The Four Essential Skills of a Transformational Leader

Anthony Muhammad, Ph.D.

Change Challenge

How should leaders engage people in the complex process of cultural change? Should they be tight - assertively issuing top-down directives that mandate change? Or should they be loose – merely encouraging people to engage in the change process, but leaving participation optional? The challenge at all levels of the system is to navigate this apparent dichotomy and find the appropriate balance between tight and loose, between assertiveness and autonomy. If we know anything about change, it is that ordering people to change doesn't work, nor does leaving them alone.

DuFour, R and Fullan, M., *Cultures Built to Last: Systemic PLC at Work (2013)*

Transformational Leader

Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it creates valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing leaders. Enacted in its purest form, transformational leadership enhances the motivation, morale and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms.
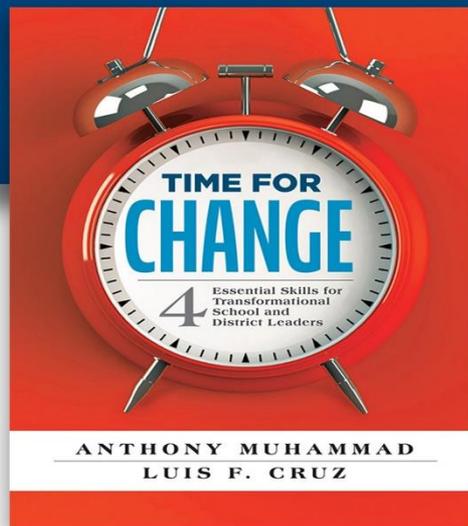
-Bass (1985)

What qualities must a leader(s) possess to transform behavior and build consensus?

Healthy cultures are two-way streets.
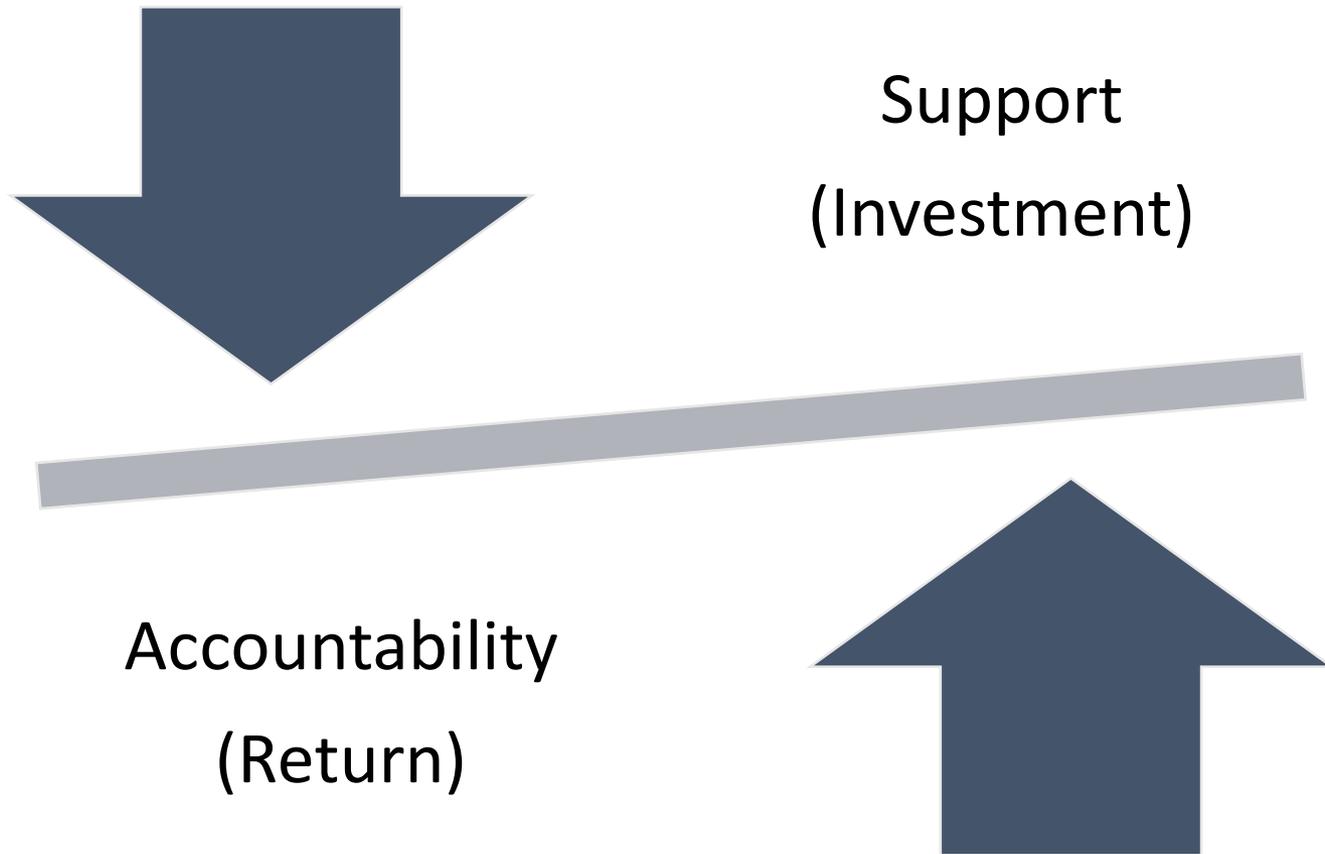
Support

