JOURNEY TO OUTSTANDING

The three key leadership strategies for creating a truly outstanding school

SONIA GILL
JOURNEY TO OUTSTANDING

The three key leadership strategies for creating a truly outstanding school
DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to those people who strive, every day, to support, educate and care for our children; those who challenge themselves to give more; and those who have a relentless desire to give the skills, knowledge, love and support, which will let today’s children go on to create a better world and live their dreams.
JOURNEY TO OUTSTANDING
Thank You

I’d like to say a heartfelt thank you to the many people who have helped me with this book. Thank you to Rebecca Harris, Am Rai, Tara Baig, Paul Robinson and Kirsten Cooper for their time and feedback in reviewing this book and Tracy Kilkenny and her senior leadership team (SLT) for their contribution.

I am grateful to the many Heads and schools I have worked with over the years and while there are too many individuals to thank by name here, I’d like to acknowledge the inspiration, challenges and improvements they have made to my work, skills and knowledge.

Thank you to Team Heads Up for all your hard work and commitment to making a difference and for being there for me and each other: Shiraz, Sheila, Heather, Robert, Sophie, Lucy, Emma, Amy and Kay.

A big thank you to those people who irrevocably changed my life for the better: Nick Bolton, for getting me started on my journey and being there for me every step of the way; Mel White, you’ve been through it all with me; Daniel Priestley, Andrew Priestley, Darshana and Marcus Ubl for helping me know why I’m here and Susie and Rod for your great advice, support, time and humour – you keep life sparkling!

In my personal life I am grateful to those who have been by my side during life’s ups and downs and without whom life would be a lot harder and a lot less fun!

My family, my wonderful mum, for giving me more than any child could have hoped for and my dad, bless his soul, for his high standards and love.
My big sister Sim who picks me up and keeps me on track and her husband Kevin who tells me so much yet says so little. And Izzy and Ally who teach me life’s most valuable lessons and giggle all the way through it!

Two of my best friends: Lee, one of the wisest and most giving people I have ever met; and John, for your endless help, intellect, support and laughter – you guys keep it all real.

Most of all, thank you my dearest Phil, for your unwavering support, love and guidance through thick and thin – you are my rock.

Sonia Gill
Sonia Gill is an exceptionally talented business leader as well as having experience as a successful teacher. One of the factors contributing to our school’s high success has been working in close partnership with Heads Up to establish or consolidate the processes of high quality leadership as well as other aspects of school improvement.

Sonia Gill’s book Journey to Outstanding is a great guide for any school practitioner and leader who is aspiring to create an outstanding school. The book provides a balance of achievable practical strategies with sound theoretical evidence which are such essential factors in achieving outstanding outcomes and impact in any successful school.

Tara Baig
Outstanding Head Teacher, Miles Coverdale Primary School, Hammersmith and Fulham, National Leader of Education

Sonia’s book Journey to Outstanding is an excellent guide for all leaders of learning. She outlines her ideas for core leadership skills and values in a way that is relevant, inspiring, accessible and practical. The ideas are based on sound theory and practical evidence making this book a must for any leader aspiring to create an outstanding school.

Kirsten Cooper (Mrs)
Outstanding Head Teacher, Nelmes Primary School, Havering
Sonia Gill has crafted a refreshing book that will appeal to aspiring, new and ambitious head teachers. She has framed the complexities of this important role alongside the realities that exist in many schools, and ensured a relevance for those that are committed to continuous improvement. Head teachers of outstanding schools will also welcome this book as it makes a contribution to an analysis of what is required for longer term sustainability and development. Local Authorities, Academy Trusts and Governing Bodies should ensure that Journey to Outstanding is included in every induction package for newly appointed head teachers.

Am Rai
Outstanding Head Teacher,
Montpelier School, Ealing

Great leadership is not about overnight success. Great leadership takes practice, difficult conversations and applying the right consistent approach. Great leadership takes courage and is helped on its journey by tailored support from a great coach like Sonia.

I love this little book. Sonia explains difficult concepts in a simple way. She demystifies all the jargon around visions and missions, so for the first time ever, I really understand the difference between the two. There are some fantastic ideas for inset days as well.

Rebecca Harris
Outstanding Head Teacher,
St George the Martyr Primary School, Camden
Contents

Testimonials 7
Introduction 11

Section 1 13
There is a magic ingredient to becoming outstanding
1 Every school can be outstanding 15
2 What is getting in the way of all schools becoming outstanding? 29
3 The three core leadership strategies for creating an outstanding school culture 41
4 It’s all down to leadership 59

Section 2 73
The three core leadership strategies to creating an outstanding school culture
5 Tell them where you are going and why 75
6 Creating a culture of healthy conflict through successful difficult conversations 105
Introduction

Hello, I'm Sonia Gill, the Founder and Director of Heads Up, and we specialise in helping primary schools become outstanding.

My mission is to make every primary school in the UK outstanding; yes, in terms of the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted), but also in being centres of excellence in all of our communities.

I'm a qualified teacher, trained in Key Stage 2, but I've taught every age from reception to year 11 (if you've ever taught reception I think you're amazing because that's the toughest year in my opinion). I had planned to go into educational psychology (that's my degree) but after some changes to the profession I decided not to, which meant, to be honest I didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up! I sought to broaden my experience to help me find out what I liked and was fortunate to be selected for the prestigious John Lewis Graduate Leadership Programme.

Throughout my time there I learnt a lot; I found my focus on leadership and creating great teams combined with my passion for psychology and my
skills as a class teacher led me to be successful in business. Within three years I found myself on the steering group, reporting directly to the MD, of the second largest store. Don’t let me lead you on though, I made a lot of mistakes and learnt a lot of lessons!

It’s funny because I think there’s often the view that the public sector should learn from the business sector, but not so much the other way around. Maybe people think that businesses are more successful? I don’t think they are. A lot of businesses are average. Excellence is a rare breed in any sector or industry. I think the lessons run both ways. What I learnt as a teacher was invaluable when I moved into business and, when I moved back to the public sector, the same was true.

I always wanted to return to education because to me it’s the most important part of society and so Heads Up was born. Using the best from business with the best of education to support those who want to create great schools, Heads Up is all about supporting our educational leaders to create the outstanding school they have always wanted to lead.

In this book I want to share with you the insights I’ve found over the years and the approach and methods I’ve used to support hundreds school leaders create the amazing school they dream of. I hope you find it useful, I hope you enjoy it and most of all I hope you feel empowered to create the outstanding school, the centre of excellence, you have always dreamt of leading.

