speak very simply and very powerfully about a very few things, but they say a lot about those few things. And they say those few things in a lot of ways to communicate with different audiences.
So the way a vision gets communicated is both by living it out, by articulating it, by constantly asking people about it, and saying it over and over and over again. And even when you're all done, five years out, you think you've talked to everybody; you're going to run across someone who doesn't know what the vision is. And also keep in mind that every year your vision erodes because you're bringing in new members. And unless you can also bring new teachers and inexperienced teachers and new parents and inexperienced parents into this vision—visioning is never done; it's an ongoing and continuous process. Too many people say, "Well you did that vision thing once. Therefore, we're done with vision for five more years until the next strategic plan comes along." The problem is that by the time five years arrives, half the staff is gone; and they've forgotten what the vision was if they ever did know.

So how you do it is by constant reiteration, by referring back to it in every printed document that you have in the school, putting it someplace—and more than just something on the wall; it needs to be celebrated; it needs to be argued; it needs to be discussed; it needs to be thought through; it needs to be challenged all the time.

Clip 2: How do principals encourage teacher and student leadership?

PHIL SCHLECHTY: A second question is—that I'm often asked—is what are some of the ways that principals can create a culture of encouraging leadership that extends throughout the school, including student leadership?

First, I think you have to start with the assumption that everybody is capable of leadership; just like everyone can learn and every child can learn. We've got to believe that all individuals, given the right circumstances, can lead and can learn to
lead. Now, that's a pretty hard one to swallow; but so is that every child can learn a hard one to swallow. I happen to believe both that every child can learn more than they're now learning; and I also believe that every person can be a leader and under certain circumstances will lead.

So the issue then is how do you create circumstances and opportunities to test oneself out in leadership roles. And when people are successful in those leadership roles, we shouldn't apply stereotypes to them and, therefore, say that wasn't really leadership.

I've seen that happen with, for example, the selection of student council members. In many schools, you have to meet a certain academic performance level before you can be a member of the student council. And some of the most powerful leaders in the school are thereby excluded from the possibility of being on the student council. The very people who are leading the gangs in the street are disassociated from leadership in the school.

We need to ask ourselves the question: Are there ways to bring those kind of leaders into a situation where school performance becomes more important to them than it obviously is, because they really wanted to be leaders in the schools now. They're smart enough to perform, but they found other meanings in leadership in other environments. How do we begin to integrate—and I don't mean racially integrate—but integrate the strengths of all leaders, teachers the same way. Some of the very people who we need to lead often find more comfort in being boxed up in their self-contained classrooms—I sometimes call their self-contaminated classrooms—and boxed up in those organizations; and don't deal with the larger realities of the school because they are hired to teach. And to them, to teach is to
eventually have youngsters sitting at their feet doing those things that youngsters have always done ever since the time of Socrates. And those that don't behave themselves, the idea is to find some way to relocate them so that they're no longer stomping on your toes.

Well, those are real problems. So what a principal has to do, were he in conjunction with a lot of other folks, is to create leadership opportunity structures; leadership opportunities for teachers; leadership opportunities for children; and then to help and provide support and the kinds of dialog and the kind of conversation it takes to learn from that experience. Experience that is not reflected on isn't worth having; experience for which you have a capacity to reflect and examine and analyze and draw lessons is invaluable. And, so, that's a second question.

**Clip 3: How do I deal with people that resist change?**

PHIL SCHLECHTY: Another question I’m often asked is what do you do about those people who resist change and who sabotage change (who are opposed to the new direction).

I can't answer that fully until I make a couple preliminary points. I think resistance to change is a much more natural response than embracing change. We're all creatures of habit. We're all intellectually in favor of change so long as someone else is doing it. But when you begin to ask me to break my old habits and do fundamentally different things, I naturally resist because habitual behavior is easier to engage in than is the old behavior; and it conserves my energy. I think that's a natural thing, so I don't see change resisters as people who are particularly malignant in terms of their own intentions and personalities.
So we start with that assumption, and then we ask ourselves: How do we overcome resistance to change? I think there is the first place that educational change leaders make their mistake—that's the wrong question. The question is, How do we create enough commitment to change that the authentic resisters will eventually be identified? If you've got to start on the other end, then creating commitment to change is not the same thing as overcoming resistance to change. Overcoming resistance to change simply neutralizes the resisters. Creating commitment to change provides mode of structures that get those people who are more prone to change and more willing to embrace change to begin to support the change and develop the kind of enthusiasms that attract people who are willing to come to this activity later.