(Investment)

Accountability

(Return)

The Four Critical Behaviors

- Communication (Why? - Cognitive)

- Building Trust (Who? - Emotional)

- Support/Capacity Building (How? - Functional)

- Accountability (Do - Return)

(2019) Cruz and Muhammad, *Time For Change!: 4 Essential Skills for Transformational School and District Leaders*

Rational vs. Irrational Resistance

Why? (Cognitive)	**Who?** (Emotional)
How? (Functional)	**Do!** (Return)

System Change

TIME FOR CHANGE

4 Essential Skills for Transformational School and District Leaders
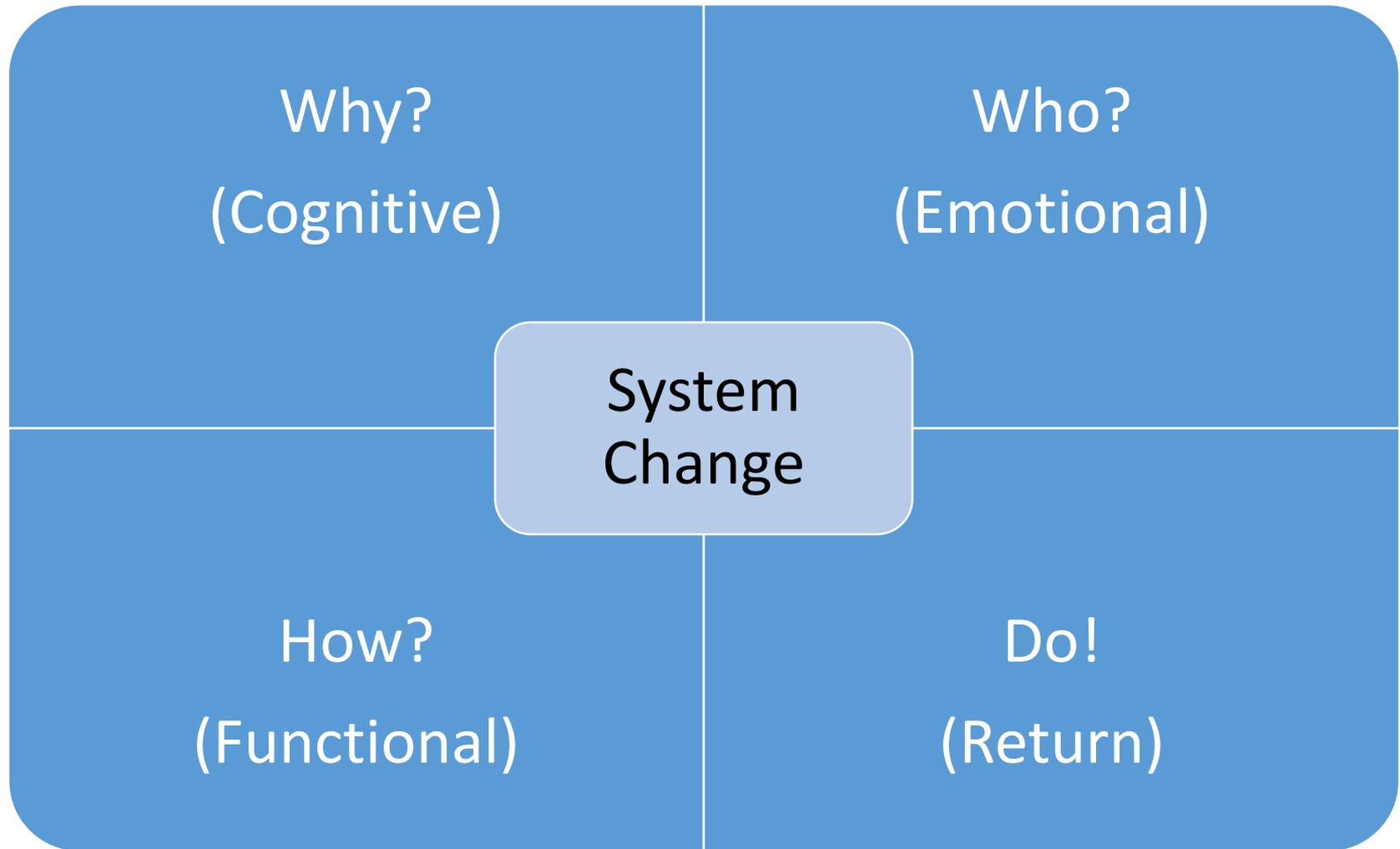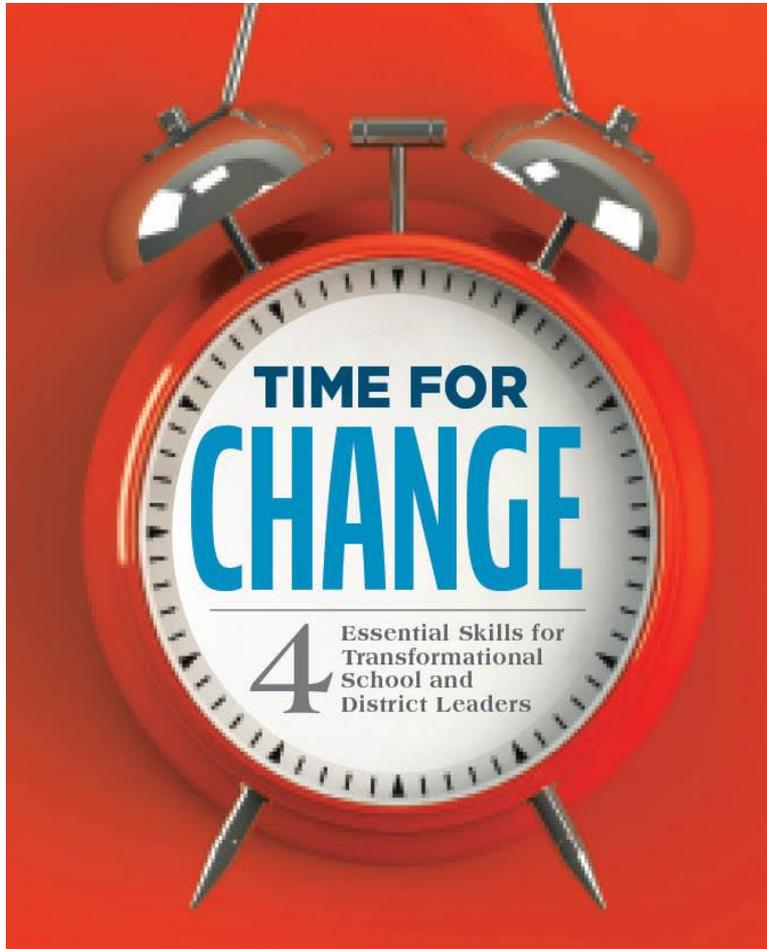
ANTHONY MUHAMMAD

LUIS F. CRUZ

"In an organization, resistance to change in practice or behavior is a symptom of individual or collective needs not being met. Those needs vary from person to person and from school to school. They include cognitive (why), emotional (who), and functional (how) needs. These needs are rational; they emerge out of negative personal and professional experiences. A perceptive transformational leader knows how to diagnose and respond to rational needs without taking the resistance personally."   pg. 21

Critical Behavior #1

Communication (Why? - Cognitive)

"If people clearly understand how the tasks that leaders ask them to complete connect to their natural need to solve problems, it will motivate them and make them intensely committed to solving the problem at hand. "

Pg. 34

Communicate What?

