



100-DAY LEADERS

Turning Short-Term Wins Into
Long-Term Success in Schools

DOUGLAS REEVES • ROBERT EAKER

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL FULLAN



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Solution Tree | Press



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This book is dedicated to my dear friend
Douglas Rife. Douglas has not only
enhanced the quality of my professional
life, he has been an unwavering
supporter and friend.



—Bob Eaker

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—Douglas Reeves

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—Robert Eaker

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In 1998, Dr. Eaker was recognized by the governor of Tennessee as a recipient of Tennessee's Outstanding Achievement Award. Also, in 1998, the Tennessee House of Representatives passed a proclamation recognizing him for his dedication and commitment to the field of education. In 2003, Dr. Eaker was selected by the Middle Tennessee State University Student Government Association to receive the Womack Distinguished Faculty Award.

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FOREWORD

By Michael Fullan

IN THE 1980s, I said that systemic change in schools and districts requires five to seven years of work. Now we know that change can happen at a much faster pace. Since then, research has shown that leaders armed with practical knowledge and partnering within their communities can achieve remarkable changes within a year or two. (See Fullan and Pinchot [2018] for a case of powerful change in culture within a year.) Douglas Reeves and Robert Eaker, in this excellent resource, provide a framework for how leaders can establish success within one hundred days. Few books combine moral purpose and practical success so readily.

Reeves and Eaker begin by showing leaders how to strip away the superfluous distractions, and what to specifically focus on to get results. They smartly observe if a seven-year-old can't explain your mission statement, then you are in trouble. Readers quickly discover not only how to establish the right values but also how to "clear the decks" with an initiative inventory in which leaders take a hard look at what initiatives are underway so as to identify those that are the most critical.

Reeves and Eaker supply strategies and tools to help leaders get on course and stay there. After clearing the decks, leaders find out about the importance of keeping a not-to-do list. Reeves and Eaker follow with guidelines that support the leader each step of the way to short-term wins: defining high-leverage practices, assessing specific results, energizing people with what matters most, breaking

down the hundred days into doable chunks, and ensuring accountability and persistence. They advocate collaboration where it counts to leverage their practical ideas. And they provide an account of what effective collaboration looks like in practice, ensuring—not just encouraging—collaboration; creating a shared understanding of teamwork; and building aligned teams districtwide to get continuous results.

Reeves and Eaker have written a powerful and inspirational resource. My recommendation is that, before reading *100-Day Leaders*, you take a moment to reflect on the following questions.

- Do I find myself doing things that don't have much of a positive impact?
- How energetic and focused are those in my organization?
- Are we getting anywhere?
- What results can I point to?
- What can I do in the short term to change things for the better?

Now you are ready to benefit from this practical and thorough book on leadership. Take a hundred days at a time, and follow the lead of these two authors who combine more than a century of practical leadership experience in these pages. They share the wisdom they have collected by working with hundreds of leaders who have found their way one hundred days at a time.

INTRODUCTION

WHY ONE HUNDRED DAYS?

IN OUR TRAVELS around the world presenting at educational conferences and consulting with schools, we have noticed that too many educational leaders are experiencing frustration, fragmentation, and burnout. They face more demands than ever before, yet they have the same amount of time they have always had—just twenty-four hours in a day—to get the job done. Many leaders are overwhelmed with priorities, projects, and tasks and feel like they are in an endless game of whack-a-mole, attempting to hit every demand that arises, while not making progress on their most important priorities. Although leaders can't add hours to the day, they can make every hour more productive and focused. If you have felt the frustration of too many demands on your time and a horizon full of things to get done, then this book is for you.

In this book, we present a system for focusing on the highest-leverage leadership actions that will yield significant results in just one hundred days. Most importantly, this first one hundred days will set the pattern for the one hundred days after that, and for every succeeding one hundred days, as long as the leader bears responsibility for personal and organizational results. Our focus on short-term wins will energize your colleagues, students, and communities. While you will always have longer-term goals, this 100-day plan will provide the organizational focus and psychological energy that people in your school or district require to know that you are making progress. This plan allows you to steadily encourage and support the teachers and

administrators in your building or district who will get the job done. You will replace the cynicism often associated with long-term strategic planning with a laser-like focus on what matters most.

If you think that one hundred days is not long enough to produce significant change, consider these remarkable accomplishments that people have achieved within that time frame: the writing of the U.S. Constitution, the longest-surviving governing document in the world, in the 18th century (Walenta, 2010); in the 19th century, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler* (Hoey, 2017); and the presidential and legislative enactments that lifted the United States from the Great Depression and set the stage for saving the world from fascism in the 20th century (Alter, 2006). Great things can happen in one hundred days!