In a book I wrote—I don't remember which one—I talked about trailblazers and pioneers, settlers, stay-at-homes, and saboteurs. And it seems to me that too many change leaders in schools spend too much time early in the change process thinking about the stay-at-homes and the saboteurs and how they can overcome their resistance, and not enough time thinking about how they nurture and develop the trailblazers and the pioneers and the early settlers. Because until you get that group moving down the road, you don't know what you have with saboteurs.

Let me give you an example of what I mean by that. In the American high school, this is not the first wave of change that the faculties have confronted. I started out as a high school teacher in 1959. We were going to revolutionize the world with BSCS and PSSI and SRSS and HSGP and all that alphabet soup and National Science Foundation curriculum material. We had the new social studies and the new science and the new math and the new this and the new that and the new something else.
And we really believed—I mean, we were convinced; and the federal government believed; and they gave us a lot of money to do it. You can see how effective we were if you look at your own curriculum today and the materials that you have today.

What we often overlook is this is not the first time that the high schools have been asked to make major changes. I came into education, as I said in my other presentation, my earlier presentation, in the 1950s right after Sputnik was launched. And we were going to revolutionize education through curriculum reform. We had BSCS and PSSI and SRSS and HSGP. And we had reforms in the '60s, we had reforms in the '70s, we had reforms in the '80s. And many teachers in the American high school joined in and provided leadership for those reforms. And just about the time they thought they were getting where they were supposed to go, their official leaders abandoned them. And they suddenly found themselves out there on the frontier all alone. And so many saboteurs are really people who once were what I would call trailblazers. But what they’ve done is said get me once, shame on you; get me twice, shame on me.

And we have to understand that some of the cynicism that some teachers have, particularly some high school teachers have, regarding the possibilities and prospects of change is based in reality—you know, paranoiacs do have enemies. And there’s a lot of folks out there that have had experiences who say to them, "This, too, shall pass. And why should I put all my energy into this business when I know full well that I’ve been here and I’ve seen 5 principals come and go, and I’ve seen 14 superintendents and changes in the board. And every time that happens, the change
takes a different direction. So if I just hunker down and wait, things will be all right."

Those people are going to have to have a lot of confidence that this time change is really going to happen. And that means they're going to sit back and wait. And you can often confuse a saboteur with a trailblazer in disguise—that is, yesterday's trailblazer who hunkers down and kind of sides with the saboteurs. And, so, when you start trying to overcome resistance to change, you often mistreat some of those powerful potential allies that you would have as you moved down the road.

And, so, where I would start with change and understanding that is not so much strategies of overcoming the resistance as identifying and nurturing and developing the support. At some later point as you begin to develop enough enthusiasm around the change, then you begin to find those people who you weren't sure were supportive begin to join. And then you begin to say, Now, with the late resisters—and they may be just stay-at-homes or they may be honest saboteurs, of whom I don’t think there are very many, by the way. I think we overestimate it because of the way we look at it. But when you find those folks, then you have to ask yourself what is it that brings those kind of folks in.

And let me tell you four values that I found that if you can play to those values in positive ways, without compromising the integrity of the change, you often get people who you think are resisted to join to you. One is positive recognition and affirmation.

Very few of us want to be blamed for the problems being addressed. Too often, change and issues in school drive the assumption that you’ve been doing something wrong; and we’re going to get you to change. I’m not going to change that way.
Now, if you come to me and say what you've been doing is valued; and part of the reason we need you is because of the experiences you've had, both good and bad. And affirm those people in terms of positions of leadership and so forth and so on; you often can get support.

A sense of involvement, a sense of personal efficacy and control. Will I have some opportunity to determine the conditions upon which I'll come into the change and the timing of that coming into the change? If you say to me we're all going to change tomorrow, I'll just close my door and say, "Try me." If you start letting out a framework that gives me some options and some choices about when I'm going to come in, then you might find me more willing to consider. I'll say, "I'll watch and see what some of those silly people do, and then if it works out for them I may come in next year. But right now, I've got all these other things that I'm worried about."