- Purpose for change (Brutal Facts/Data)

- Rationale for Proposal (Persuasion)

Data/Facts

- Stimulate commitment to a cause bigger than self

- Identify starting point for improvement

- Stimulate ownership and intrinsic commitment

Persuasion

- Context - How has this idea been helpful to others in our situation?

- Expect resistance – What arguments should I anticipate?

- Details – How will this idea be practically implemented in our environment

Complete Scenario #1 or #2

Critical Behavior #2

Building Trust
(Who? – Emotional)

Abstract Nature of Trust

"Trust is much more abstract than communication. It relies on individual experiences, involves emotion, and can evolve differently from person to person. What one person requires to establish trust may differ greatly from what another person requires"

Pg. 44

Trust (Reliable) vs. Likeable (Affable)

The most important element in effective product endorsement is trustworthiness at almost double the impact of charisma and likeability.

(Miciak & Shanklin 1994)

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups. It can be divided into ***ability EI*** and ***trait EI***

The Five Factors

- Openness to Experience
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism

Tupes and Christal, Recurrent Personality
Factors Based on Trait Ratings (1961)

Trust

- Empathy

- Credibility

Empathy

- Genuine concern

- Listening without rebuttal

- Collaborating to move forward

Credibility

- Establishing and demonstrating moral commitment

- Pursuing and demonstrating deep knowledge of the task

- Predictable and reliable implementation

Complete Scenario #3 or 4

Support/Capacity Building (How? – Functional)

Collective Inquiry

"The search for knowledge in a PLC is a collective one. This search is ongoing and improvement is nearly impossible without it. Collective inquiry is the engine of a PLC."

DuFour & Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (1998), p. 64

Teacher Curriculum

- Review Critical Data
- Choose Goals (No more than four/five)
- Identify best literature/research that helps increase staff ability to meet goals
- Develop study questions that applies the research to school's current reality
- Prepare study guide for teachers and pace their curriculum for the entire school year

Learning Centers

- Use staff meetings as "learning centers", not for announcements and trivia
- Make sure that study sessions are used to find solutions for your problems, not for complaints about the current state of your school.
- Be prepared to answer Fundamentalists
- Tie the information learned in your book studies to the vision for the school

Reflection

- What is your current system of support for teacher learning?

- Do you prepare teachers professionally before you expect them to improve practice?

- Brainstorm ways that your school could possibly institutionalize a comprehensive system of learning for educators directly linked to the school's vision.

Critical Behavior #4

Accountability
(Do! – Return)

"For many educators, accountability has become a dirty word."

(2004) D. Reeves, *Accountability for Learning: How Teachers and School Leaders Can Take Charge*

Accountability defined…..

The quality or state of being accountable; an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's action

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

What Accountability Is?

- A system to ensure effective implementation of organizational aspirations

- A necessary component of an effective organization trying to maximize human capital

- Essential in the development of a results-oriented and fair organization

- The natural result of effective support

What Accountability Isn't…..

- Compensation for lack of emotional intelligence and leadership skill
- An excuse to micro-manage
- A list of directives
- A substitute for professional development and capacity building
- A tool to silence disagreeable subordinates

RESIST Protocol

- **R**ecognize
- **E**valuate
- **S**elect
- **I**nitiate
- **S**elect
- **T**ell

Reflection

- How do you define accountability?
- What are you loose about in your school/district and what are you tight about?
- How do your subordinates view accountability? Do they view it as a professional imposition or a professional responsibility?
- Did support proceed accountability in your school/district?

Communication

Scenario #1 – (Facts/Data)

You are a new principal assuming leadership at an elementary school that has experienced three different principals in the last five years. The teaching staff is a mix of veteran staff members (more than ten years of teaching experience) 40%, and staff members who are new to the school and the profession (less than five years of teaching experience) 60%. The last principal was very authoritarian. He spent a lot of time collecting data from classroom walkthroughs and giving negative feedback to teachers about their performance. Consequently, teachers developed a negative opinion about data. People started to view data as a tool for criticism and leadership authority, rather than a tool to facilitate professional growth and development. He served for two years, and during that time school performance on state math and reading tests dropped.

