Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement

An Executive Book Summary by Alex Bergerman
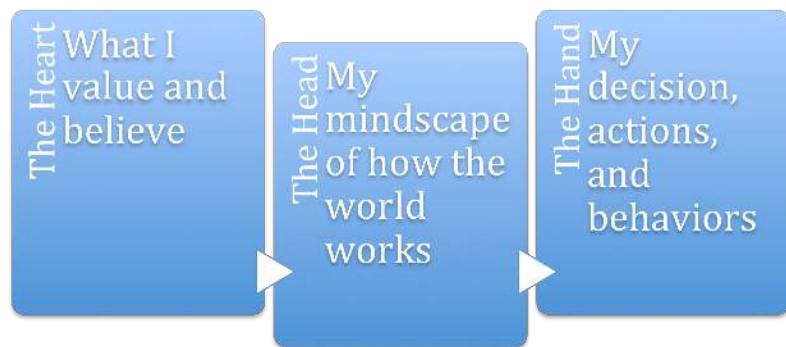
Thomas J. Sergiovanni

Moral Leadership, (1992) Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

Contents:

The Heart — What I value and believe → The Head — My mindscape of how the world works → The Hand — My decision, actions, and behaviors

"New leadership, not more leadership is the key to improving schools"

Sergiovanni's beliefs about leadership are based primarily around ones moral decisions. Within the context of principalship he is more than willing to suggest outrage in order to bring people into line with the schools policy. His theory of leadership completely disregards micromanagement, and expects that teachers will teach due to professionalism and community norms.

Moral Leadership: **Purpose**

Sergiovanni's writing in *Moral Leadership* is guided by one purpose, which is to improve our schools and our school system. To do this he focuses primarily lies upon leadership and the need for new leadership principals and guidelines. These principles come from within; these principles lie foundationally in our morality and in human beings ethical foundation. Through the use of moral obligation Sergiovanni relates these principles in a heavy way, which, makes one understand the need as he sees it and as it really stands.

In the process of addressing this purpose, Sergiovanni strives to answer the following questions:
(1)   What are some substitutes for leadership?
(2)   Where does a covenantal community come from? Development? Maintenance?
(3)   What are the guidelines for deciding upon a covenant schools ethics?
(4)   How does one lead as a steward (servant)?

The Moral Imperative

The *Moral Imperative* refers to what is good

The *Managerial Imperative* refers to what works

Practically speaking the virtuous school must operate on what is *good* and what *is effective*

The Principle of Justice:
Equal treatment of and respect for the integrity of individuals

The Principle of Benefice:
Concern for the welfare of the school as a community

Yes

Goodwill

No

1 Moral		2 Moral and Effective
3 Neither moral nor effective		4 Expedient

Moral Leadership: **Overview**

Moral Leadership is a very practical read in which Sergiovanni utilizes philosophy, personal experience, and administrators input to examine the following concepts: good schools, morals of a school and school community. Sergiovanni cites Kant, Rawls, and Habermas; these three's philosophical take on humanity and human relations help to guide and ultimately are the foundation for Sergiovanni's moral code. A summation of his code is:

In order to act morally one must place themselves in the shoes of another's while not having regard for oneself and always treat others as an end, never a means.

What are some of the substitutes for leadership?

"Leadership has to do with the leader's working directly to get others to do what she wants and, if skillful, getting them to enjoy doing it." (p. 43)

To accomplish this task Sergiovanni has two excellent ideas to utilize as substitutes rather than force or the basic hierarchical scheme of leadership. These substitutes are 'Community Norms' and 'The Professional Ideal.'

Community Norms:
"Establishing community norms within the school… involves changing the metaphor for schooling from an instructional delivery system…. To that of a community." (p. 45)

In a community when norms are violated, problems surface and become legitimate topics of discussion. Once problems are legitimate, they lend themselves to resolution. Without norms these problems remain hidden. Therefore a community forces problems out into the open where they can be dealt with. As problems are seen by not only the staff members but also by the community the staff will feel pressure to snuff these problems out. Not only for themselves but also for the entire community. Therefore the pressure to conform, or to meet communal norms, can force others to do what can be classified as right in conjunction with the communal norms as established.

