
Series Foreword

Kenneth Strike has written an important book that will surely become a prized text in every school leader's bookcase. His book, *Ethical Leadership in Schools: Creating Community in an Environment of Accountability*, will be read initially with interest by administrators struggling with the ambiguities of their leadership role. But, as important, the book will be sought out again and again by school leaders who need to remind themselves about why they entered the profession and what it takes to remain true to the premise that "it's all about the children."

This book does not provide simple guidelines that define ethical leadership. The life of a school leader is filled with ethical dilemmas for which there are seldom easy answers.

Strike's book is about the fundamental question, How shall we live well together? Because schools should be good educational communities of students, parents, families, and supporters, Strike argues that ethics are all about creating and sustaining that reality.

What makes this book so fascinating as a good read and a helpful reference is Strike's willingness to delve into the dilemmas that challenge every school leader. A particular challenge, of course, is the need for school leaders to be accountable for providing a good education to all children. But members of a school's community may well have differing views about what constitutes acceptable accountability.

For example, many schools do an excellent job of educating the majority of their students. When this is the case, most parents and faculty members alike take pride in the school. And they are likely to resist any initiatives that threaten their perception of quality if this means reallocating resources or personnel to serve those students who may not be achieving as well as the majority. A school leader who suggests to faculty and parents that the school is going to begin to implement inclusive cooperative learning or special programs for students who have fallen behind can expect push back from parents of more academically talented children and their teachers.

Strike recognizes that school leaders are going to face constant challenges in their efforts to maximize their limited resources to provide

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maximum benefit to all students. Without question, it is extremely difficult to decide what produces the greatest good for the greatest number. An argument can be made—and undoubtedly will be made by some members of the school community—that resources ought to be invested where they can make the greatest impact. But such an argument leads some to conclude that the investment in disabled students or those performing way below their peers is hard to justify. A strong school leader may well argue that the school should be less concerned with an emphasis on programs that produce the greatest overall benefit and concentrate instead on investing in programs that help the students with the greatest need. Strike examines how leaders might make ethically grounded decisions about how to resolve such dilemmas and, in turn, justify their decisions to stakeholders.

In his book, Strike discusses the several ethical dilemmas the typical school administrator is likely to confront and offers reasonable, ethical ways of coming to grips with them. School leaders will be required to make judgments about what is desirable and at the same time possible for all their students, regardless of their different needs. Resources must be allocated fairly and appropriately to help all students achieve. Strike calls this leading from the principle of equal respect, that is, the duty to respect all people is not dependent on their particular capacities and their potential. Returning to his theme, Strike argues that our communities are stronger and better when all are cared for.

But how do principals sell this belief to their stakeholders? Strike answers this question over and over in his book, providing school leaders with a rationale for doing the right thing and methods for convincing others to act accordingly. It's likely that the school leaders will revisit Strike's book frequently as they construct arguments to convince their stakeholders to pursue actions that reflect a commitment to justice, fairness, and respect, and the desirability of inclusive communities rather than their private ends.

An ethical school leader, argues Strike, projects a clear image of the kind of community he wishes the school to be and then understands the notion of legitimate authority and legitimate decision making. Faculty members and parents, to select two primary groups within the stakeholder community, frequently will argue for their legitimate authority when challenging the principal's beliefs. And they will argue that if the principal is a democratic leader, he will do what they wish. Terms such as *democracy*, *professionalism*, *collegiality*, and *parents' rights* will be used to challenge the principal. In his book, Strike helps the principal understand that the notion of democratic leadership gives members of the school community a voice but doesn't confer upon them authority. That resides with the school leader. But that also means the principal needs to understand what it is to be a mindful conduit of legislative authority and what it takes to educate his stakeholders to the legitimacy of his role.

Kenneth Strike's book is one in a series being edited as part of the Leadership for Learning initiative of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). The series attempts to enhance the capacity of school leaders to improve the quality of teaching so that all students learn at high levels. *Ethical Leadership in Schools: Creating Community in an Environment of Accountability* is a major addition to this series.

—E. Joseph Schneider