

## Steve Munby's talk to the NAHT Annual Conference - May 2007

### The Future of School Leadership - In praise of the authentic, human, imperfect and courageous leader

It is two years exactly since I spoke at my first NAHT annual conference in Telford. I had just started in my new role as Chief Executive then and I felt both nervous and honoured to be asked to address your conference. I must say that I am delighted to be asked back and, two years on, I still feel nervous and honoured. So nothing has changed there. But I looked up what I said to you two years ago. I talked about the need for NCSL and for schools to be:

- focused
- outward-looking
- self-evaluative
- collaborative

It is always good to stop and reflect on how you are doing against what you set out to do and, two years on, I would like to spend a few minutes reflecting on NCSL's progress against what I said two years ago.

#### i) Focused

With regard to **focus**. We have focused more on school leadership development – our moral purpose is service. We are not the National College for ICT or for networking, we are the National College for School Leadership. I am pleased to say that much larger numbers of school leaders are clearer about our focus and our core purpose than they were, but there is more that we can do on this. Frankly, it's a constant battle, as it is for school leaders. Like you, more and more things are requested of us by a government keen to improve things but in doing so we have a constant battle to keep focused. This is especially the case since we know that the very worst practice is to start doing something else and ease up on the thing that you were doing before its had a chance to make a difference. So in terms of focus I think the College has made **good progress** but an on-going challenge.

#### ii) Outward-looking.

As you know, when I first got the job as Chief Executive I made 500 phone calls to headteachers and followed that up with regional consultation

conferences all over the country to develop a new vision for the College. This outward-looking approach set us on the right direction but it can't be a one-off. Being outward-looking is a constant challenge and we should never become complacent. For you it's about focusing on children and their parents. For NCSL it's about focusing on the needs of school leaders. It is really easy for this to go badly wrong- and I have seen this happen many times in schools and in other organisations. As public servants our role is serving others not doing things that will make our own lives easier if it is not in the interests of the people we serve. As the famous Yachtsman says:

***"You are there to serve a purpose. The boat isn't there to get you around the world. You are there to get the boat round the world. It's about stewardship".***  
Yachtsman Peter Goss

In terms of the College I am clear that we need to be a College for all schools and for all school leaders. So on the issue of being outward focused we are making good progress but there is a long way to go.

### iii) **Self-evaluative**

The College is better than it was at welcoming challenge and listening to the views of school leaders. It has developed a Balanced score card which reports on our impact on schools and on what school leaders think of us. As it is with all leaders, we learn more from negative feedback than from positive feedback so we should really welcome negative feedback. I am keen for the College to continue to welcome advice. That is one of the reasons why I am here today and will be here until after Mick's speech on Monday. So we have made **satisfactory** progress in focusing on overall impact and welcoming feedback but there is more to do.

### iv) **Collaborative**

I am pleased to say that this is now fundamental to how we are operating. We are working more closely with the TDA, SSAT and with the professional associations including NAHT. We developed our advice on complex school leadership and on National Leaders of Education in consultation with Mick and with Carol and with your new vice president Clarissa. NAHT has also been closely involved in the development of our succession planning strategy (of which more later). On this one we have made good progress and I am proud of what has been achieved. Ultimately this is about moral purpose -working together in the interests of schools and children. I am

also pleased to announce that the Secretary of State has recently asked NCSL to provide advice to him on primary school leadership. We are taking that request very seriously and we will be working closely with NAHT and with others to develop that advice.

Can I at this point thank Mick Brookes and the NAHT for their collaboration with the National College for School Leadership. Mick and I started in our national roles at pretty much the same time and he has been excellent to work with. What singles Mick out is, frankly, his strong values about children and his humanity. That is what makes him such a good General Secretary. As I will go on to say, these are key qualities in effective leadership.