Feelings that I will be supported; feelings that, indeed, if you can't create a system that supports people in their change, then you're not going to overcome resistance to change; nor are you going to create commitment to change. If I'm told here's the change, now go ye and do it; and don't have a support system that allow me to have the kind of training I need and the kind of time that I need to think and the kind of opportunities that I need to see models, you're not going to overcome my resistance. And, finally, you need opportunity for collegiality. You know, sociologists talk about this as kind of the shared ordeal. Change is an ordeal. If I suffer it alone, then it's a debilitating activity. If I can turn an ordeal into a shared experience, it often can become exhilarating. Some of the best induction programs all the way from way back in tribal society to medical schools are really based upon the assumption of the shared ordeal—that people learn what they learn partly because they're going
through it with other people who are going through the same pain and misery at the same time that they are. And, so, creating opportunities for collegiality, and making the conditions of collegiality associated with the embracing of the change, is another possible avenue.

Clip 4: How do I create structures for shared leadership?

PHIL SCHLECHTY: Another question that I often am asked is how can principals create effective structures for shared decision making and team leadership. I could probably spend about two hours responding to that question and still won’t have adequately answered it. So I’m going to try and do it about four or five minutes.

If there’s a concept that is misunderstood in educational reform today, I think it is the concept of shared leadership. That we tend to think about it in schools from a political perspective, and we talk about whose interests need to be represented as opposed to who will best represent the interests of children and the best interests of children. And, so, you say well—for example, in Kentucky, we’ve set up a site-based council made up of three teachers, two parents, and one principal on the assumption that those are the vital interests of the community that needs to be reflected in decision making of the community; that needs to be reflected in decision making at the schoolhouse level.

What about me? I’m a taxpayer. I have no children in school, but I still have some claims on what ought to be going on in the schools that I pay for; and proportionately pay more for than do the parents. Because old folks have property, and young folks have babies. And we need to understand that. So shared leadership
isn’t simply a matter of politics; it’s a matter of figuring out not who has the right to make the decision, but who is it right to make decisions; and who are the right people to have involved to make the best decisions possible.

Too often what I see under the guise of shared leadership is we now have a slightly larger group of different people making the same stupid decisions that were made by an individual that would—and this is ineffective decisions that were made by individuals—because they see themselves as representative of constituencies rather than creators and pursuers of a common vision that leads to better work for kids and higher quality of learning.

Shared leadership, it seems to me, needs to be leadership in which both those people need to distinguish between authority, which is a right to use the power of the organization, and leadership, which is the ability to get other people to do things without the exercise of authority. And shared leadership is a different thing from shared authority. And I, as a principal—one of the obligations I have is to figure out who should lead. And sometimes I should lead; sometimes the custodians should lead; sometimes the cafeteria workers should lead. And part of my job is to know that system and know those people well enough to know who should lead and who needs to lead.

There are many times, particularly when you talk about student leadership, where there are students who aren't leaders, who need to be put in the position of leading. And there are some times when people who are leaders need to be put in the position of following. The research is that the best leaders are people who are good followers.
Now, I used to teach at UNC Chapel Hill; and Dean Smith was the basketball coach there. And one of the habits that UNC has now—and I think they had it then—is no matter who you are, when you are a freshman, even if you're Michael Jordan, you carry the basketballs. That's part of freshman ritual. That is, you don't—when you're a senior, you're expected to lead no matter who you are; when you're a freshman, you're expected to do some scout work. Well, I don't think that's a bad thing. Unfortunately, what we do in the school is when a person becomes a senior, only some are expected to lead. Or we get up and give some biased statement that you are now role models for the senior class, and you should behave accordingly and so forth and so on. But we don't really create honest-to-god leadership opportunities.

We need to find ways to create leadership opportunities for every teacher; leadership opportunities for every student; and then encourage them and give them the support to do that. That's the only way we can possibly get shared leadership in place.

People can't share leadership if they can't lead. It's kind of like collegial governance. If you have a strong head and other people are weak, you're going to wind up with an authoritarian system whether you like it or not. You've got to have strong followers to have strong leaders.