Our observations of effective school change confirm these lessons from history. In a single semester—usually about one hundred days—schools have achieved dramatically improved student performance, better climate and culture, improved faculty morale, and better discipline and attendance. Our research conducted in schools around the world and published here for the first time, demonstrates that schools can do the following, within one hundred days.

- Reduce the failure rate by more than 90 percent.
- Reduce chronic absenteeism by more than 80 percent.
- Reduce the suspension rate by more than 50 percent.
- Radically transform faculty morale.

We have witnessed these results in elementary, middle, and high schools. They occur in urban, suburban, and rural schools; in schools with high concentrations of students from low-income families and schools where the students are affluent; and in schools where large numbers of students do not speak English at home and schools where the entire student body consists of native English speakers (DuFour,

DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Reeves, 2001, 2016b). These results happen among students with a wide range of demographic characteristics. If we have learned anything in more than a century of combined leadership experience, it is that leadership makes the difference for student achievement and educational equity. Although most of our experience is in the K–12 public education field, we also have leadership experience in universities, private schools, charter schools, nonprofit organizations, and the military. Regardless of the setting, we see a consistent theme: short-term wins—gains in confidence that occur within one hundred days—establish the confidence and credibility necessary for long-term success. We acknowledge the value of longer-term goals and strategies; however, we find that those have no chance of successful implementation without the momentum that results from 100-day leadership.

Years-long strategic plans that offer more platitudes than substance make stakeholders weary. What these stakeholders—parents, students, teachers, community members, and educational policymakers—long for are results. They want short-term wins that restore confidence that the hard work teachers and students engage in will yield something more than vague promises of reform.

This book suggests a new way of thinking about leadership. Whether the project is large in scope, such as transforming a school into a professional learning community (PLC; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016), or smaller in scope, such as developing formative assessments or new grading practices in a single semester, *100-Day Leaders* brings a sense of daily accomplishment, from the classroom to the boardroom. The approach is rigorous, clearly distinguishing between implementation that is *PLC lite* (DuFour & Reeves, 2016) and the courageous, risky, and often unpopular decisions involved in implementing effective and lasting change.

We wish to make it clear what this book is and what it is not. In this book, we offer an integrated approach in which the leader will

see connections that others in the organization may not find apparent; curriculum, assessment, facilities, transportation, food service, teacher evaluation, board relationships, and a host of other complex interactions lie at the heart of *100-Day Leaders*. Therefore, this book is not a policy manual, academic treatise, or checklist. Rather, it is a practical guide for leaders at every level—from state, provincial, and national policymakers to superintendents, principals, and department and grade-level team leaders—that will support immediate transformations in culture, practice, and performance. We provide a coaching and development model for leaders who are willing to challenge themselves and their leadership teams to rise to greater heights of effectiveness.

In the chapters that follow, we begin with the moral imperative of leadership. This is the fundamental obligation educators owe to the students they serve. Educators pursue this moral obligation through the PLC process, the central organizational system for effective educational organizations, from the classroom to the boardroom. We make a compelling case for the PLC process in which we share evidence of the impact that it has on student achievement.

Every leader aims to create personal and organizational change that results in continuous improvement, but successful and sustainable change is often elusive. Change begins not with hierarchical commands, but with effective introspection. Leaders cannot seek to change others until they gain the self-awareness to change themselves. Effective 100-day leaders must focus on a few priorities; our research suggests that focused leaders have dramatically more impact on student results than leaders who are fragmented due to initiative fatigue (Reeves, 2011b; Schmoker, 2011).

We then turn our attention to *culture*—the daily actions that represent what great organizations are all about. Culture is not about attitudes, words, or beliefs; rather, it is about specifically observable actions. Although leaders must see the big picture, they also

understand the details of implementation, team by team, task by task, kid by kid, and skill by skill.

Leaders face myriad decisions and challenges. We suggest a disciplined approach to leadership decision making in which leaders systematically compare the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives they face. Accountability systems have, since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, focused on student test scores (DuFour, Reeves, & DuFour, 2018). This change was prompted, on the one hand, by frustration with lagging student achievement, and, on the other, by the recognition that a focus on “accountability” was a political asset. We suggest a system in which leaders consider not only the effects of effective education but also the causes—the factors over which leaders have the greatest influence. Persistence and resilience are two of the greatest assets of 100-day leaders, and we consider the factors that can encourage—or undermine—resilience and persistence in the face of adversity. Finally, we consider how great leaders collaborate. Although leading can be lonely and isolating, the most successful 100-day leaders engage in remarkably effective collaboration.