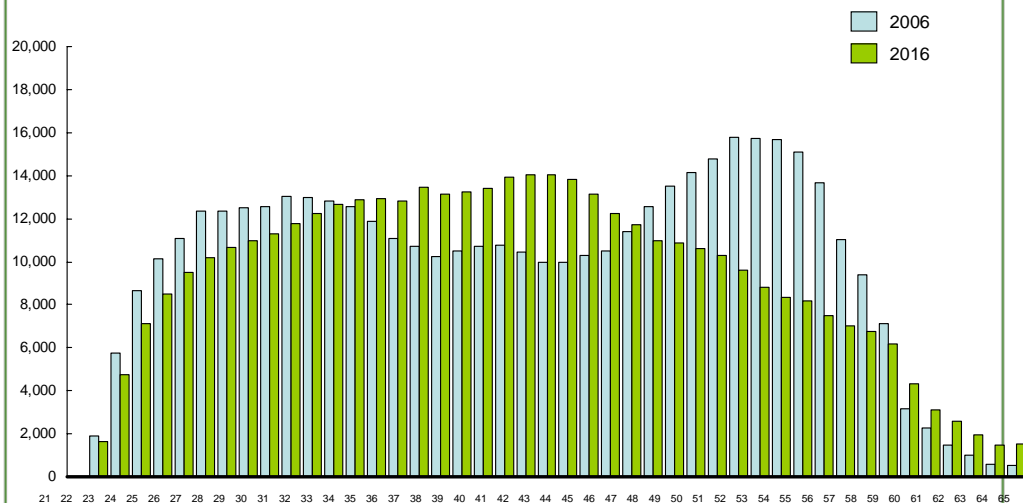
The main things I want to talk about this afternoon are:

1. Succession Planning
2. the future of school leadership and
3. the kind of leadership that is going to be even more important in the future

## Succession Planning –the Problem

Many headteachers are nearing retirement age and the challenge will be most acute in 2009-2011

Age profile of teachers: maintained mainstream schools



Source: DfES Analytical Services Teacher Flows Presentation 2002

Graph showing the demographic challenge – age profile of the teaching force: maintained mainstream schools.

The graph shows a two hump profile, including a large hump of older teachers – these people will retire in the next few years. Leaving a gap of experienced teachers. This suggests that the headteacher shortage will reach its worst state between 2009 and 2011, then it should start to gradually pick up again. In England we have to grow more leaders more quickly than we have had to do before. The average age of a new secondary headteacher is 45 and the average age of a new primary headteacher is 42 – it takes on average about 20 years in a school before you become a headteacher. We are going to have to change that over the next few years if we going to have the quantity and quality of school leaders that we need.

Basically, if you are considering becoming a Headteacher, your country needs you.

The problem isn't just one of demographics, it is also one of perception of the role of headteacher.

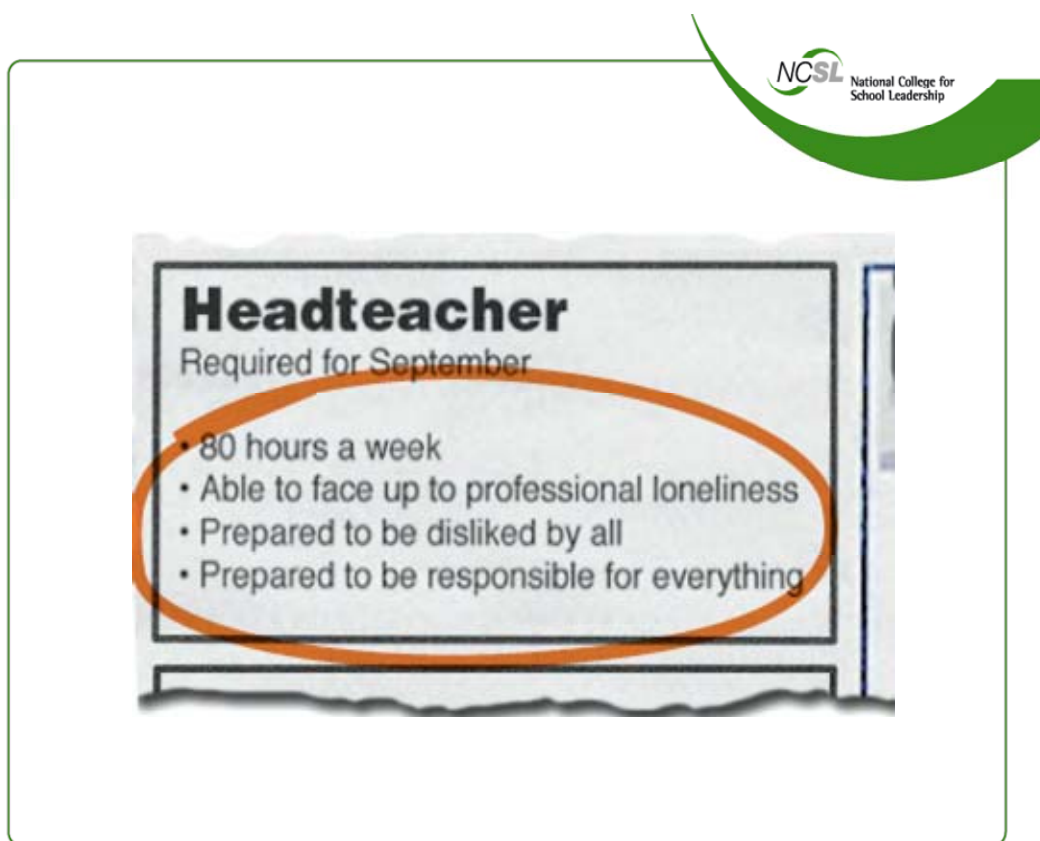
This graph shows the main reasons why middle leaders and deputy headteachers don't want to become heads. There will be no surprises in this list.