Professional Ideal:
> The professionals expertise, normally acquired as a result of specialized training in a body of abstract knowledge, often serves to reduce the need for structuring information; furthermore, a belief in peer review and collegial maintenance of standards often causes the professional to look to fellow professional rather than to hierarchical leader for what informational needs remain [Wieck and McDaniel, p. 343]

Professional values are the virtues that enable one to practice in an exemplary way, and which results in valued social end (communal

norms). The exercise of those virtues defines our relationship with other practitioners with whom we share the same purpose and standard of excellence. Professionalism means taking professional development into our own hands, bringing technical knowledge to bear on one's practice. With the professional ideal in place it is no longer acceptable to teach competently in the presence of others who are having difficulty, with out offering help. The idea of professionalism as a substitute for leadership gives everyone the potential to experience intrinsic satisfaction in the work itself. (p. 52-56)

Without these two instrumental leadership methods in place the ideal of the covenantal school may escape, as without a communal norm or professional ideals the leadership of a community would be impossible; one cannot strive to do the work of many.

Where does a covenantal community come from? Development? Maintenance?

> A covenantal community is a group of people who share religious or ethical beliefs, a strong sense of place, and think that the group is more important than the individual.

In Moral Leadership, Sergiovanni shows how creating a new leadership practice -one with a moral dimension built around purpose, values, and beliefs- can transform a school from just an organization to a community. He believes that this "community" can inspire the kinds of commitment, devotion, and service from all stakeholders that can make our schools great. Sergiovanni explains the importance of justifying emotion and getting in touch with basic values and connections with others. He reveals how true collegiality, based on shared work and common goals, leads to an interdependence occurring naturally among teachers. He shows how a public statement of values and purpose can help turn schools into "virtuous" communities where teachers are self-managers and professionalism is valued.

Virtuous schools are established within a covenantal community or can be the grounds for developing a covenantal community. "Covenants are solemn binding agreements between two or more parties that provide reciprocal rights , duties, and obligations on the one hand, and guidelines for action, on the other. They define how one should live as an individual and one's collective life as a member of the community." (p.103) This along with community norms guides the principle of creation and establishment of covenant communities. By professing a firm intrinsic principle to ourselves and to others we become more than we once were for we are now living proof of those words. To fail to act in correlation with our words would be a failure within that agreement between our community and us. The development and maintenance of a covenantal school is as apparent as this example. **To maintain and develop a covenantal community, profess and do.**

What are the guidelines for deciding upon a covenants school ethic?

These are a set of maintained values; so long as your **values are in line with your schools ethic** wondrous things will happen. In our society it is generally acknowledged that we all have the right to exist independently of our connections with government, school, community, and other groups. However, within this parameter rights are often mixed with responsibilities. Following are four working principles from Ruggerio, (1998):

1) Relationships with others create obligations of various kinds; these should be honored, unless there is compelling reason not to do so.
2) Ideals enhance human life and assist in fulfilling their obligations to one another.
3) The consequences of some actions benefit people, while those of other actions harm people. Consequences can be emotional as well as physical.
4) Circumstances alter cases. Generalizations have their place, but too often they are used as a substitute for careful judgment.

In order to act morally one must place themselves in the shoes of another's while not having regard for oneself and always treat others as an end, never a means.

How does one lead as a steward (servant)?

Stewardship is essentially servant leadership.

"Servant leadership is more easily provided if the leader understands that serving others is important but that the most important thing is to serve the values and ideas that help shape the school as a covenantal community." (p.125)

Stewardship represents primarily an act of trust, where people entrust a leader to with certain obligations and duties to fulfill on their behalf. By placing oneself in service to ideas and ideals and to others wore committed to their fulfillment, the steward is fulfilling those ideals.

As Professor Keith Walker once stated "To guide is to serve and to serve is to guide."