7 Mindshifts for School Leaders

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Finding New Ways to Think About Old Problems

Foreword by
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PREFACE
FROM FLAWED THINKING
TO NEW MINDSHIFTS

The way we see the problem is the problem.

—Stephen Covey (1989)

Embracing Mindshifts

Consciously choosing to think about old and ongoing problems in new and intentional ways is what we call a *mindshift*. This book is about mindshifts that educational leaders can make to generate new and necessary changes to established practices that currently aren't solving the important, urgent, and persistent issues within our schools—problems that should be approached with the same level of commitment and urgency as a crisis. In fact, we argue that there are perennial problems in education that have gone unresolved for so long that they have reached a crisis level. Our ultimate hope is that by demonstrating the flaws in the present thinking and by describing new ways of approaching old problems in education, you'll shift your mindset about how we do school.

> **Mindshift**: Consciously choosing to think about old and ongoing problems in new and intentional ways
> **Mindset**: A current mentality that influences how a leader perceives, thinks about, and reacts to a situation

We use the term *mindset* to reference a current mentality that influences how a leader perceives, thinks about, and reacts to a situation. Even when leaders have a "growth mindset," as defined by Dweck (2007), their perception and actions regarding old problems can still be limited by flawed thinking. Therefore, each chapter spotlights a new shift in thinking to a mindshift that is often used when faced with a crisis.

Each of the seven chapters follows a consistent structure that contains five distinct sections to help you analyze one mindshift at a time. Reflection questions are offered to close each chapter to help you process and connect the mindshift to your leadership role. The following describe each of the five sections per chapter and their purposes for readers.

Outside Story

Inspiring leaders are found both within schools and within the corporate world. Every chapter of this book begins with a story that comes from outside of education that highlights how successful individuals and companies have exhibited the mindshift that the chapter will describe. These stories are not only meant to characterize the necessary thinking to initiate change but also provide the inspiration that change leadership and innovation are possible. New ways of leading are within our reach, and we have to look beyond the walls of our schools to find new ways of approaching old problems.

Flawed Thinking

In each chapter, we provide you with a clear understanding as to why the current thought processes are unsuccessful in solving old problems. We take great lengths to explain how the

prevailing logic, even the notions of making change, are failing to resolve our biggest and oldest problems. We have to come to terms with the fact that our best efforts aren't yielding the results that our most historically marginalized students need from their schools. You'll likely cringe as we candidly describe today's reality, even in systems that embrace the need to do things differently. As the chapters unfold, you will uncover why we believe that a mindshift is so desperately needed to combat our educational crises.

New Mindshifts

This is the section where each chapter's mindshift is fully explored. We lay out a way of thinking about problems that will offer a fresh perspective and novel approaches to finding solutions. What we don't offer in this book are silver bullets or easy fixes to address your school's persistent problems; you need to know that before reading another word. We don't know your unique needs, and we don't propose to have all the answers. What we do offer are 7 mindshifts with a corresponding model for processing and solving lingering problems that will help you to move faster and more successfully toward your own solutions. We believe that this book, and what you can glean from it as a reader, is one of a kind. The models, as far as we know, have never been intentionally initiated in education before and only exist in other fields and in rare instances where success can be found.

Mindshifts and Their Models	
Mindshift	**Model**
Leading With a Crisis Mindset	Important, Urgent, and Persistent
Leading With a Battleground Mentality	Relentless, Experimental, Agile, and Learning Culture

(Continued)

Mindshifts and Their Models	
Mindshift	**Model**
Leading With a Beginner's Mind	Discover, Collect, Process, and Respond
Leading With an Octopus Approach	Learning, Independent Parts, Sensemaking, and Temperament (L.I.S.T.)
Leading With a Disciplined Tunnel Vision	Vision, Values, KPIs, Principles, Focus, and Models
Leading With a "Yes, And" Attitude	Define, Analyze, Identify, Select, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate
Leading With a "Go With What Is Known" Response	Accomplish, Understand, Decide, Initiate, and Test (A.U.D.I.T.)

Applying the New Mindshifts to Schools

The mindshifts will apply to various problems that you might be facing. In this section of each chapter, we chose an obvious and persistent problem to which many school leaders will relate. While the provided connection aligns to only one problem, we expect that you will make your own connections to other problems that you face in your school or district. The mindshifts and their models are built to be used universally, but we apply them in each chapter as examples for how you might approach a needed change in your setting.