And I think that's the message of this whole document—you've got to have strong followers if you're going to have strong leaders. And you've got to have strong leaders if you're going to have productive followers.

Thank you.
Clip 5: How do I deal with fears associated with high stakes testing?

MARILYN HOHMANN: I think one of the questions that I hear most often from principals, you know, is how to deal with the perceived fears that surround the state-mandated, high-stakes testing, and how to avoid loss of purpose and momentum in the change process. I know many of them feel that they were on the road to making real progress in some serious effort at changing the high school structure or practice. And then as the D-Day occurs with the state testing, teachers are fearful that they can't participate in rethinking or redesigning or reinventing their roles when they are being held to such rigid and public—often—humiliation. And I guess the only answer to that one is that’s the toughest job that principals have right now. It's both managing the realities of testing and assessment—as it has been practiced in the last five, six years, and probably will for a time to come—managing that reality and still holding firm to the notion that we can do this better, we can invent a better school, we know that what we're testing is not all that we must do and doesn't represent the scope of high school purpose. And I guess about, again, it goes for me at least to we have to do the testing; we have to accept the fact that the work is—I mean that the kind of expectations are there. And at the same time, we have to continue to help teachers to focus on the uncommon kind of assessments. You can’t really assess the higher-level work with paper-and-pencil tests; the kind of work that teachers invent in which students use technology and where they are working in real research kind of activities and developing multi-media process and projects. Those aren’t assessable by paper-and-pencil tests.
And constantly helping faculty to be confirmed and affirmed and supported and what is a clear recognition of that fact.

So you have to walk with one foot in the current world of external expectations and just give every manner of support. Provide the time. Find ways to assist teachers in understanding what multiple assessments of various ways of monitoring student work can provide in the way of getting the documentation, gathering the data to show that the innovative practices do lead to higher levels of student learning.

That’s the real task that we face now, is having to do the one while we are constantly building a much better repertoire of assessments.

The work that Grant Wiggins and many of the others have provided are enormously powerful models is a tremendous help there; and it’s one of those places that I think many principals have gone for support. So it’s, again, a dilemma; but it’s one that is doable. It’s just trying to avoid the tendency to abandon ship and say we can’t do this because we have to do that. That’s where the leadership comes in.

**Clip 6: Where can I see examples of model schools?**

MARILYN HOHMANN: I think another question that I have found occurs frequently is, you know, what does it look like? Where are there places that you can go to see this or that kind of process really working; where scores are rising and students are engaged in unique ways of working and even calendars might be different; structures have been changed?

Probably—well, I wouldn’t give names and places—there are many such. But I always admonish friends—that goes back to the vision and belief. You have to believe it before you can see it. Very often in our early days at this business of
change, we would send folks to observe practice in some other place, in some other school, some innovative practice. And the results were always strangely disappointing. Folks would come back, and you would get a mixed set of responses. And our leader figured out it depended upon whom you sent. If the folks who went there already believed that this was right and this would move practice forward, that interdisciplinary teaching was necessary; then the report was powerfully all positive. If folks were seeking to be convinced that that was so, they were far less so.

So I don't know what operates there. I do know that it helps to see images, and I know it's very important to be able to demonstrate practice. One of the most important rewards for teachers is that they have the opportunity to discuss the practices that they have found to be both innovative and producing the results for students in terms of student learning that are necessary. In that instance, it's an extremely powerful thing to do from both sides.

But it always reminds me of an old minister friend of mine who said, "If you've got to see it to believe it, you probably won't believe it very strongly." I think there are more lessons to be learned and more wisdom within our own faculties, very often, that really get at the unique nature of the learner there; that really get at the dynamics of the community. And I know for a fact that we solve many, many more issues and we proposed many more powerful ideas when the wisdom of the folks in that place brought to bear upon those issues.

So I guess I'd say if folks want good examples of places that they want to see how these practices that Breaking Ranks recommends might be played out. NASSP would be a good place to ask. And others who know that there are some good
places to watch, so to speak, out there; as long as you don't abandon the simple reality that the leadership and the solutions to most problems exist right within our own walls.