1. Work-life balance/stress
2. Personal commitments
3. Less pupil contact
4. Less teaching involvement
5. Not an ambition
6. Admin demands
7. Accountability/inspection

So the job of headteacher appears to be unattractive because of stress, accountability, administrative demands etc.

I think many people would identify to some extent with this mock advert for a head's job:



Yet when we ask headteachers what they think of the role, this is what we get:

*The majority of headteachers are positive about their leadership role; nine in ten say they feel confident in what they do and enjoy it (91%)*

Follow-Up Research into the State of School Leadership in England  
MORI Social Research Institute (2005)

On a good day!

We also know that those who are acting heads are far more likely to apply for headship than those who have not been an acting head. Our hypothesis is therefore that the closer you are to being a head the more you see the positive aspect of the role as well as the negative aspect. The more you understand that you can help to transform the lives of a whole generation of children and really make a difference across a whole organisation.

Our hypothesis is therefore that the closer you get to headship the more you see the positive aspects of it as well as its demands. (I was delighted to see this afternoon that the NAHT conference passed a motion celebrating what a great job being a headteacher is).

**So what are the ways forward to address the succession planning challenges?**

## **1. Review the role of school leadership**

I am very worried about the current expectations that we place upon the leaders in this country, especially those who work in the public sector. As Deborah Ancona and colleagues have said, What have we come to expect from our senior leaders in complex public service organisations?

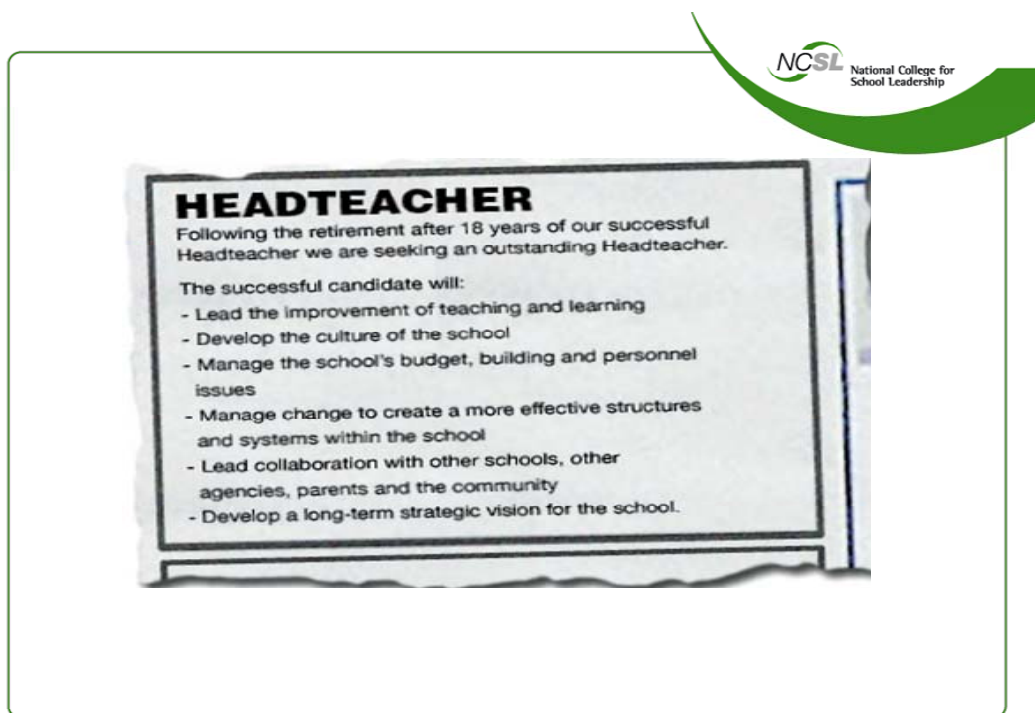
- The intellectual capacity to make sense of hugely complex and often potentially conflicting issues
- The wisdom to be able to read the broader local, national and political environment,
- The creativity to develop a compelling vision which will move the organisation forward and which will generate enthusiasm and commitment,
- The operational understanding of strategies that will turn the vision into real action that will make a difference,