Technical Tips

The technical tip at the end of each chapter is meant to help you get started in applying the mindshift to your school leadership role. We offer protocols, strategies, and techniques. Each will enable you to lead others in committing to eradicate persistent problems, preventing them from haunting our students, staff, and community yet another year in schools.

When you're done reading this book, you'll be a different kind of school leader than you are today. You'll learn to lead with a crisis mindset, and you'll attack old problems in new ways. You'll be less afraid, more empowered, and better equipped to challenge the status quo and do what needs to be done for our students. You will have reframed the concept of crisis in schools to see that persistent problems can only be solved if we approach them as the crises that they are.

Reframing "Crisis"

When you hear the word "crisis" you probably think of emergencies, catastrophes, or even a pandemic. And, rightly so. In addition to these single, but serious events, there are lingering and consequential problems in education that live in our schools, and we classify them as another type of crisis. As educators, authors, and consultants, we have the privilege of traveling the United States and working with schools in our own states and around the country; we see the same perennial problems afflicting schools year in and year out in school systems of every size and zip code. Educators have been fighting the same battles for decades, using the same thinking and the same tools with mixed results. Our central argument is that these issues have evolved into crisis

proportions, and something new and different needs to be done about them.

Unfortunately, we also see some of our most deeply ingrained and inherent issues being left alone. And it's not because of ill-intended or apathetic leaders. What has happened over time is that our biggest issues have persisted for so long that we have grown accustomed to them. Maybe we even see them as a reality of our circumstances that is out of our control, conditions to accept or simply left as unsolvable given our current means. Whether it's a lack of resources or what seems to be an insurmountable effort, we find that busy school leaders have developed strategies and processes to *deal with* the outcomes of our most significant problems, but are just not able to *extinguish* them altogether. This, too, is becoming a crisis.

We can relate to how the day-to-day operations of a school or district can be so daunting that our mission to quell persistent problems takes a back seat to the problem du jour. This constant sense of urgency can create confusion on the difference between something that is an actual crisis and something that is important at the given moment. How we define a crisis is laid out in the first mindshift and threaded throughout the remaining chapters. In Chapter 1, you will find our three-part model that, when applied, will determine if an issue is in fact a crisis and should be dealt with accordingly using a new and intentional way of thinking about problems. We want leaders to know how and when to use what we call Leading with Crisis Mindset to make the difference that you intended to make when you became an educator. All of the other mindshifts in Chapters 2–7 are ways that we can lead with a crisis mindset to reach beyond the barriers of our oldest problems in schools. These are the mindshifts necessary to attack crises.

Feel the Shift

This book is written for school leaders—teachers, principals, and support staff—who care about leadership and the mindset that is needed to make a change. This book is for leaders who want to challenge the status quo in new ways. After reading this book, you will feel the following shifts:

1. *Think differently about old problems.* You'll understand why problems persist, and you'll shift to a new way of thinking about how to solve them.

2. *Discover new models for change.* We know that you are an instructional leader who supports a student-centered approach to equity for all kids. That's a given. What will help you, are the tools and tips for identifying the silent crises that are harming our schools and our students and the intentional mindset to eradicate them.

3. *Be equipped for change leadership.* We're inspired by literature regarding change leadership in education, and we know that this book will help leaders to initiate change by providing new ways of confronting our crises.

Leading With a Crisis Mindset

This book is a call to action for a new mindset for solving perennial problems in education, one where leaders follow a problem to its core and unveil every related issue and then work to build a comprehensive response that employs resources within the school and within the community. This new mindset for solving problems entirely and turning to systemic solutions is what we call a crisis mindset. We define it as *an unfiltered, 360° view, and approach to solving problems with urgency that abandons conventional wisdom and*

accepted restraints until a meaningful solution is found, implemented, and sustained. It is an outlook and no-turning-back approach that responds with immediacy and urgency to old and ailing issues that are the Achilles heel of learning and progress in schools.

Leading with a Crisis Mindset is about finding new ways to think about old problems. With it comes new opportunities for engaging with our communities, accessing diverse resources, embracing radical new ideas, and charting a course of improvement—all actions designed to solve what is commonly held as an unsolvable issue. We challenge readers to consider long-standing problems in education as crises and approach them with the same tenacity that we did when the pandemic hit.