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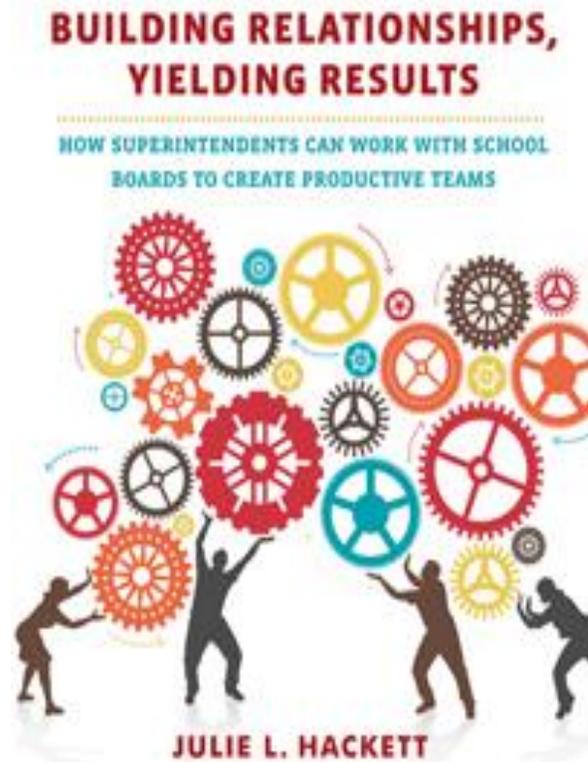
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Author Julie Hackett brings together an array of professionally sound and actionable techniques to offer clear guidance for how superintendents can work with school boards to create productive teams. Drawn from the wider educational administration literature and rooted in Hackett's own field-tested, Massachusetts public school district experiences, *Building Relationship, Yielding Results* is less a 'how-to' manual and more a guide for aspiring and veteran educational leaders. Hackett's relationship-building system (chs. 2-5) and useful strategies (chs. 6-9) offer up much practical wisdom for district leaders charged with making the hard decisions to assist educators and students progress.

As the lead teacher responsible for helping organizations learn and grow, a school district superintendent's core work centers on strengthening teaching and learning conditions. Adopting the right mindset to get



on with it requires determination and perseverance to address simultaneously school reforms and relationships. At the same time, Hackett shows why district leaders ought to prioritize successful relationships with the school board and connect with the wider school community to achieve long-term, sustainable change. As part of a comprehensive playbook, Hackett's three-staged approach starts by cultivating mutually agreed norms and behaviors to establish positive and productive working relationships:

- 1) **pre-entry** - to make connections, build consensus, begin alignment
- 2) **entry-plus** - to develop shared purpose and priorities
- 3) **re-entry** - to work through relational challenges and make mid-course correction

In the process, Hackett advocates for a personalized approach that recognizes the individual and collective needs of school board members, gives opportunities for them to learn and grow together, and accepts differences in how they learn, what they believe, what they know, and what they can do. As school and district leaders well know, this is attractive yet hard rhetoric to make real: in this standards-based era of high-stakes accountability and public scrutiny, how can time-poor school leaders so customize their messaging and actions when driving educational reform?

Hackett urges district leaders to invest the time because school board relationships are deeply personal: “[T]he two parties must possess a sense of optimism and forge strong bonds” (p. 27). Similar to the keys for cultivating healthy relationships amongst

family members, patience, care, and persistence are required as part of an ‘all in’ mindset: we are in this together. To aid in this purpose Hackett offers a 10-step norming and beliefs protocol that encourages superintendents to relationship-build through actively soliciting school board member ideas and willingly learning and growing alongside them.

For example, her ‘Norms and Beliefs Activity’, undertaken as part of Superintendent-School Committee workshops, can strengthen governance and communication practices through developing “a strong sense of the collective values of your school board. You need to know where they stand...” (p. 167). In particular, Hackett shares an individual- and group-rating instrument she used with her Taunton School District. Focusing on both the process and product, the norms and beliefs areas of ‘strength’ and ‘improvements’ to emerge also yield two important outcomes: how to approach and resolve ‘burning issue’ challenges that get in the way of progress, and the group’s collaboration ground rules. Hackett’s roadmap for cultivating effective relationships thus builds a solid foundation — through developing mutual respect for the work that they (can) do — from which to develop high-functioning, productive teams and create a culture of success.

With superintendent-board and board-to-board member relationships so systematically normed and personalized, Hackett turns her attention to establishing a collective vision. Her strategic planning approach is rooted in Fullan’s notion of the learning leader for all: “Superintendents who are the best educational leaders view themselves as teachers of an enormous

classroom, eager to instruct their students — an attentive legion of educators, school community, and school board members” (p. 88). Hackett’s planning architecture works deliberately yet iteratively from core values to mission, vision, strategic priorities, and goals -- and strengthens relationships at every step. Inclusively turning vision into reality, Hackett’s goal-setting process and concrete action-taking mobilizes a ‘community input’ team, which strengthens bonds with the board and focuses its work on both overcoming the impediments to student success and improving teaching and learning conditions.

To illustrate, Hackett describes her school reform challenge response to structured budgetary deficits and inequities, which involved matters of race, class, power, and culture, and led to redistricting, closing three elementary schools, implementing a reduction in force, repurposing a middle school, and moving an entire eighth grade into the high school... simultaneously! The case study illustrates how the author-superintendent’s successful implementation planning and actions stemmed from her trusting board and community relationships rooted in strong, shared values, the ability to remain unflappable under pressure, advanced communication skills (e.g. practice ‘rule of all’ rather than ‘rule of five’), and a respectful mindset towards difference. Boldly, Hackett managed the change by bringing her blockers to the table: “[I]t is always better to invite those who may not agree with me on a given topic to be part of the conversation” (p. 134). Invoking polarity thinking, Hackett demonstrated leadership responsiveness and relational management by actively seeking out, considering, and harnessing different perspectives. In particular, Hackett turned her

blockers into some of the most helpful and persuasive members of the community by listening, deepening her understanding of what needs to be done, correcting course, where possible, and responding. In the end, her blockers become “one of our greatest allies in the school reform effort” because they know “how much we cared” (p. 135).

Building Relationships, Yielding Results demonstrates that serving successfully requires both technological knowledge (e.g. finances, facilities, politics, curriculum, instruction) and relationship-building skills: “[e]ffective school governance... must be a balance between relationships building and results” (p. 25). A straightforward read for busy administrators, it is well organized and moves at a good pace, supported by a comprehensive index of the key topics treated therein. The episodic content can be taken in through one reading or several sittings. I found the at-a-glance insets a useful chapter start and summary of the key actions to implement the spotlighted techniques. However, a few guiding questions to promote focused reflection could have purposefully rounded off each chapter. Moreover, though the numerous artefacts included are readily implementable, their retrievability would be enhanced if listed as tables of figures, exhibits, and appendices at the start of the book.

In sum, Hackett’s practical road map and no-nonsense advice refreshingly conceptualize and usefully operationalize the stewardship tools for superintendents to serve ably through responsive school board relationships and meaningful connections with their school community. It is an important contribution to the field of educational administration with appeal to academics and school leaders.

About the Reviewer

Dr. Eric Jabal is Secondary Principal at The ISF Academy, a two-program IB World School in Hong Kong. Since 1994, Eric has worked as a teacher and administrator in Europe and East Asia. He also serves as a Council of International Schools accreditation team visitor and peer reader. Eric's main research interests include student engagement, school leadership, and comparative and international education.



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