You begin your tenure with a review of past performance and it is evident that literacy is a "brutal fact." All performance data reveal that your students read below grade level, and your school has some of the lowest test scores in the school district and state, and this has been a reality for many years. You have a background in literacy, and you've earned a bachelors and master's degree in literacy education. In fact, you spent three years as a literacy coach with a very strong track record in increasing literacy proficiency. How do you, the new principal, effectively use data to confront the necessity to improve literacy practices considering the fact that data was used as a deflating tool of criticism in the past?

Scenario #1 - Data	Strategies
What data would I gather?	- - -
How would I present the data to appeal to a sense of commitment?	- - -
How would I use the facts to inform, not to scold?	- - -
How would I use the facts to stimulate personal ownership and internal agency?	- - -

Scenario #2 (Persuasion)

You're a high school counselor and you are concerned about the number of students receiving out-of-school suspensions for minor disciplinary infractions. You are in your second year of employment at your school, though you have been an educator for 15 years. As a counselor, you get a bird's-eye view of the impact that disciplinary suspensions have on student grades, credit acquisition, and ultimately graduation. You review the school data on student disciplinary infractions, and nearly 80% of the students receiving suspensions of 3 days or less are for three predictable violations; insubordination, classroom disruption, and failure to follow to school rules. As a counselor, you do not have the authority to enforce a change in policy, but you have the opportunity to persuade the opinion of the teachers and administrators in your school.

Before accepting employment in your current school, you served as a teacher in a high school that embraced the *Restorative Justice* theory. Instead of punishment, your former school created an environment and created structures that helped students recognize the error of their ways and created opportunities for students to commit acts of service that atoned for their misdeeds and added value to your school culture. This method resulted in a 90% reduction in student infractions, and out-of-school suspensions were nearly eliminated. You and your former colleagues experienced intensive professional development in the Restorative Justice methods, and you even had the opportunity to share your success with others at a national conference.

You recognize that the current situation at your high school mirrors that of your former school and you believe that Restorative Justice would be a perfect response to your school's dilemma. In the short time that you have served in your position, you have observed that both administrators and teachers are passionate about strict student behavior policies and administering punishment for students who do not adhere to those policies. Your observation and school data reveal that this mindset and method are not making any impact on changing student behavior, it is only leading to a culture of conflict and student alienation. The experience and insight that you gained at your former school makes it difficult for you to simply disassociate yourself from this reality. How do you use the power of **persuasion** to convince your colleagues to reflect on the ineffectiveness of their current practice and embrace Restorative Justice?

Scenario #2 - Persuasion	Strategies
How would you help people recognize the importance of your idea in their context and their reality?	
What resistance/arguments might you expect the people that you are trying to influence to pose to devalue your proposal?	
How would you counter their arguments?	
What details or concrete processes would you share to increase the confidence of those that you are trying to influence?	

Trust

You are the principal at a high-performing elementary school. Your school has won several awards for student academic achievement, including your state's highest honor, the Blue Ribbon Award. You just received notification from the state department of education that last year's state academic testing results revealed that your economically disadvantaged students at your school performed significantly lower than the other students in your school, and the gap is so large, that the state has placed your school in the category of *Needs Improvement*.

This achievement disparity between students based upon socio-economic status has been personally upsetting for the last three years. You attempted to inspire your staff to enthusiastically take on this challenge in the past by exposing them to data and citing research, but that approach did not stimulate the response that you wanted. In addition, the data revealed that most economically disadvantaged students are also very mobile. The average residency of an economically disadvantaged student in your school is seven months. So, when the staff starts to see signs of progress with economically disadvantaged students, most of them move.

Your staff prides themselves on being hard-working student advocates. Most indicators of performance would validate that personal belief, but the data concerning economically disadvantaged students disrupts that narrative and it is a sore topic of discussion. In the past, you could kick the can down the road. The state's designation has created a sense of urgency and you have to confront this anomaly in your data. The coping mechanism that your staff has

traditionally used when addressing this issue is to blame the student and the circumstances that created this crisis. You regularly hear; "I can't be their teacher and their parent!" or "If they wouldn't move so much, we could help them!" or "If I concentrate on their needs, it will take time and resources from my good students, and that isn't fair!" Personally, you have observed that the staff's past attempts to support economically disadvantaged and mobile students have been half-hearted at best, and the intervention methods and systems could improve greatly. Empathy does not require that you share the same emotion or you agree with a person's stance, it requires that you understand that emotion and you consider it when attempting to positively influence a person's behavior.   How do you engage them in this process with empathy, while also helping them to understand that their practice and effort can improve?