- The financial expertise to ensure that resources and public money are used efficiently and effectively
- The managerial competence and flexibility to deal with the wide range of day-to-day challenging problems and external requirements that arise in the job,
- The toughness to challenge poor performance and to take strong and decisive action where it is needed,
- The counselling and negotiation skills to deal with difficult and challenging parents and members of the community and
- The interpersonal skills to motivate staff and take people with you.

In addition, the public service leader is highly accountable for everything in the organisation.

Frankly I think it is time that we accepted the fact that believing one person can and should be this type of leader is not realistic. It makes the job feel too hard and threatens work-life balance, it fails to attract people to want to become leaders and, most important of all, it ultimately does not serve the public best - in our case children and young people and their parents.

The job role and the expectations on schools and on the individual headteacher are increasingly unrealistic. Here is a copy of a recent advert for a headship.



I support Local Management of Schools. I am convinced that we have better headship as a result. But the expectations on heads from government and from society have increased dramatically since the late 1980s. Inspection systems, performance tables, ECM, asbestos, water testing, the nutritional standards of school meals, safeguarding and child protection, equality and disability policies. The list is endless. The Price Waterhouse Coopers report says too many heads get involved in operational issues too often. That is a tough one and is not to be commended but frankly if your site supervisor is off sick or your finance person is out on a course and something is needed urgently what else can you do? I do think, however, that there are some heads who frankly prefer the operational to the strategic.

What I don't think we can expect under any government is the pace of change to slow down. In an increasingly globalised world that is just not realistic. As the recent PWC report on school leadership stated:

***“longing for that mythical period of calm and stability is to misunderstand the nature of the world and of leadership”***

We have to get better at managing that change and in doing so I think we have to challenge our fundamental concept of headship as the person who is accountable for everything.

As you well know, the days of the all knowing, all-controlling HT are over.

However, not all parents, governors, staff, local authorities and DfES officials really understand this. They still insist on seeing the head. Our own **leadership literature and research** encourages participation and distributed leadership but our **culture** glorifies the charismatic leader who everyone admires. Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. No one person could possibly stay on top of everything but the myth of the complete leader and the fear of appearing incompetent makes many of us try to cling on to the model and exhaust ourselves in the process. The argument goes something like this – and it is an easy trap to fall into - I am accountable for everything in the organisation and if anything goes wrong it will be my responsibility. Therefore I cannot afford to let anything slip therefore I must attempt to make all the decisions. Moreover my staff already work too hard and have enough on their plates –it will be quicker if I take responsibility myself.

Let's consider what the key responsibilities of the leadership in the school are:





**Each function of the leadership team requires  
strategic leadership and operational management**

Here is the traditional leadership model. The old style.

The crucial thing that needs to change – and it still hasn't happened sufficiently in every school - is to delegate strategic responsibility and accountability as well as management and operational responsibility.