Sonia Gill (2015)
Section 1
There is a magic ingredient to becoming outstanding
Chapter One
Every school can be outstanding

‘Your playing small doesn’t change the world.”
Marianne Williamson, Return to Love

In this chapter:
• Being truly outstanding is more than the Ofsted criteria
• The excuses we make for not being outstanding
• Any school can be outstanding regardless of its post code and demographics
• Good is the enemy of great

Every school can be outstanding.
What is your reaction to that statement?

Some Heads will agree, some will disagree, some will be unsure. What do you think? I truly believe this and I’m going to explain why.

I believe every school in the UK can be outstanding by creating a culture of excellence through brilliant leadership. I think you want to be a dynamic leader and you’re looking for ways to do that; that’s why you are reading this book. In my opinion the desire to improve your own leadership is one sign of a great leader.
I need to explain what I mean by ‘outstanding’. Ofsted has its criteria for being Outstanding, which changes and evolves, but it is one of the markers for a great school.

I’ve worked in a lot of schools, with a lot of Heads and a lot of senior leaders, hundreds, and what is clear to me is that we share the view that just achieving Ofsted’s definition of outstanding is not enough.

What I have found is that Head teachers want something more than what Ofsted want and I encapsulate this in the phrase: create the school you have always dreamt of leading.

The school you have always dreamt of leading

You became a head teacher for a reason and it’s unlikely to have been purely for the money or status of the job. If you did the chances are you quickly figured out that these didn’t really correlate with the demands put on you.

More likely you became a head teacher to make a difference, to take the impact you had in the classroom as a teacher, across subject areas as a subject leader, across the school as a deputy head, and to another level as a Head. A level where you could create a stimulating educational environment for children, where they could achieve academically and holistically, preparing and equipping them for
life, nurturing their skills and ambitions, growing their creative talents, their love for learning, their moral and cultural development and all while enjoying the fun of school, the school which you lead. I also believe you want to be outstanding both in Ofsted’s eyes and your own, because I think to have become a Head you’re not someone who wanted to be average – I don’t think you could have become a Head if you were.

One Head described her dream school beautifully as two halves of an apple, one side being the formal academic achievement and the other being the multitude of life skills that are not measured but are nonetheless incredibly important.

Tests, tests and more tests!

And of course in your dream school you do want children to be literate and numerate and you will want good test results - I’ve not met a Head who isn’t interested in their end of year test results which they want, and let’s be honest, need, to be excellent.

But like I’ve said every Head I’ve been lucky enough to work with has also wanted to grow and develop the whole child as there is more to education than just test results.

In the summer of 2014 we saw a wonderful example of this desire to give our children more than just tests results in the touching letter from the Head of Barrowford School in Nelson, Lancashire, Rachel Tomlinson, which was inspired from a blog post by US teacher Kimberly Hurd Horst:
Please find enclosed your end of KS2 test results. We are very proud of you as you demonstrated huge amounts of commitment and tried your very best during this tricky week. However, we are concerned that these tests do not always assess all of what it is that make each of you special and unique. The people who create these tests and score them do not know each of you- the way your teachers do, the way I hope to, and certainly not the way your families do.

They do not know that many of you speak two languages. They do not know that you can play a musical instrument or that you can dance or paint a picture. They do not know that your friends count on you to be there for them or that your laughter can brighten the dreariest day.

They do not know that you write poetry or songs, play or participate in sports, wonder about the future, or that sometimes you take care of your little brother or sister after school.

They do not know that you have travelled to a really neat place or that you know how to tell a great story or that you really love spending time with special family members and friends.

They do not know that you can be trustworthy, kind or thoughtful, and that you try, every day, to be your very best... the scores you get will tell you something, but they will not tell you everything.

So enjoy your results and be very proud of these but remember there are many ways of being smart.

We both know that poor test results put pressure on you and your school and no Head’s dream school has children who are illiterate or innumerate.
What do I mean by outstanding?

When I’m referring to being outstanding I’m referring to this kind of school, the one many Heads have spoken to me about, the school they have dreamt of and long to create. It includes what Ofsted are looking for and all those areas Heads want for their children - it’s what most teachers and parents want for children - passion, skills, social and emotional well-being, fun and so much more.

I’ll refer to being great, the pursuit of excellence, high performance, exceptional and more superlatives all of which are about creating that outstanding school, that picture of success: the school you have always dreamt of creating.
THERE ARE MANY REASONS (AKA EXCUSES!)

There are many reasons why people say schools can’t become outstanding and I’m sure you’ve heard them all (and then some!) at some point or other. They usually centre around three areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue area</th>
<th>Supposed problem</th>
<th>Supposed ideal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td>‘It’s the demographic of this school’</td>
<td>If these children were all tutored, if we had less on free school meals, low SEN and low EAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socio-economic background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free school meals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special Educational Needs (SEN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English as an Additional Language (EAL)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td>‘It’s the staff we have in this school, they don’t perform well enough’</td>
<td>All teachers and staff are good or better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Money</strong></td>
<td>‘We don’t have enough money, resources, teachers, teaching assistants (TAs).’</td>
<td>We have a surplus every year to spend on what we want for the school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However there are schools with one, or usually several of these factors in place, who are outstanding.
WHY LEADERSHIP IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD AND OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS

Outstanding schools despite the odds

You can find schools who don’t have any of the supposed ‘ideals’, or certainly don’t have all of them, but have achieved excellence.

Every year we host our annual Heads Up conference of recently outstanding Heads who share Best Practice and we purposely choose schools whose demographics are challenging, because I believe if they can do it the rest of us can.

I’ve had the privilege of working and interviewing many of these outstanding Head teachers and I’d like to take a moment to look at three of these schools to illustrate my point that every school can be outstanding, regardless of their context, and pick some highlights to show what it is they did to create success (to share everything they have told me would be another book!).

Paul Robinson, Woodmansterne Primary School, Lambeth, Outstanding 2013

Paul joined the school as Deputy Head teacher in September 2009 and the school was judged as Good in June 2010. He took up substantive Head teacher in September 2010 and was judged as Outstanding in November 2013.

I first met Paul as a delegate at a Heads Up Conference, during one of the workshop sessions.
He stood out to me because of his comments about staff development. He had a clear process in place which meant he was very focused on developing staff to improve school performance.

He believed his approach was already used by most, if not all, Heads because it seemed so logical and natural to him. I knew it wasn’t widely used, not because Heads don’t believe in the value of developing staff (because they do) but because I know most schools don’t have such a thorough process as his, which was integrated with his School Improvement Plan (SIP).