Clip 7: How do I deal with students that resist change?

MARILYN HOHMANN: That question about resistance—Doctor Schlechty mentioned it in his—about resistance to change. What do you do about it? I hear it so often from principals, how many times. What do you do about the teachers who won't change or students don't want to change; and they don't. Many students for whom the traditional ways work, who learn very well that way, I mean, simply are not at all positive about working in groups.

I'll never forget a valedictorian of ours standing up in a huge group and saying, "You know, I can do this very well by myself. I don't need to work with these groups and all of this. In fact, very often people are requiring me to do something that's not even comfortable." Now, at the end of a period of time, she acknowledged that she learned a great deal by working with people who learned differently and think differently and who bring different skills to bear upon an issue. But she started out that statement with, "I thought I could do this very well by myself."

I think the resistance to change from a principal's point of view is uncomfortable because in the high school it can create some chaos. Folks know how to use power; they know how to use the instruments of resistance. And that's why the notion of having a constant openness about what the work is that we're committed to is so important; that's why it's so important to have a guiding coalition, a solid understanding of what we're about. We have to educate the public, just as we have
to educate ourselves about these kinds of changes. And having a wide understanding in the community of why we're about this and what we're going to accomplish, why it's necessary; having a shared understanding of the need for it is critical. It won't prevent difficulties, and it won't guarantee that there will be any smooth movement. There is no smooth way to do this.

In fact, it's guaranteed that there will be difficulty and chaos. If everything is lovely and quiet and everybody's happy, then there's not really any change under way. You can be sure of it.

The very nature of such fundamental, institutional redesign demands, promises that kind of difficulty. People get upset, but they get over it. It's the persistence that Phil mentioned; the persistence of leadership in the face of that kind of issue that matters.

And honoring all attitudes and constantly inviting people, you know, whether they accept or not; but constantly putting the invitation out there so that resisters have to say no, and say it a thousand times if need be.

I think the toughest thing that principals have to face during that kind of process it that very often the teachers who are in the leadership of innovative practice can be the targets of unprofessional behavior. That's just something that happens. Wish it didn't.

But that's what the risk-taking piece is about. And I guess if you just have to talk to yourself a lot—principals do—about, you know, this may not be normal anywhere else; but I guess it's normal here; once again, the opportunity to have collegial friends is an extremely important help for principals and for leaders in this whole process.
You cannot prevent resistance to change. It's a fact. It's how you deal with it, how much attention and focus you give to it, when the focus ought to be on staying the course and persisting in thoughtful and well-designed practice.

Clip 8: What would a Breaking Ranks high school look like?

MARILYN HOHMANN: What would a high school look like that was truly a Breaking Ranks High School? I've been asked that on numerous occasions when we work with high school faculties.

I don't know. I think we're inventing them piece by piece. I think it will be very different from the high schools we see today. I don’t think it will be bounded by the walls of a simple building or several buildings. I think people will work differently; teachers and students and community. And I think the opportunity to invent that is what Breaking Ranks is about. And while many of the common practices that are currently under way are familiar to folks—have almost become too familiar—so familiar that they no longer speak to innovative practice, you know.

We talk about interdisciplinary teaching as if it is a fact; and it's not. And we often speak of team teaching these days as if it is, you know, the answer to everything and accept, in a few rare cases, it’s turn teaching. It’s not where we need to be. Each and every one of those practices are rich and profoundly difficult to achieve.

So what it would look like, what would the Breaking Ranks school look like, I think is the challenge for every faculty in the country; every high school to create. And they will be different. The shame is, and the sad potential is, that we won't create them fast enough; that we won't recognize the urgency that exists for the American high
school to contribute to society in the way that it has in the past. That's part of the problem.

We've always done it, you know. High schools in the old factory model did what the country needed. We provided what workers were needed; and it was okay for kids, many of them, not to succeed at high levels. It was okay to have that 20 to 25 percent of A/B students and the rest much less well-served. It's not okay anymore. And that sort and select reality has to be replaced with the high school where most of the students achieve at much higher levels.

I think that's the great potential that we have to invent that kind of place. And Breaking Ranks and the opportunities to talk with one another about it give us all some support in devising strategies to do that.