**Traditionally headteachers delegate management responsibility but continue to lead each area**

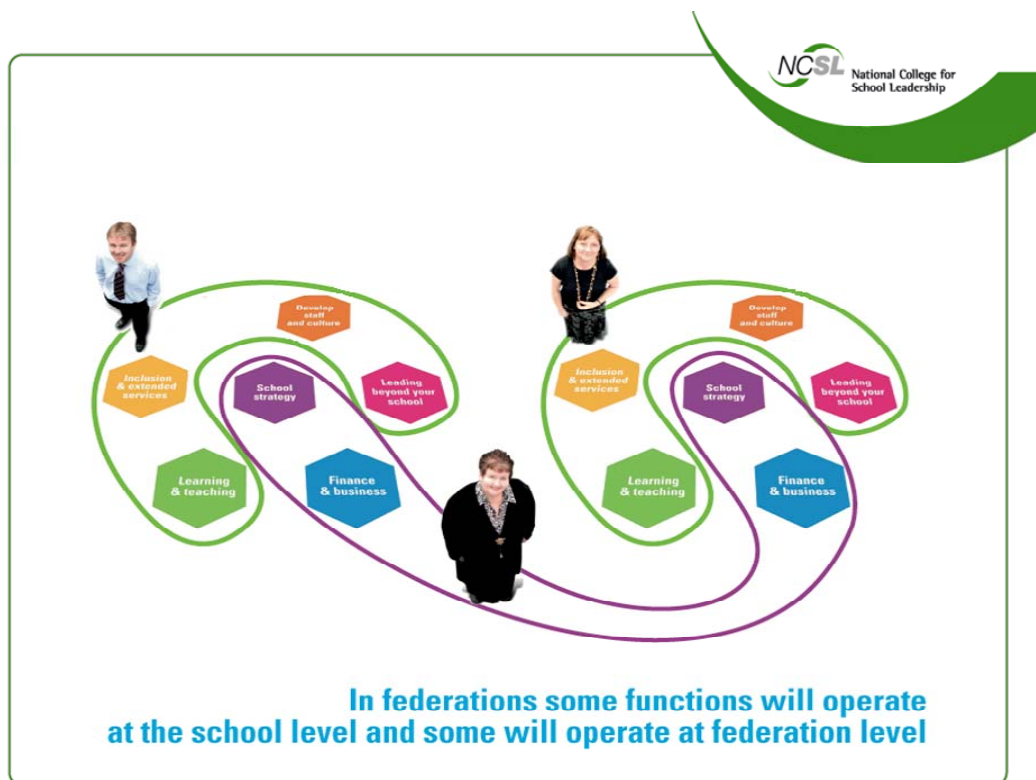
Now and increasingly in the future heads are choosing which bits they are going to lead and be accountable for and which bits others in the team are going to lead and be accountable for.



**In the 21st century you will have to choose what kind of head you want to be, what you want to lead**

Of course, this kind of approach to distributed leadership is particularly challenging in small schools where there is little capacity and delegation is hardest of all. In these cases I do believe that we need to look at federations and collaborations in order to share the burden and to play to our leadership strengths. In independent schools the second most important person in the school is the school bursar who handles all the HR, Finance, Site management and health and safety aspects of the organisation. If schools can have that kind of support, either at individual school level or across a small group of schools what a difference it would make to the capacity for school leaders to focus on their core role of teaching and learning and outcomes for children.

So in federations and collaborations it might look like this:



Under this model the person leading across the federation could report to each of the two headteachers or the two headteachers could report to person leading across the federation. Either model could work.

So, if we are to make the job more manageable and attractive in the future then we need to review our approach to leadership and our expectations of leadership.

## **2. Further Develop Local Solutions to Succession and Talent Management**

NCSL is not proposing a national strategy for succession planning. That is because every region and locality is different. The data confirms that. Rural schools have their own challenges re recruitment and succession planning, as do aided schools, schools in areas of expensive housing and schools in areas of high deprivation.

I think we need to become much better at identifying potential leadership talent and doing something about it at local system level. If “Education England” was a business, potential leaders would be identified in their first year in teaching and given managed opportunities to experience a range of different contexts – urban, rural, multi-ethnic, large, small etc in order to fast track them towards senior leadership. That does not happen in our education system.

This local solution requires schools to identify potential leadership talent – It challenges the historic hierarchical model in schools, where promotion has been a condition of age, experience and, in some cases, turn, rather than merit or ability.

But individual schools doing talent management and succession planning is not enough to solve the national challenge. Schools have to work together to share that talent - on the understanding that the ultimate gains from that may not be your own school but you will have the satisfaction of seeing them go on to be successful elsewhere. Frankly – it requires some moral purpose over and above being concerned for your own individual school. Taking responsibility collectively for providing mentoring, job swaps, learning challenges for the potential leadership talent in your local area or in your network. This is a hard one to get right because your own schools still need to be led and you are still accountable but school leaders who only focus on their own school will not solve the nation’s succession planning problem.

## **3. A new approach to NPQH and leadership development**

As leadership in schools changes and develops and we develop new models of school leadership then NPQH needs to be up-to-date in equipping future leaders. NPQH has been successful but it has four major problems:

1. Too many people are getting the qualification without going on to headship
2. Too many people come out with the qualification using the same vocabulary and have not developed their own individual leadership style
3. The role of headteacher has changed and NPQH needs to adapt further to that change
4. We now have a better understanding of effective leadership development and we know that most of the development and learning needs to take place on the job in a real context.