He invests in the development of his whole team, but only where that development links directly to the SIP; even free training is not given if it doesn’t link to the SIP because it’s a distraction to what needs to be done to move the school forward. Paul says:

‘I spend around £2 million of my budget on staff costs every year and so I’m not going to worry about spending £60k on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) on my team to develop them, which is double last year’s CPD budget. That is only around three percent of their salary costs. If you want to get the best from your team, you need to invest in high quality, targeted and needs led professional development for the extended team – including the Premises Team!’

The school:
• Is a larger-than-average sized primary school.
• Has a higher than national average proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action.
A higher than national average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds many of whom speak English as an additional language.

Here is a taste of what Ofsted said:

- Pupils achieve exceptionally well. They make outstanding progress from low starting points to reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are significantly above average by the end of Year 6.
- Teaching is outstanding. Pupils are highly motivated in lessons because tasks and explanations are matched exceptionally well to their needs.
- Teachers are exceptionally well supported to improve their practice because leaders invest a lot of time and effort into providing bespoke training opportunities.
- The high quality of leadership from the Head teacher, his senior team and Governors has driven improvements year on year since the previous inspection so that all areas of the school’s work including teaching and achievement are now outstanding.

(Ofsted inspection report, Woodmansterne 2013)

*Tara Baig, Miles Coverdale Primary School, Shepherd’s Bush, Outstanding 2013*

Tara Baig, Head teacher of Miles Coverdale Primary School, moved her school from satisfactory to outstanding in three years. Amongst the factors that led to the school’s success was the development of the
school’s middle leaders which Tara quickly identified as a critical area to improve.

The school:
- Is an average-sized primary school.
- Has almost three times the national average proportion of pupils supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational.
- Has a much higher than national average proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium.
- Has many pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with 13 different groups represented in varying proportions.
- Has over two thirds of pupils who speak English as an additional language, much higher than the national average.

Here is a taste of what Ofsted said:
- Leaders at all levels are highly ambitious for the school and all its pupils. They work closely together to provide an educational experience that results in pupils being exceptionally well prepared for moving on to secondary school.
- High expectations and an intolerance of mediocrity drive staff to do their very best to ensure that all pupils make outstanding progress from starting points that are generally low.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 have been significantly above average for the last three years.
- Pupils’ attitudes to learning are exemplary. This is a school where everybody talks about learning.
The school has an outstanding programme for promoting pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, pupils are highly respectful towards each other and members of the wider community.

(Ofsted inspection report, Miles Coverdale, 2013)

Rebecca Harris, St George the Martyr Primary School, Camden, Outstanding November 2013

The children Rebecca and her team serve often enter below age related expectation and leave above national expectation.

Having joined the school in 2010 as Head teacher, Rebecca has created an outstanding school culture with high expectations of children.

She has reduced unnecessary disruptions and distractions so that the school can focus on its primary task of teaching.

To support this she has an effective system in place which developed the quality of teaching in her school from 88% good or better and 20% outstanding in 2010 to 100% good and 88% outstanding in 2013.

To make sure her teachers can achieve this high performance Rebecca invests in her senior leaders so they can support this exceptional level of teaching and learning.
The school:

- An inner city school in central London.
- Has almost double the national average proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium.
- Has an above national average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups with the highest proportion being of Bangladeshi heritage.
- Has an above national average of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.

Here is a taste of what Ofsted said:

- Parents, staff and pupils say unreservedly how much they enjoy the school. They feel that teaching is of a high standard, pupils are well cared for, and the school is well led and managed.
- Pupils’ achievement is outstanding. Pupils start school with low skills and experience. By the end of Year 6 attainment is above the national average.
- All pupils make at least good, or outstanding progress. This includes pupils eligible for pupil premium, with additional needs, and those of Bangladeshi heritage.
- Teachers work hard to plan and teach high quality lessons which excite, interest and enable pupils to fulfil their potential.
- The school is led exceptionally well by the Head and Deputy Head teachers.
- All leaders expect the best for every child.
- The school promotes pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development outstandingly well.

(Ofsted inspection report, St George the Martyr, 2013)
I hope these examples inspire you, I think they can also be daunting because they are quite exceptional. But I do believe if these schools can be outstanding, without having the ideal conditions of perfectly rounded children who all speak English, ideal staff and excess cash in their budget, we have to ask ourselves: why can’t all schools? I believe they can.

**GOOD IS THE ENEMY OF GREAT**

If there is one book I would make mandatory for all leaders it would be *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. It’s an incredibly easy read that analyses why some organisations become great while others stay at good. It also put research findings behind everything I already believed as a leader.

Collins argues good is the enemy of great (or outstanding if you prefer) because it allows us to stop improving, it’s good enough: ‘if it ain’t broke we don’t need to fix it’.

There is little, if any, pain or discomfort in the world of ‘good’ and humans are more likely to move away from pain than move toward pleasure. I think we’d all agree that *Requires Improvement* (RI) is a painful place to be, as is *Inadequate* and *Special Measures*, so we work hard to avoid those assessments.

Sir Michael Wilshaw was tapping into human psychology when he changed the judgement of *Satisfactory* to *Requires Improvement* because, like *Good, Satisfactory* implies it’s okay and so we perceive little pain there.
If you’re reading this book because you want to know how to create your version of outstanding then I suspect you’re a bit different to most and you probably perceive some level of pain in where your school currently is. For you perhaps Good isn’t good enough?

ACTIVITY

List some reasons your school might have for not being outstanding? Next to each point, list who you think believes these reasons.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Every school can be outstanding
- We need to be aware of and challenge the reasons why a school is not Outstanding
- As leaders we need to be aware that good is the enemy of great

BONUS MATERIAL

Outstanding Head teachers Paul, Tara and Rebecca have shared their approach with Head teachers at Heads Up conferences. Watch their presentations at www.ukheadsup.com/outstanding-heads-best-practice
Chapter 2
What is getting in the way of all schools becoming outstanding?

‘Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other.’

*Abraham Lincoln*

In this chapter:
- There's an elephant in the room
- The magic ingredient that makes a school outstanding

Through my work with school leaders and Heads all over the UK I have noticed patterns in what is holding schools back from being exceptional and I’ve made two key insights:

1. School leaders are not properly trained in how to lead adults (their staff)
2. Culture is what makes a school outstanding

Let’s look at both of these claims in turn.
WE NEED BETTER LEADERSHIP TRAINING

School leaders are not properly trained in how to lead adults

This is the elephant in the room.