Following is a guide to how we’ve organized this two-part book.

Part 1: Exploring 100-Day Leadership

In part 1 of this book, we consider the *why* and *how* of 100-day leadership. We begin by exploring the moral imperative of leadership and then we look at the six steps to becoming a 100-day leader.

The Moral Imperative

The moral imperative to improve student learning—*why* educators do what they do—is essential, as educators will not implement prescriptions based on policy; they must see that they operate in a moral context. Moral imperatives guide our decision making when no one is looking. There are no rewards or sanctions, only a response to the leader’s inner compass that provides the moral foundation for

his or her decisions. Everyone in any organization, whether it is a for-profit, nonprofit, educational, military, or any other organization, must not just understand how he or she fits in functionally but also have his or her own sense of purpose within the context of the organization's mission and values. Custodial staff do not merely sweep floors; they create safe and healthy learning environments in which students can take pride. Teachers do not merely deliver content; they nurture curiosity, kindness, relationships, and lifelong learning habits. Principals do not merely set schedules and handle discipline; they guard the values that guide thousands of daily actions for everyone in the school. The moral imperative should be the focus of the opening and closing of every meeting.

The Six Steps

This book outlines six steps for implementing your 100-day leadership plan. These steps are not one-and-done actions; rather, they require review with every 100-day planning cycle. Leaders use them to create and achieve short-term wins that combine to form long-term success.

Step 1: Identify Your Values

Begin with values—your bone-deep beliefs that will prescribe the goals you will, and will not, pursue as a leader.

Step 2: Take an Initiative Inventory

List the leadership and instructional initiatives that your school already has in place. The list is always longer than you think it will be. Take an initiative inventory of everything on your plate. Ask teachers and staff about their perceptions of the initiatives. Two key questions leaders should ask are, “To what degree is each initiative actually implemented?” and “If the initiative is implemented, what is the impact on student achievement and other organizational goals?” For example, we have observed a school system purchase online curriculum resources with the assumption that teachers would use the

program to link standards, curriculum, assessment, and teaching. But when we simply asked, “Is anyone really using this?” we found fewer than 1 percent of teachers had even accessed the program. This is not an isolated example, as schools are inundated with programs for data analysis, formative assessment, and literacy interventions that are delivered but never or rarely used (Reeves, 2006). Leaders should be assessing the degree to which a particular initiative is having the desired impact. Simply asking the question about degree of implementation will reveal the *binary fallacy*—that is, the assumption that an initiative is either implemented or not implemented. But human performance is almost never binary, but rather takes place on a continuum. On one end of that continuum is delivery—teachers attend a workshop, receive workbooks, and perhaps log instructions for a technology-based tool. The second level of implementation goes beyond delivery, but includes actual evidence that teachers are using the initiative. The third level includes not only the use of the initiative but also evidence that these new professional practices have a positive impact on student results. The fourth level includes not only student results but also evidence that successful implementation is replicated by other educators and leaders in the school. In other words, saying “We have the program” never tells a complete story of an initiative’s implementation.

Step 3: Make a Not-to-Do List

Prior to embarking on new plans, leaders must establish a clear and emphatic not-to-do list. Before you set goals for the next one hundred days, identify in specific terms those tasks, projects, priorities, and initiatives that you will *not* do. Make the list public. Before you ask your staff to implement the 100-day plan, tell them what they can *stop* doing.

Step 4: Identify 100-Day Challenges

Identify your top-priority challenges for the next one hundred days. Be specific. They might relate to reducing student failure or

improving discipline, parental engagement, attendance, or staff morale—you decide. But you must set specific and measurable goals with which you can make an impact in one hundred days.

Step 5: Monitor High-Leverage Practices

Identify specific professional practices that you will implement immediately. These need not be major changes, such as adopting a new curriculum or assessment system, but practices that you and the staff can apply immediately, such as the following.

- Effectively monitoring collaborative team meetings within the PLC
- Changing a schedule to allocate more instructional time to areas where data suggest students need more help
- Shifting staff meeting time to allow for collaborative scoring of student work
- Scheduling three common formative assessments in the next one hundred days

In other words, select short-term, achievable goals whose implementation you can clearly observe.

Step 6: Specify Results

Finally, identify the results that you will measure. Consider how to display these results in an easily understandable visual featuring before-and-after data. Examples of results include the following.

- Reading comprehension
- Writing proficiency
- Mathematics proficiency
- Attendance
- Parental engagement
- Consistency of scoring
- Student engagement

The six steps are a process of identification, measurement, delegation, and elimination that makes way for aligning focus on the greatest priorities of the system.