That is why we are proposing to change NPQH next year. There will be more rigorous assessment on entry, an opportunity to spend time in another school or context as part of the programme and when people qualify there will be an expectation that they will move rapidly onto headship.

#### **4. Address the retention issue**

Remodelling school leadership should help to make the job more attractive and more manageable. But we have to do more than that. What about the good but tired who have put in 25 or 30 years and want to ease up. Don't have the energy that they used to have. After 30 years frankly I don't have the energy that I had 10 or 20 years ago. What we do have, though, is wisdom and experience. We have to develop new models of leadership. Job shares, succession plans whilst still in post, mentoring and coaching. Let's not lose that expertise.

Fifthly, I think we need to hold on to the key leadership skills that will be needed even more powerfully in the 21<sup>st</sup> century models of leadership.

#### **5. In praise of imperfect, authentic, human courageous and developmental leadership**

##### **Authentic and Imperfect Leaders**

The best leaders are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and don't try to be perfect at everything. The imperfect and human leaders know that there are probably people in their organisation who are better than they

are at many things (or, if they are not, then they could be if they were given the opportunity) and actively finds ways to give responsibility for those things to others. Imperfect and human leaders are not incompetent leaders – far from it – they are extraordinarily competent at leadership – they understand what they are good at and what they are not good at. They look for people who will compensate for their weaknesses so that they can play to their strengths, they look to create a perfect and complete **team** rather than to be the perfect and complete individual leader. They admit their weaknesses and are honest about who they are. Frankly, it is unlikely that we will be able to inspire, excite or motivate people unless we show them who we are, what we stand for and what we can and cannot do.

When I say share your weaknesses I don't mean like Sam Goldwyn from MGM did when things weren't going well for him and for MGM in and he invited his senior staff to a meeting and said that he wanted them all to be absolutely straight with him about how his leadership could be improved, even if it means I have to sack you afterwards!

**Secondly**, I don't mean revealing too much of yourself and saying I am me – take it or leave it – put up or shut up - irrespective of the context.

A good leader tunes into the context.

*“.. we have been witness to countless uncomfortable examples of executives who feel that the art of leadership is to give unfettered expression to their true selves in bold, take it or leave it fashion. They typically find that others choose to leave it. Leadership is not achieved by riding into town – cowboy fashion- and shooting it up. Skilful leaders, to continue the analogy, need to get a sense of the town and to conform enough so that they are seen to be acting in the best interests of the townspeople, so they can lead change without being shot early in the proceedings.”*

*“Why should anyone be led by you” - Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones*

So let's acknowledge our imperfections. Let's be honest about the fact that we have never liked that part of the role or have never been particularly good at it. Our staff will know anyway.

As Judy Garland said:

***Be a first-rate version of yourself rather than a second rate version of somebody else”.***

Rather than being a copy of someone else, we need to develop our own signature leadership style. We should know what our **leadership signature style** is and know how it can be made to work most effectively.

I have just finished reading a book called ‘Why should anyone want to be led by you?’ by Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones. It is quite powerful and challenging. We won’t be effective leaders unless people want to work with us and for us.

Authenticity and a sense of moral purpose are in my view the most important qualities of all. When we do hard things and challenge poor performance, when we confront the brutal facts what enables us to do it and enables the organisation to accept it? Because our reasons are genuine. It is not about us wanting to be powerful it is about being passionate about ensuring that children get the best deal possible, it is about doing what’s right. Most people in the organisation accept it because they know we really do care.

We can’t easily talk ourselves out of a situation we have behaved ourselves into. They will forget what we say but they will never forget how we made them feel. Relationships matter.

As Plato said:

*“Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”*

### **Courageous leadership**

My wife and I bought a house four years ago and we immediately made a list of all the things that needed to be improved. We set about doing it all and in the first year we got about three quarters of the way down the list. After that we just stopped. Not because we ran out of money –though that was relevant – but also because we stopped noticing that it needed to change. We just got used to things the way they were. The effective leaders maintain the high expectations even after the first six months or year or two years. They carry on challenging and carry on wanting the best. They understand the culture but they don’t go native.

The second law of thermodynamics says: “when you put a hot property next to a cold property they soon become a uniform heat” The effective leader remains a “hot property” and carries on challenging.