Pretty much every school leader I have met has a similar background: they gained a qualification in teaching, then became a newly qualified teacher, developed their classroom practice and became a competent, experienced teacher (more often than not ‘outstanding’). They were given more responsibility and progressed through the management structure. Throughout this journey they were trained, mentored and learnt on the job. There would have been specialists, experts and role models for them to turn to, behaviour support, in-class support, educational psychologists and more. It’s fair to say that most school leaders, certainly the many I’ve met, are really good classroom practitioners, who have worked hard to hone their craft and as a result have been given greater responsibility and impact by becoming leaders.

Now let’s look at the training they received to lead adults. Usually there would be some training, be it middle leader training, the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), and some other courses to attend. A coach or mentor is often assigned and hopefully someone at the local authority is offering a helpful and supportive hand.

Over a number of years school leaders will attend more training, this is often a blend consisting of mainly
knowledge training (that is Life Without Levels, developing curriculum, SEN training etc.) and some leadership skills training. I’ve found that there doesn’t seem to be much targeted training on the leadership skills needed to guide an adult team to create an extraordinary school.

There certainly hasn’t been as much training to work with adults as there has been to work with children.

When writing this book I had some excellent feedback from a Head teacher. He reviewed a draft I’d prepared and was ‘a bit miffed’ that I was implying Heads were not well trained in leadership skills. I respect his opinion a great deal. He is an exceptional leader and I’d say he’s a natural because at a young age (in leadership terms) he has been able to create an exemplary school. But I do I disagree with him on this. I realise you may have been well taught or naturally have exceptional leadership skills, as this Head has, and if you are then that is brilliant and we can all learn a lot from you. But I’d like to explain why I have this view and the evidence it’s based on.

What makes me think Heads are not properly trained in leadership skills?

I see this in the schools I work with

When I work with leadership teams on how to create a vision, how to have a successful difficult conversation or how to properly coach someone I am constantly asked, ‘Why has no-one ever told me this before?’
They didn’t know this knowledge was out there and how useful it would be to them. They can apply it immediately to their team, which allows them to understand what is happening in their school and make improvements.

As one deputy said to me, ‘I’ve never thought about changing my leadership style with adults, and yet I do this so easily with children.’ That’s because she is so well trained and experienced in teaching and leading children.

A London Head I worked with had two feuding Deputy Heads and reached the point where she didn’t know what to do with them so she put them into an office in the hope they would fight it out and be done with it!

After working with me over the course of just two terms these deputies not only had an effective working relationship but had also forged a personal relationship so strong they would ask each other for parenting advice! The Head teacher thinks I’m a miracle worker but the fact is these deputies were willing to be mediated and coached. They were also willing to learn some skills and apply them so that they no longer needed me (or anyone) to keep their relationship working amiably.

I train Heads in leadership skills and they all recommend the training

One of the areas I’ve trained hundreds of Heads and school leaders on is how to have successful difficult conversations which, I’m sure you’ll agree, is pretty much a daily part of life as a leader.
The fact I’m sought out for this training, it’s recommended by everyone who attends and it has such an impact on achieving success with difficult conversations tells me our school leaders are not trained well-enough in this skill despite the ever growing need to tackle these troublesome conversations. One Head, who was just a few years away from retiring, said it was the best training she’d ever had and wished she’d learnt it earlier in her career. I find this disappointing because it seems we are not supporting our Heads with the skills needed for effective leadership and better schools.

When leadership is not great the whole school suffers

Conversely I have worked in schools with really fantastic teachers but with poor leadership and it is heart breaking to see the impact this can have on the team:

- Low morale
- Wasted time
- Bureaucracy over the smallest things
- Lots of unnecessary email communication
- Politics and factions within the school
- High sickness
- High staff turnover
- Late performance management

All of the above issues existed in one school I worked with. The situation was the result of poor leadership skills in the Head teacher, but I don’t blame the Head, because they had not been taught the skills.
And their Governor line managers had not managed their performance well enough to notice their limitations and make them aware of them. It’s true for all of us that we don’t know what we don’t know. You would hope leaders have self-awareness but we all have blind spots. When the inspectors called the school it was unsurprisingly judged as Requires Improvement.

Lack of leadership skills undermines the functioning of a school. And it almost doesn’t matter how good everything else is, the chances are a school will struggle under poor leadership.

THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE TO LEADERSHIP DOES NOT GROW GREAT LEADERS

In the corporate world and public sectors people move into leadership positions in often the same way, through a kind of organic process: You’re good at a job you do, enthusiastic, competent and keen to learn more so someone promotes you. You bring the same enthusiasm, competence and keenness to this job and learn the new aspects of your role and impress those around you, so much so that they promote you again. This time you have responsibility for a team and you need to lead them. The problem is you are really good at your job, but you’ve never been told how to lead a team. Your new role might go well, but it might not.

I’ve heard so many leaders from all sorts of industries say it’s not their fault their team isn’t performing and I can understand why they feel that way.
However if they had been trained in leadership skills they would know that their team’s performance was their responsibility and they’d be taking action to correct this. Because **being good at your job does not mean you will be a good leader; it requires a combination of expertise and leadership skills.**

Sir Richard Branson is a good example of this because he has gone from record shops to developing commercial flights into space with a lot in-between. Apparently, when Sir Richard told his board he wanted to run a train company they all thought he was mad and yet we know that’s exactly what he did and he didn’t stop there. I understand Sir Richard’s expertise is a customer-centric approach to business building, which combined with his skills as a leader make him successful in many diverse business contexts. I think an equivalent ‘hallmark’ of a great leader in education is an outstanding Head teacher who can move to a new school and set about making it outstanding. The new school is the new context, but the knowledge of schools (their expertise) and leadership skills are what the Head brings with them and continues to develop.

**How should we develop leaders?**

Many businesses and public sectors now have fast track leadership programmes which recruit people specifically to learn how to lead: the civil service, NHS, Unilever, BP, John Lewis, IBM, local councils and Head teacher fast track, to name a few, are all aimed at creating their future leaders quickly. They blend experience and leadership training and most importantly they know the training doesn’t end when
the scheme does. I’m not saying fast track schemes are the only way to develop leaders, but they give the important blend of experience and training and fast track schemes tend to do this better than most organically appointed leadership routes (‘You’re really good at your job, here, have a team to lead!’). They succeed because they have the extra element of training leadership skills. Of course a method where someone who is experienced, organically promoted and trained to lead would work just as well.