Part 1 closes with a description of the six steps in action. The appendix contains a template to aid in creating your 100-day plan (see page 126).

Part 2: Creating the Environment for Success

In part 2, we consider the environment for success for 100-day leaders and the educational systems they guide. The primary organizing structure for effective educational systems is the PLC. Consisting of collaborative teams that focus on core questions for student results, PLCs allow all people within the system—teachers, paraprofessionals, students, parents, leaders, and community members—to understand how they can personally support the system's goals. The Collaborative Team Rubric in the appendix (see page 128) provides scales for use in assessing PLC practice within teams.

Putting It All Together

We conclude this book with a focus on accountability and resilience. There are times when leaders must, in our vernacular, “put their stars on the table.” That expression stems from the occasions in which military generals must honor their principles and values above the political demands of the moment. By relinquishing their stars, they express a willingness to lose their authority, position, and professional security in order to establish the primacy of integrity over obedience. We believe that the heavy emphasis on test-based accountability in the first two decades of the 21st century has amounted to an exercise in frustration. While student scores are certainly important, those scores tell only a fraction of the story of teachers', administrators', and students' hard work. Our view of *accountability*, framed by the work of Richard DuFour, Douglas

Reeves, and Rebecca DuFour (2018), is holistic and includes not only what students produce in terms of literacy, mathematics, and other scores but also what causes those scores. We therefore consider the *accountability variables* that teachers and leaders can control—the measurable and specific actions in the classroom, school, and district that lead to the results teachers and leaders seek to achieve.

Resilience refers to how 100-day leaders persevere in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Some change literature has claimed that systemic change occurs only after five to seven years (Fullan, 2018; Kotter, 1996). Imagine that you are the parent of a kindergarten student and you hear that effective change in literacy instruction will happen when your child enters middle school. An anonymous friend of ours has said that school change happens “one funeral at a time.” We are unwilling to accept this cynical view, and therefore claim that history and experience show that change can happen much faster—in one hundred days.

If you don’t believe us, believe Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt. As you shall see, educational leaders around the world have proven that 100-day leaders can make a remarkable and enduring difference in a very short time.



EXPLORING 100-DAY LEADERSHIP

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CHAPTER 1

WHY BEFORE HOW: THE MORAL IMPERATIVE OF LEADERSHIP

ABRAHAM LINCOLN IS credited with saving the Union and emancipating the slaves. But as any student of history knows, achieving these goals came at an enormous cost in blood and treasure, and success was not at all certain during the dark days of the early 1860s. Although the Emancipation Proclamation is, in retrospect, regarded as a great victory for the advancement of equality and the pursuit of the Declaration of Independence's noble goal that "all men are created equal," even the Northern states did not have consensus on this when the Proclamation was announced. Lincoln faced opposition in his cabinet, in Congress, among many governors in states that had not joined the Confederacy, and, most notably, among the generals leading the Union army.

Presidential scholar and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin (2018) notes that before Ulysses S. Grant secured the surrender of Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House, the Union suffered a series of disastrous military leaders, including George McClellan, who regarded emancipation as an abomination and who warned that Northern troops would desert in droves if slavery were abolished. These soldiers, he claimed, fought for the Union, not for the

enslaved. McClellan's failure to pursue Southern armies more vigorously, Goodwin (2018) notes, nearly cost the Union the war. In brief, Lincoln did not wait for buy-in from politicians and generals, but followed the moral authority that he perceived as an unalterable course. He acted on not what was popular but what was right and just. In his address to Congress on the issue, he said:

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. . . . The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. . . . In *giving* freedom to the *slave*, we *assure* freedom to the *free*—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. (Goodwin, 2018, pp. 241–242)

Goodwin (2018) concludes, “It was through the language of his leadership that a moral purpose and meaning was imprinted upon the protracted misery of the Civil War” (p. 242). Lincoln exercised transformational leadership at its best—leadership in pursuit of a moral purpose, not political gain or popularity (Goodwin, 2018).

Moral Authority in Education

In education, leadership based on moral authority is the key to sustaining educational results and organizational health. The title and administrative authority of a leadership role pales in comparison with moral authority, which no title can bestow. Titles are designated; moral authority is earned. This requires leaders who have the will and the courage to lead—to act, and then to persist in the face of adversity and opposition. Whether the leader is a veteran or new to the position, every few months bring new opportunities for beginnings. Every day people get to choose. Hopefully, they will choose to focus on the ultimate moral purpose of schooling—enhancing student learning. The most complex and challenging multiyear objectives, such as building systemwide capacity for technology integration, planning and executing building projects, or