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Candace F. Raskin

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Book Review

Candace F. Raskin

MOTION LEADERSHIP—THE SKINNY ON BECOMING CHANGE SAVVY. Michael Fullan, Corwin, 2010.

Introduction

Michael Fullan's *Motion Leadership—The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy* provides what he describes as the skinny or the “core unobscured essence of the matter” (p. 2) on how to move individuals and organizations through the process of change. The book is designed as a precursor to an online series of experiences called *Motion Leadership the Movie*—a product that will provide footage and interactive tools to help a leader with system improvement. The intent of the book is to increase readers' knowledge and insight about change in an efficient and succinct manner. Fullan provides basic insights and ideas about becoming a change savvy leader.

Fullan introduces readers to what he believes is the single underlying challenge to all change, inertia. He notes, “Change problems come in all shapes and sizes, but they all have one thing in common—they are mired in inertia” (p. 9). The book provides readers with insights on how leaders can address the state of inertia and through whole-system reform create large amounts of positive motion in an improved direction (aka *motion leadership*). Fullan emphasizes that motion leadership is different—it is about getting inside of movement and providing the reader with the essence of how to make complex change simpler and more powerful. Fullan states, “The skinny is about “simplicity”—finding the smallest number of high-leverage, easy-to-understand actions that unleash stunning powerful consequences” (p.16). *Motion Leadership* provides readers with the skinny on how leaders can target inertia and set large-scale positive change in motion.

Fullan is recognized as a worldwide authority on educational reform. A professor emeritus of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of University of Toronto, Fullan is currently serving as Special Advisor to the Premier and Minister of Education in Ontario. He is engaged in leadership training, consulting and evaluating change projects worldwide. He has written numerous books and is published worldwide in many languages. His book *Leading in a Culture of Change* was awarded the 2002 Book of the Year by the National Staff Development Council.

About the Author

Candace F. Raskin, associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Minnesota State University, Mankato. *candace.raskin@mnsu.edu*

Overview

Motion Leadership—The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy is organized around seven different leadership principles needed to be change savvy:

- Understanding the process of change
- Connecting peer to purpose
- Building capacity
- Knowing the real work
- Valuing transparency
- Earning trust through integrity and competence
- Making it possible for others to become motion leaders

Each section is designed to scaffold readers' knowledge around change, leadership, and how to "move" individuals, institutions, and whole systems forward.

The first principle Fullan's examines is to understand the process of change itself. In exploring change Fullan focuses on relationships, implementation dip, over planning, behaviors before beliefs, communication, risk taking and being assertive. He provides insight on the importance of building relationships first and the need for leaders to understand the too-fast, too-slow dilemma in working through change from a systems perspective. Fullan assists readers in recognizing the importance of knowing the culture of an organization. The speed through which a leader can create positive motions within an institution or system is directly related to the extent of solid relationships the leader has built. The essence of principle one is that a change savvy leader needs to move fast, but not too fast, understand the culture and carefully build relationships to put individuals, institution and systems in forward motion.

Principle two involves connecting peers with the purpose. According to Fullan, "Top down change doesn't work—people resist when leaders try to tighten things up. . . . The best way to tighten things up is to get peers to do it" (p. 35). Fullan explores how the role of the leader needs to change in order to mobilize peers. Fullan further states, "The role of the leader is to enable, facilitate, and cause peers to interact in a focused manner. Peer interaction is the social glue of focus and cohesion" (p. 35). He also emphasizes that school reform cannot occur if only the leaders are focusing on it. There are simply not enough leaders to get the work done. His answer, de-

velop purposeful peer interactions and harness the power of peers, is essential for success. The second skinny is “nothing succeeds like collective capacity” (p. 43).

Building capacity of an organization is the third principle Fullan introduces. Fullan defines capacity building as, “. . . the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of people individually but especially collectively” (p. 45). According to Fullan, a group of people with a shared purpose and the skills necessary are who get things done in an organization. Fullan introduces two powerful thoughts in this section of the book: capacity building and judgmentalism. He contends savvy leaders overuse capacity building and underuse judgmentalism. Fullan defines judgmentalism as “perceiving something that is not working and wittingly or unwittingly conveying a negative or pejorative message” (p. 46). The skinny on principle three is that leaders need to add the skill of building capacity without negative judgment to their skill set. Fullan conveys leaders who are able to park their judgment and build capacity within an organization will realize more improvement and positive direction.

Fullan emphasizes building capacity is essential but the challenge to building capacity is to recognize that when people gain new skills they are not yet good at these new skills. Fullan defines principle four, knowing the real work, as relentless consistency, which he contends leads to people naturally seeking improvement. He stresses that real work is all about people getting better at the work and then branching out. Fullan states, “The more committed you are to relentless consistency, the more naturally you seek improvements. Today’s relentless consistency is tomorrow’s innovation and tomorrow’s innovation is the next day’s relentless consistency” (p. 56). The leadership essence of principle four is that the work is harder when it is new learning and a person is not good at it yet; as a person develops capacity the work gets easier.

Principle five stresses the need for leaders to value and understand the complexity of transparency within an organization. Fullan emphasizes having openness about the work and the result of the work is in itself a strategy for improvement. Given the demands of accountability and access to information, transparency becomes an asset for motion leaders. Fullan’s skinny on principle five for motion leaders is to trust transparency and recognize that it is a skill and a stance. He believes principle five is one of the most sophisticated components of leadership. “As skills mount, the transparent leader wins just about every time. . . . The world is demanding greater transparency, and technology is accelerating it. The motion leader moves toward the danger and turns it to advantage” (p. 64).

In the sixth principle Fullan explores the relationship between love and trust in addressing resistance. In exploring the concept of love, Fullan emphasizes it is a general tendency for people to respond according to how they are treated. A savvy leader understands this tendency and gravitates towards treating others in a positive manner. In exploring the relationship between love and trust he notes trust cannot occur without integrity and

competence. He defines integrity as sincerity, reliability and honesty and defines competence as skill and effectiveness. Fullan insists there are no shortcuts to gaining trust. Trust comes from a level of integrity and competence demonstrated over time. Fullan shares that it is treating others in a positive manner and leading with integrity and competence that supports leaders handling resistance. The skinny of the sixth principle is that motion change agents work on the most resistant relationships using love, integrity and competence in order to turn them into positive movement.

The seventh and final principle is to make leadership possible for others. Fullan notes, "Becoming change savvy makes you more confident and humble at the same time. In this respect leaders have two responsibilities: to be always learning and refining the skinny of change and to realize that they have an equal responsibility to teach others the same" (p. 75). The seventh principle defines motion leaders as leaders who not only know about the essence of change but also are comfortable heading into the next change experience. They exude "more confidence than the situation seems to warrant" (p. 75) by taking the complexity out of the situation thus reassuring others that progress is probable. Motion leaders also develop other leaders multiplying their efforts to change for the better.

In addition to providing insight on each of the seven principles, Fullan weaves the story of Chef Jamie Oliver into the book. Oliver takes on the challenge of improving the quality of food served at sixty English schools and uses the seven principles to guide his work. Oliver's story brings to life the principles of motion leadership. This blending of knowledge with real application reinforces the key concepts of being a savvy change leader.

In general, Fullan's teaching of the motion leadership principles provides women in leadership with a clear, detailed process for approaching whole-system change. Fullan states, "Getting at the skinny is to make change less complex and more powerful in its impact" (p. 3). Motion Leadership meets that criterion.