The ongoing development and support of leaders is just as important as the initial training. Let’s think about a high performing athlete; imagine if Andy Murray, after winning Wimbledon in 2013, had received no more support, coaching or training. It just wouldn’t happen!

Even if he kept up his physical fitness it wouldn’t be enough for him to stay at the top of his game. He needs better coaches, better techniques and better trainers to continue to compete at this level.

This is the difference between good and great: Andy Murray is a great tennis player, he didn’t stop at being good, he kept working until he was great and now he has to keep working hard to remain great and push towards greater. (And his 2014 dip in form after parting from Ivan Lendl shows how hard it is to maintain top level performance).

Andy Murray really focuses on his own continued professional development, which is a necessity in the world of sport.
And I think it’s a necessity for anyone who wants to develop their skills and expertise in their profession.

Let’s use an example closer to home, that of a good classroom teacher. They could stay at being good, which is good enough, however to become brilliant they will need some help and support, maybe training, shadowing, coaching, but certainly some guidance.

Leaders need the same ongoing development. I coach a lot of Heads and one says to me at the end of every coaching conversation, ‘If only everyday could start with a call to you, you make everything so much clearer for me’. Coaching is one form of ongoing support and leadership development.

ACTIVITY

Like Andy Murray when he’s strategising about the support he needs to win Wimbledon, what training and support would you need to develop even further professionally and lead at a level where you could create the school you’ve always wanted?

Write down what leadership books have you bought and read in the last year?
The second insight I have found is that there is a magic ingredient which makes a school exceptional. You see getting to good is essentially a checklist, it’s a hard tick list, but a tick list nonetheless of things that need to be happening regularly. But there is a bit of magic when it comes to outstanding and that magic is all about creating the right school culture. And culture is harder to create because it’s about consistent behaviour over a stretch of time.

The difference between a good and outstanding school is like the difference between a good and outstanding lesson

Think of a consistently good teacher and what a lesson looks like with them. Now think of an outstanding teacher and what a lesson looks like with them.

The good lesson has key components and follows a checklist but when we see one of those extraordinary lessons the teacher has probably ‘loosened up’ from that structure to create an inspired lesson. I often hear Heads talk about how in good lessons the teacher will be doing the majority of the work but in the best lessons it’s the children who are fully engaged.

There is a qualitative difference between a good and outstanding lesson and the same is also true at a school level.
Good schools will have good systems and processes in place which are adhered to.

Excellent schools will have these as well. However it is the culture which will be different and people will have a freedom within that structure to do things differently, take risks and excel.

Whenever I hear an outstanding Head teacher share their best practice they almost always start with their school ethos or values, essentially the culture they have created. This is the foundation for the excellence they have been able to create.

You can feel when a school is outstanding

The funny thing about a school being so brilliant is you can feel it pretty quickly. I can usually guess the Ofsted rating within a few minutes of walking in the door.

One of the best examples was a school in south London. The environment, while as good as it could have been, was anything but inviting. The reception area was tatty and tired and the school looked like it was falling apart. Yet the school felt culturally vibrant because of the staff and the wonderful way they interacted with everyone; they were like rays of sunlight. When I met the Head it turned out they were, thankfully, getting a new school building and had just been judged as Outstanding by Ofsted.
When a school gets stuck at ‘good’…

As a Head reading this we both know you have immense pressure on you and I think you will know what I’m about to say. When a school gets stuck at good it’s because of the Head. I know that will probably feel like a heavy burden but I think we both know it’s true.

One Head I met, who was just about to retire, said being a Head was much like being a football manager: if you don’t come home with that piece of silverware you’re out on your ear!

So let’s go on to look at how as a leader you can create that magic ingredient of an outstanding culture.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

• *To create the best school both school expertise and leadership skills are needed*
• *We don’t always give leaders the skills they need to create high performing teams*
• *Culture is the magic ingredient which makes a school outstanding in the fullest sense.*
Chapter 3

The three core leadership strategies for creating an outstanding school culture

‘It is only through consistency over time, through multiple generations, that you get maximum results.’

Jim Collins, Good to Great

In this chapter:
- The three core leadership strategies that create a culture of excellence
- Culture by design instead of by accident
- Being in the right place to create your outstanding culture
- You’ve already created a great culture many times
- Working with children and adults is the same, but different

When you became a Head you had a vision of a school which you wanted to create and the chances are you still have that school in your mind, but you have you created it yet? This requires three leadership strategies delivered well and consistently over a period of time.

You might find you are familiar with the ideas or that you are competent at using these leadership
strategies. As you know I believe a lot of school leaders (and leaders in other sectors) are not well trained in the leadership skills needed to create an exceptional culture. While many are aware of these key strategies, they openly admit they have not always been trained or supported sufficiently in how to use these skills effectively.

THE THREE CORE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES THAT CREATE AN OUTSTANDING CULTURE

1. **Get everyone on board**: Create a really compelling, values-based vision

2. **Ensure behaviour and performance are consistently high**: Have successful difficult conversations

3. **Create the best people**: Grow your team’s strengths so they are brilliant in their role

The first strategy is to excite and motivate the team toward a shared purpose and this is done by creating a compelling vision, not just a motto like ‘love, live, learn’ but a clear picture of success.

The second strategy is to make sure everyone is performing and behaving to expectations, which requires having those difficult conversations successfully.

Often school leaders are more willing to talk about performance than behaviour. In fact when I mention behaviour in schools, because the focus is rightly on children, I find Heads often tell me what Ofsted rating they got for behaviour.
When I say I’m talking about adult behaviour and not children it usually gets a giggle!

The third strategy is to develop your team so they can deliver their best every day and enjoy a standard of excellence. We do this by growing their skills in a meaningful way. This is about developing the areas they need to improve and their team’s strengths. Building on strengths is something that can tend to be overlooked.

GET YOUR ‘SCHOOL BUS’ RIGHT

I like to use the analogy created by Jim Collins of getting everyone on your school bus. With your vision you’re telling everyone very clearly where your school is going so they can decide whether this is the bus for them or not. After all we want people on the bus who want to be there, don’t we?

Once on the bus we need to make sure everyone performs and behaves well, this is where our skill in having successful difficult conversations comes in. We don’t want people with their bum on the bus but their head out the window!

Then finally, with everyone wanting to be on the bus, behaving in a way that makes this a great bus to be on, we want to make sure everyone is able to give their best to this journey so we can get to our destination (our vision) sooner. So now we focus on growing the skills of our team to encourage them to be fulfilled and excel at what they do. Now we’re all singing on the bus!
Implementing these three strategies means that you will be cheerfully driving your impressive school bus!