We can often come across as victims or martyrs in today's culture. If only, we could have more money, if only there were fewer initiatives, if only there weren't so many constraints, Ofsted etc. .... There is a clear place for lobbying and for getting your messages across to government. Although we have to work within the system that we have got, we don't have to be bullied by the system or be slaves to it. The criteria by which we judge our own schools don't have to be identical to the criteria that Ofsted use. When Tim Brighouse went to Birmingham as the new CEO he developed bottom up targets for attainment – which were needed by the way – but he also develop entitlements for all children to have a residential experience. The accountability framework that he developed was focused but it was also rich and colourful. The good school leaders absolutely believe in raising standards and in focusing to make sure that each child achieves becomes literate and numerate because without that they will struggle in our world. But they also have other success criteria for children and for the school. Criteria that they declare and talk about and, indeed, report progress on. Just because it is not easily measured doesn't mean to say that it can't be reported on and given high status. A happy school. A school where the curriculum is so good that every single child has at least one electrifying, moment of learning and experience each year that they will remember for the rest of their life. A school where the community feels engaged and welcomed. I visited Langdon School recently. One of the young people said “we may not have a nice new school building but we do have love” a school where love and care are part of the success criteria.

Here is a quote from an Ofsted report on a primary school in Knowsley where I used to work. It encapsulates everything I am trying to say:

*“Children delight in school because learning is ‘fun’. Their attitudes to learning and their behaviour are exemplary. Attendance is high. The care, guidance and support of children are exceptional and emphasise children’s emotional health. Teachers squeeze every last drop of creativity from children. The rich curriculum is packed with experiences that fully engage learners. Children with learning difficulties and or disabilities and those who speak a language other than English receive support of the highest quality*



*and achieve equally well. Staff create a magical place to learn where academic rigour and emotional well-being happily co-exist. The .....leadership of the headteacher drives the whole school team to 'Reach for the Stars'!* “

We need leaders, like this head, who are human and imperfect and authentic and courageous. Who can take some risks and are prepared to help others to take some risks too. Who consider carefully their context then seize the agenda and make it work well in their school. You might call it “Look as you leap”.

I was thinking of song titles to describe school leadership recently. I thought of Jackson Browne's song 'Running on Empty' or the Who 'Wont Get Fooled Again' but after much research I came up with what I think is the best one:

It is by Chumba Wumba Tubthumping

*“I get knocked down  
But I get up again  
You're never going to keep me down”*

Good leadership is not about never having a bad day – we are human – it is about when you have a bad day, getting up and starting all over again. Because that's what leaders do!

Martin Luther King said:

*“The greatest glory in living lies not in never failing, but in rising every time we fail”*

So we need Imperfect, human, authentic and courageous leaders.

Finally we need leaders who develop others, and who model the culture they want for their organisation.

As leaders we cast a shadow over our organisations, for good or ill. If we moan they will moan, if we get cross they will think it OK to get cross, if we look too busy to listen then they will look too busy to listen, if we cut them

off they will cut others off, if we look in a panic they are more likely to look in a panic. If we inspire they will inspire, if we coach others they will coach others, if we show respect and high expectations, they will do also, if we demonstrate emotional intelligence and kindness, they will develop that too, if we challenge poor performance fairly but relentlessly then they will also. If we don't take ourselves too seriously then they will do the same. If they find working with us stimulating and challenging and they feel valued and they respect us and want to work for us and with us then they are more likely to want to become leaders themselves and to have the skills to be good in the role

As school leaders your role is to ensure that no child is given a bad deal while you are responsible - -that the culture in the school that you lead is one which believes that these children can achieve and can be the people that they might be. That is respectful and challenging and stimulating to each of the young people in the school.

But the role also gives you a responsibility for other staff.

We are all in leadership roles because someone believed in us and encouraged us to be leaders. That is certainly true of me. The best leaders grow future leaders. Whenever someone leaves a role in order to go into a different role, they are usually leaving something they are very good at in order to do something that they don't know if they are going to be good at. That takes courage. As Henry Ford said:

***"One of the greatest discoveries a person makes, one of their great surprises, is to find they can do what they were afraid they couldn't do."***

As leaders we need to provide potential leaders with that courage to take the step up.

Your legacy can be to develop other leaders who will help to transform the lives of many, many children and who will regard you as their inspiration, their coach and their role model.