



## What Kind of Leader are You? Peter Reilly

Directors of technology and school administrators face enormous pressure as they lead schools through times of unprecedented change and accountability. In the last few years many technology leaders and school administrators have experienced an incredible expansion of their job descriptions. What started for many as a passion for using technology in their own classrooms has evolved to encompass highly technical infrastructure and telecommunications decisions, complicated project management responsibilities, oversight of sophisticated administrative applications, data reporting, maintenance of district web pages, management of growing technical support staffs, budget development, research and development, strategic planning, policy development, security expertise, Board presentations and, of course, staff development. Building principals and district administrative leadership cabinets have undergone the same exponential growth in the breadth and complexity of their positions.

The result of this crush of responsibility and complexity is that many educational leaders suffer from overwhelm and burnout making it increasingly difficult for them to provide effective leadership. Many have lost their original passion and have diminished their personal lives to keep their professional heads “above water”.

In addition to coping with overwhelm most educators have received little help in the development of their leadership skills. What help they do receive is often in the form of traditional programs involving listening, reading, discussing and writing. Our intuition tells us that leadership isn’t developed by reading or talking about it, any more than a professional athlete can develop a complex skill by talking or reading about it. We know in our hearts that we need more than tips and techniques. We need to have a leadership presence that others will respect and follow. Developing this presence is not trivial. It involves commitment, practice and feedback. This is called, “Embodied Leadership”.

This type of Embodied Leadership is distinguished from the tips and techniques that anyone can read about leadership. Embodied leaders have 'presence', they know what they care about, stay focused on their goals, and can inspire others to follow the vision of the team or organization. They can listen with an open mind, communicate their goals without emotional baggage, and encourage their staff to think independently, and at the same time create the boundaries for acceptable performance. An embodied leader can set aside his/her own emotional responses to deal effectively with conflict or uncomfortable situations. Embodied leaders are able to make the right move at the right time; create a healthy and vigorous environment for their teams; and “walk their talk”.

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Being a leader requires personal commitment and practice in order to produce new actions, not just new insights. For many of us practicing leadership is a new and exciting concept, guaranteed to take us out of our comfort zones. Most of us have risen to positions of authority in our organizations based on our enthusiasm, hard work, competence and commitment. As successful professionals and human beings, it's understandable that we would prefer to skip over the clumsiness of being a novice and get right to the part where we become powerful leaders. However, we know this isn't how authentic learning happens. We don't need **to know** more about leadership, we need to **be** more effective leaders. What kind of leader are you?

**Pete Reilly**  
**September 2003**

NOTE: *For more from Pete Reilly on leadership issues, see: "When the Classroom Door Swings Inward", published in the anthology, "Being Human at Work: Bringing Somatic Intelligence Into Your Professional Life", edited by Richard Stozzi-Heckler and published by North Atlantic Books (August 2003).*