As you know a triangle is the strongest shape unless you remove any one side. In the same way if you miss any one of these core leadership strategies your culture will be pretty good but it will struggle to be truly outstanding.

**ALL SCHOOLS USE THESE STRATEGIES**

I’m sure you are using these three strategies. All schools I’ve worked with have a vision, have difficult conversations and develop their team. But what Heads tell me is:

- No-one knows our vision or what it means
- Adults are not all performing or behaving as
expected, even after a request for change

- Our staff members are being developed but they’re not all yet pushing through to the level of *Outstanding*.

At core they are trying to create an exceptional level of education for their children but not attaining it. The difference in great schools is they use these proven strategies to create a superb culture.

**CULTURE BY DESIGN INSTEAD OF ACCIDENT**

__In creating a superb school culture we are creating a culture by design.__ Culture happens as soon as you have two or more people come together. It’s the established behavioural and social norms that a group operates within. Think about your school; it has a culture and it has pockets of culture. For example you might have a year group that you think is superb because they deliver exceptional education every day, they work well as a team, they are positive and have a can-do attitude. Conversely you might have another year group that lacks energy, doesn’t want to go the extra mile and is, well, a bit of a grey cloud.

**The culture equation**

Culture is behaviour over time: behaviour repeated over time which becomes established and becomes the norm. When this just happens, because people have come together regularly, we have a culture which has formed by accident: it might be really good, really bad or anything in between. If we’re lucky we’ll have a happy accident … if we’re lucky.
However when we aim to create an outstanding culture we are creating culture by design which is achieved through those three core leadership strategies.

Creating a culture of excellence will take a few years, at least two if you go about it with determination. We are developing skills and behaviours and they take time to cultivate. While it’s not for the faint-hearted it is an exciting and rewarding journey.

There are several essential factors needed to embark on creating the very best school culture.
ARE YOU IN THE RIGHT PLACE TO CREATE YOUR OUTSTANDING CULTURE?

Ofsted category

I believe this is not a journey a school judged as Inadequate should start while they are in that category. This is because the school is seriously failing and needs to fix this as soon as possible. The leadership style is likely to be autocratic with the team being told what to do to improve. A school needs to keep its head above water before it can really begin to look at culture. Some schools judged as Requires Improvement are in a ideal position to start this journey and certainly schools who are good should if they really aspire to excellence.

Culture is a never ending cycle of improvement and so outstanding schools can also benefit from developing their culture further.

Schools rated Requires Improvement

Some schools judged as Requires Improvement can start this journey and the main difference I find in RI schools who are ready and schools who are not is the Head teacher. In schools ready to develop their culture and start creating the very best culture, before they get to good, the Head is already looking for their school to be a centre of excellence; for them good is not good enough. At the same time they know this requires the team to take the school there and they are willing to put in the additional work required while at RI status.
In a *Requires Improvement* school, which is not yet ready to start this cultural journey, the Head is usually pretty weighed down and focused on getting to *Good*, which is no bad goal. When they get there they will be in a position to think about either consolidating at *Good* or moving to *Outstanding*.

Neither is bad, but I think it’s useful to be aware of these two scenarios.

**Time and energy**

I know being a Head teacher is a demanding and frantically busy role and so if you are to aspire to creating an outstanding culture you will have to stretch yourself and devote time and energy to making it happen. We all have the same amount of hours in the day, and with those hours some Heads make their school *Outstanding* while others don’t. I don’t say this to criticise, I realise getting to *Good* is hard enough.

I say this because **I want us all to spend the one most precious resource we have, time, as wisely as possible.**

Your time must be allocated carefully in order to create the very best school you can, the one you dreamt of creating when you became a Head and one that is much, much more than Ofsted’s *Outstanding*. But I have to be honest and tell you it will take considerable time and energy.
Willingness to develop

As a Head teacher you must be willing to develop your skills. Most likely your focus will be on developing your leadership skills so that you can create the best culture by design. This will mean letting go of some old habits and ways of working and adopting new ones. The same is true for your senior leadership team, but it starts with you.

YOU’VE ALREADY CREATED A GREAT CULTURE MANY TIMES

The first great team you created was your class

The exciting news is you’ve already been a master of creating an exceptional culture. Like me you were once a teacher, responsible for around 30 children, and in that role I bet you were fantastic. I bet your children loved you, I bet they learnt a lot with you and I bet you are one of the teachers they warmly remember. You created a dazzling team with that class, a team that performed well, was flexible when things changed (and don’t they always in school!), behaved beautifully and grew as individuals as well as a cohesive group.

You excelled at classroom management, be it lining up and going into assembly (and your class was probably noticed for this), or having lively and interactive lessons which could have descended into chaos but, because of how you scaffolded activities, were actually wonderfully memorable learning experiences; the kind children are excited to talk about when they get home.
As a brilliant class teacher you wouldn’t have accepted any excuse for your class not progressing well, in fact they probably made rapid progress with you.

**Watch out for those excuses**

As a Head you will probably have heard teachers or TAs talk about why a class isn’t progressing enough and if they are saying things like ‘it’s the demographic’ I imagine you wouldn’t accept this as a valid reason. The same is true at a whole school level and you’ve got to be really aware of these excuses, in disguise as reasons, and not let them be the reason you or your team believe you can’t be Outstanding. Be alert to excuses like those covered earlier which can seduce us into believing it’s not possible to be Outstanding:

‘It’s the demographic of this school’

‘It’s the staff we have in this school, they don’t perform well enough’

‘We don’t have enough money, resources, teachers, TAs.’

I hear dedicated Heads, who I’m sure can make their school outstanding, talk about their demographic as being the reason they can’t improve. However other schools have overcome these issues and if they can do it the rest of us can too.

I believe that being a teacher really helped me achieve success in business because **there are so many skills you have as a teacher that are so important when leading adults.**
Let’s look at what you did as a class teacher that created a fantastic team of children, in fact an outstanding culture, year after year.

**You talked about your vision daily**

Even though you probably didn’t have an explicit vision for your class you would have referred to it on a regular basis in a range of ways. You might have talked about how ‘we’re a class who always tries our best’, how ‘we always set our work out neatly’; in lots of little ways you would have told your class what your picture of success was for them.

**You set out expectations of behaviour and stuck to them**

Think about September, faced with a new class, you quickly set about establishing your class rules. Chances are they were the same as elsewhere in the school, you’d think that your pupils would know them by now so you didn’t need to reinforce them; but you do. This is the first part of establishing what the behaviour of your class (your team) will be.

