

## Book Review:

### *Balancing Leadership and Personal Growth: A School Administrator's Guide*

Twila D. Patten, Ed.D.  
University of Florida

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*Balancing Leadership & Personal Growth: The School Administrator's Guide*, by Christa Metzger, is a “how-to” book. Seeking to address a lack of holistic balance in administrators, Metzger wrote the “how-to” book for administrators whose self-identity is often found only in their jobs. Metzger’s original interest in a balanced self-concept for school administrators stemmed from a friend’s experiences. The friend lost her job as a superintendent in a political climate created by a newly elected school board. Metzger expanded her research to study the coping skills of superintendents who had lost their jobs. This led to a national study on stress management and spiritual renewal of urban superintendents and college of education deans. Subsequently, the study on coping skills and self-balance led to a national study of administrators.

Metzger, a former school superintendent (ten years), is a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University, Northridge. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Administration from Arizona State University; her master’s degree from the University of Florida; and a Bachelor of Science from Florida Southern.

Educational Leadership is a ubiquitous subject for scholarly research. A book search alone for “educational leadership” in a national book chain recently produced thousands of results. The research lens on educational leadership is often an examination of how a school leader’s behavior, not their interior life, impacts student achievement. This examination often separates the essence of the educational leader into research parts. The following are but a few research descriptors for school administrators: managers, instructional leaders, change agents, coaches, culture leaders, and head learners (Drake & Roe, 1999; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Blase and Blase, 1998; Barth, 2003; DuFour, 2002).

## Chapter Highlights

Metzger synthesized theories from the fields of psychology, philosophy, theology, and spirituality for a balanced understanding of self-concept. Among the descriptions of self, or being, as used in the book, are “emotional intelligence” by Goleman (1996); “flow” by Csikszentmihalyi (1996); and “spiritual intelligence” by Covey (2004). These definitions point to the question of “Who am I?” not the statement of “I am my job.” Senge (1990), whose work Metzger also synthesized, considers the over-identification with one’s job to be a learning disability in an organization.

In Chapter Four, Metzger defined different paths to self development, delineating what she found in previous literature and administrator practices found in her research. These practices are (a) physical activities, (b) reading, (c) music, (d) silence and solitude, (e) meditation, (f) dreamwork, (g) creative work, (h) writing, (i) time with family and friends, and (j) other. Her analysis of these practices found that all of the activities bridge the outer and inner selves, include all aspects of self, and all have the potential for inner focus. Further, the activities provided choices based on needs and interests. She used choice to help the reader bridge the gap from theory to practice. For example, she suggested small or large steps from which a reader can choose. To wit, “Practice being still now and then and. . . . Find some time each day to reflect.” (p. 42). Another activity is to keep at least one inspirational book by one’s bedside. She further suggested practicing the activities superficially and deciding how each could be expanded.

## Discussion

Anyone who reviews a book must answer questions for the potential reader. One such question being, has the author achieved his/her purpose? It is noteworthy that a book search for educational leadership and balance turns up scant results. Metzger’s research and practical book addresses the gap in educational leadership research about how to achieve balance. Max DuPree (1992) wrote that leaders only lead by those who consent to follow. Most members of a school community can relate to watching administrators’ characters and moods. It follows that a balanced leader may have a greater chance of consenting followers. Further, the value of balanced leadership could have an effect on the schoolhouse in a myriad of ways.

Another question is, has the material been presented in a novel way? Metzger synthesized theories from the fields of psychology, philosophy, theology, and spirituality for a balanced understanding of self-concept. With her in-depth use of synthesis across the disciplines, she fit her own definition of balance understanding. Her use of Multiple Intelligence Theories (Gardner, 1993) in practical exercises, which bridge theory to practice, showed the reader how a balanced interior life looks and sounds. The reader, who chooses to be a practitioner of balanced self-development, can pick and choose activities.

Further, a novel use of the guidebook may be in principal preparation courses. Future administrators may learn more about a balanced leader. With the considerations of shortcomings in principal preparation, educational leadership programs are revamping. Milstein (1999) wrote that a shortcoming of present preparation programs is that they ignore “the escalating ‘dark side’” of educational leadership challenges (e.g., unsafe/violent schools,

union intransigence. . . .)" (p. 544). Metzger also addressed the dark side of educational leadership in her book dedication, mentioning capable administrators who have fallen victim to political climates, and administrators who are quiet heroes and champions bravely facing daily stresses. With a well-documented lack of administrative succession, it follows that an increased emphasis on personal growth and development has its place in principal preparation programs.

### Conclusion

The ultimate question the reader may want answered is, should I buy this book? The book is recommended on its merits: documented research need for administrative self-balance, multi-disciplinary concept formation, and choices of concept application. Further, the tone of the guidebook is sincere in its intent, is deep enough to pique the reader's interest, and is capable of stretching the leader's life on several levels, which is its original purpose. Elmore (2000) wrote that administrators are the most important variable to study for change in schools. It follows that administrators need safe places to feel vulnerable—the pages in this book reveal ways to find these safe places to make meaning of who we are at our core. Ultimately, the beneficiaries of personal growth in school leaders are school communities.

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**Twila D. Patten** earned her doctorate from the Educational Administration and Policy Department in the College of Education at the University of Florida. Her research interests include sustaining change through the use of data-driven decision making and establishing collaborative cultures. She is an assistant principal at Melbourne High School in Melbourne, FL.

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