Scenario #1 - Empathy	Strategies
How would you create opportunities to demonstrate genuine concern about the emotions of your followers?	
What types of strategies would you use to stay fully engaged and process their concerns and refrain from giving personal opinions or rebuttals?	
How would you collaborate with your followers and create a collaborative resolution to their stated issues?	
How would you continue to demonstrate empathy throughout the entire change process?	

Scenario #4 – Credibility

You are the new principal at an elementary school. The teaching staff was enamored with the personality of the previous principal. They were endeared by his warm personality and his commitment to listen to the concerns of teachers. He was fired by the new district superintendent because although he was beloved, student academic performance declined over his five year tenure, and there were a lot of complaints levied by parents and the local middle school who welcomed six graders annually from your elementary.

One of the traits that the staff admired about the former principal was his willingness to subvert district policy and protect them from systemic change, and ultimately changes in their professional practice. The school district has invested heavily in the Professional Learning Communities at Work model (PLC) over the past five years. The board of education has arranged for an early student dismissal every Wednesday so that teachers would have two hours of collaborative time. The district has allotted nearly 50% of its professional development budget to invest in conferences and training to enhance teacher skill in the areas of curriculum, assessment, and academic interventions to enhance the PLC process. All of the other schools in the district have demonstrated enormous gains in student achievement, but your new elementary school has shown a decline in the indicators of student academic achievement. It is well known that the former principal did not require teachers to attend their collaborative meetings and that he fabricated reports to the central office to give the appearance of compliance with the district expectations.

You were hired because of your track record and knowledge of the PLC process. You have studied the process extensively and you are a true believer in the process. Your previous school was honored as a model of this process and you are expected to stimulate the same level of commitment for PLC at your school that has been modeled throughout the school district. How would you establish yourself as a credible leader and establish the trust necessary to stimulate commitment for the PLC process with a staff that has been taught to rebel?

Scenario #2 - Credibility	Strategies
How would you articulate your moral purpose and connect it to the change that you propose?	
How would you stimulate a moral connection between your followers and the change that you propose?	
How would you display your knowledge, competence, and expertise in this area?	
How would you establish your commitment to the process that you are proposing, and that you are the kind of leader that is consistent and *Walks the Talk*?	

Expectations
Pgs. 9-35

1. How has your education impacted your life? Do you think that you received a quality education (K-12)? Please give an example of a friend or family member who did not receive and/or take advantage of their educational opportunity.

2. Researchers have proven that a student's level of education is best predicted by their zip code. Why do you think that this present reality exists? How does this relate to teacher expectations?

3. Please give your response to the quote, "Poverty is not a barrier to learning, but low expectations, rejection, and indifference are." (pg. 12)

4. We have made significant double-digit gains in student achievement at Levey in every academic area in two years, yet our students' racial, ethnic, and socio-economic statuses have not changed. Why do you think that this has happened?

5. Please examine the seven characteristics of Effective Schools (pgs. 14-18). After reviewing them, identify the one characteristic that we need to improve the most and give suggestions as to how we can improve this component.

6. How do we form expectations? What power do they wield in our lives and in the classroom?

7. Why do you feel that people are unwilling to challenge their beliefs, expectations, and assumptions even after evidence is presented to refute their stance?

Team Mission

_____
_____
_____

To fulfill this mission we will make the following commitments:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Baseline Data (Previous Year):

% of Passing Students _____

% of Students Earning A _____

% of Students Earning B_____

% o Students Earning C _____

% of Students Earning D _____

% of Students Earning F _____

% of Students Exceeding State Standards _____

% of Students Meeting State Standards _____

% of Students Below State Requirements _____

% of Students Taking Advanced Coursework _____

Team Goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Breakthrough Goal:

_____

Team Norms of Behavior

Norm	Response to Violation

Teams are only as effective as the sum total of their parts; everyone must pull his or her weight for teams to be effective.