**You sanctioned appropriately**

Having set out your expectations, when they were not met you sanctioned appropriately. You would have focused more on behaviour than the child: ‘Jack, because you are talking during silent reading I am going to give you a first warning which I hope you can earn back’, instead of ‘Jack you are naughty boy, stop talking’.
You praised

You would have praised your children, their tables and the class for getting things right, reinforcing their good behaviour. And you would have praised more than you sanctioned. You would have looked for those children who didn’t often ‘get it right’, who were often in trouble for their behaviour and found ways to praise them, to encourage them, to give them some responsibility so they could shine and you could acknowledge them. But you also made sure you did this with the quieter ones, no child was left unnoticed for praise in your class. And you would have been specific in your praise for their work and their behaviour ‘Jack is sitting so nicely, with his arms folded and looking at the board, well done Jack’, again reinforcing and sharing your vision and expectations.

You were relentless in developing your children’s skills

These questions would have been a big focus: Were your lessons achieving the outcome? Were they developing knowledge and skills? What did you need to do to help pupils who were struggling? Developing your children would have been central to all you did.

You created useful structures to support the class

Be it silent reading every morning for 15 minutes, monitor jobs for children, reward systems or even the order the class would line up in, you created structures to help order the day and let your class know what
was coming next, as far as any class teacher can (and let’s face it, we’ve all faced the unexpected experience when our class is ready for indoor PE only to find out we can’t use the hall!). You put in place whatever you needed to help you manage your class and let them have a stimulating learning culture every day.

Each of these elements are part of the three core strategies:

| Vision                      | You talked about your vision daily |
|                            | You praised                       |
| Difficult conversations    | You set out expectations of behaviour and stuck to them |
|                            | You sanctioned appropriately      |
| Growth                     | You were relentless in developing your children’s skills |
|                            | You created useful structures to support the class |

And as a result you created a great team and culture. Your class would have taken on an identity of its own, a team spirit which grew throughout the year. Class assemblies and school competitions would have given your class a chance to shine, but smaller wins throughout every day and week will have helped as well.

Over time you saw your class grow into a unit, a team, achieving whole group success as well as individual success.
Think about a class in September and that same class in July, they’re different aren’t they? And different in a good way, more relaxed, more of a team, more capable and more fun to be with. You created that great team, that culture, as teacher so why is it harder to do with adults?

WORKING WITH CHILDREN IS THE SAME AS WORKING WITH ADULTS, BUT DIFFERENT!

There are many parallels with how we work with children that apply to adults. In fact there is almost always an equivalent scenario because they are essentially the same in principle. But working with children and working with adults is different in subtlety.

I was working with a wonderful group of Heads in the north and one Head was telling us how a teacher in her school had told off her whole class because two children had misbehaved.

Unsurprisingly some of the children were upset and their parents complained to the school.

I’m sure you will agree, as did I and the other Heads, that the teacher should have spoken to the two children and not told off the whole class. I asked the Heads if they’d ever had a staff meeting where they had raised an issue like checking emails, or being in school on time, or getting the class to assembly promptly. ‘Oh yes’ they nodded smiling.

And so I asked if when they gave that message if there were a few people in particular they knew the message was for, a few people who didn’t check their email regularly, who
were late into school or in getting their class into assembly. ‘Oh yes’ they nodded. So I asked them how is that different from telling off a whole class for two children’s behaviour?

They gasped and then laughed, a light bulb moment: they could see it clearly now, but never had before.

It’s funny but what we do so naturally and obviously with children doesn’t always easily translate across to working with adults. Creating a great adult team feels harder than working with a class of children, at least that seems to be the case in education (outside of education a lot of people seem to find it hard to create great adult teams and are scared of working with children!). I often have Heads email me to say they’d pick working with children over adults any day! From what I have observed through my work in schools I think this is the case for three reasons.

Three reasons it seems adults are harder to work with than children

Adults don’t need to be told

There seems to be an implicit belief that by time we are adults we almost don’t need to be told, that we can figure a lot of things out by ourselves. To an extent this is true but it’s not enough for us to rely on.

We don’t see our own behaviour but everyone else does and we don’t always realise the impact we have on others, positive or negative, so we can’t rely on knowing all of this ourselves; we sometimes need others to help us, to tell us.
Peer to peer relationships

Adult communication is hard because you are dealing with peers. Even in a hierarchy, these are other adults regardless of their position and so they are peers.

The very nature of being a class teacher, an adult with a class of children, means we have a position of greater knowledge, experience and authority. With adults we might be dealing with people who are older than us, who have been in their role longer, who have been in our school longer, who believe they know more than us, who we believe know more than us! And all of this can make it harder to go about creating a great team. Peer to peer relationships in a hierarchical structure just feel harder.

It was once the same when we worked with children, which I’m sure you can recall. I remember when I was training to be a teacher, my heart would race and I would think ‘How am I going to get a class of children to listen, behave and learn with me?’ It doesn’t cross my mind now because I have been trained in the skills I need and I’m experienced at using them.

We don’t have all the skills

In leadership roles, even if you have been a great class teacher there are additional skills and knowledge which make it easier to lead adults well. I’ve touched on this already but think about how well trained you have been to be a teacher and how much experience you have.
JOURNEY TO OUTSTANDING

Have you had a comparable level of training for leading adults as you have for children? Sadly the answer I’m often told by school leaders is ‘no’.

ACTIVITY

Thinking about your school bus write down:
Who really gets your vision? Who doesn’t? Who performs to the level you want them to? Who doesn’t?
Whose skills are constantly developing and improving? Whose are not? You might like to think of a group like your leadership team or teachers.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Culture is a crucial foundation for creating an outstanding school
- Creating a high performing culture requires three leadership strategies:
  1. Vision: Tell people where you want to go
  2. Ensure behaviour and performance are consistently high: Have successful difficult conversations
  3. Create the best people: Grow your team’s strengths so they are brilliant in their role
- Culture takes years to develop
- The core skills are the same when working with children and adults. Remember: You’ve already created a great team as a class teacher.
- Working with adults can feel harder for three reasons:
  1. We can often think adults don’t need to be told
  2. We don’t have the same authority we have in class, in fact we have much harder peer to peer relationships in a hierarchical structure
  3. We don’t have all the skills we need to create our great adult team
Chapter 4

It’s all down to leadership

‘Leaders aren’t born, they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work. And that’s the price we’ll have to pay to achieve our goal, or any goal.’

Vince Lombardi

In this chapter:
• It’s all down to leadership
• Great leaders have the best teams
• Becoming a greater leader

As Head teacher you are the leader of your school and the leader of the next generation; you know too well that your school’s success ultimately rests on your shoulders. So before we get onto how you can start creating a vibrant culture by creating your vision, having more successful difficult conversations and developing your team (the ‘exciting part’) it’s important to touch on a few points about leadership because leadership is what makes all of this work.

Leadership creates culture by design; a lack of leadership allows a culture to form by accident.
ACTIVITY

Work out approximately how many children will pass through your school while you are leader. In about 30 years they will be running the country.

LEADERSHIP IS THE SHEPHERD OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

Leadership enables all of this; by mastering the three leadership strategies you can create a high performance culture, your dream school. Your job is to lead your team to success, to shepherd them and show them the way.

GREAT LEADERS CREATE GREAT CULTURES

The behaviour of individuals, consistently repeated over time, creates a culture. Great leaders know this and keep using the three key strategies to create the right culture for their school. The classroom, again, provides a fantastic example of this at work, so let’s look specifically at classroom behaviour, which is the class-based counterpart to the strategy of having successful difficult conversations.

When a teacher creates a good classroom environment they will foster co-operative class behaviour and systems of reward and sanction to ensure these remain in place.

Some teachers will tirelessly reinforce the behaviour they expect until it becomes normal and as a result they will create a good classroom culture with clear
expectations of pupil behaviour that allows them to get on with the job of teaching and learning.

Other teachers will be more inconsistent, sometimes reinforcing the behaviour they expect, sometimes using sanctions and sometimes not. There will be a culture in this classroom but not the best culture possible because of this inconsistency of the leader (in this case the teacher) in enforcing what is and isn’t okay. They will continue to have behaviour issues that will distract from the job of teaching and learning.

**It is the consistent implementation of the strategy that makes it work.**

**GREAT LEADERS CREATE THE BEST TEAMS**

**Leadership teams**

Any leader who complains that their leadership team is not good enough sadly only has themselves to blame (unless they have just taken on the role). Great leaders take responsibility and so if your leadership team isn’t performing well enough then you have to fix it, the reason this is often hard is because we don’t train Heads on how to do this.

When I worked in retail I asked a senior leader who the best shop floor manager was in their branch. They answered quickly, enthusiastically telling me about why a certain manager was so good. I then asked what this shop floor manager’s section managers were like, how good were they? Apparently they were terrible! So how could the shop floor manager be so good if their team wasn’t?
It turns out the shop floor manager was doing all the things their section managers should have been doing which made him look wonderfully busy and motivated, which he was, but on all the wrong things.

**ACTIVITY**

*I want you to daydream for a little while about what your leadership team would look like if they were performing at the level you wanted them to?*

- What would meetings look like?
- How would it feel to be part of this team?
- What would you say about the team?
- What would team members be doing?
- How would the rest of your school feel about your team?

*After your day dream jot down some notes, or draw a picture if you prefer, to capture what you saw.*

**Great leaders grow their leader’s skills**

Leadership is a skill, in fact it’s a set of skills, and great leaders cultivate leadership skills in their leaders. They develop management knowledge and skills, like budgeting and strategic planning, but also core leadership skills that centre around leading and managing people such as having difficult conversations well and growing their best. **If you’re going to create your amazing school your leadership team needs to help you most.**

Heads often ask me to teach their leadership teams how to have successful difficult conversations for two reasons. Firstly they know this is a skill and skills
need practice so the sooner their senior leaders learn the skill the sooner they can start practising and become good at it. A lot of Heads tell me they were never trained in having difficult conversations, and those who have learnt the skill have often done so because they needed to have a lot of difficult conversations (usually because their school was judged RI or worse). They learnt the hard way through trial and error. The second reason for training their leaders is so issues can be dealt with closer to where they arise and not passed up to the Head to sort out. This is a more effective way of dealing with issues and frees up some of your time.

**Great leaders make themselves redundant**

A great leadership team should be able to run the show without you because great leaders make the need for their input redundant. If this feels a bit scary, don’t worry, that’s natural, but please understand that not many people are able to lead at a level which makes their input redundant. This level of leadership is highly valuable and therefore unlikely to lead to real redundancy, but more likely to bigger and greater roles.

To do this great leaders give more and more management and, where possible, leadership responsibility to the team so they can run the school without you; essentially everyone becomes a leader. This includes decision making responsibility so that you are not needed for every decision and, ideally, for a decreasing number of decisions. It not only means the school runs smoothly without you being there but it also prepares those leaders for future leader-
ship roles all within the safe environment of your stewardship. Maybe you had a Head whom did that for you when you were developing as a leader?

THE LIFE CYCLE OF LEADERSHIP

Having an understanding of the leadership life-cycle, and the trap within it, is useful to leaders as it helps them understand where they have been, where they are now and where they want to go to next. It looks like this:

Figure 3: The leadership life cycle
Some people will go all the way through the life cycle, some will stop at certain stages and some will get stuck and want to know how to move to the next stage. Whilst I have indicated how long is spent in each stage these are not absolute, they are general patterns I’ve noticed and the time in each stage will vary from person to person.

**Stage 1: New leader – your first 3 – 5 years**

Here you are learning the role. You learn the functional management aspects of the role, such as the performance management cycle, child protection, Governors meetings etc. You also learn leadership concepts (like why a vision is important) and you start developing your leadership skills. There are lots of learning mistakes made.

Examples:
- A new Head into role
- A Head in RI.

**Stage 2: Maturing leadership - 3 – 10 years**

Now you are learning to be a leader. You understand your role and are competent in many, if not all, the functional aspects. Now you learn and hone your leadership skills, such as inspiring a team and leading them to greater success.

Examples:
- An experienced Head
- An *RI* or Good Head moving to Outstanding.
Stage 3: Leader of leaders - 10+ years

Now you lead other leaders, in fact you are a leader’s leader: a role model and inspiration to leaders. You are competent in management however you spend your time leading, not on management tasks. Other staff members carry out most, if not all, management activities. You know how to create a team that achieves excellence in all they do. You are now ready to use your skills more widely, such as supporting or leading other schools.

Examples:
• A respected leader who others look to.
• An Outstanding Head teacher.

Working through the life cycle

The speed you progress through the lifecycle varies from person to person. Someone on the Head teacher Fast-track Scheme might get to Stage 2 more quickly because of the training they’ve had, as might someone who doesn’t take a career break to start a family, as might someone who is naturally a leader.

I once coached a deputy head who was clearly a natural leader, without being a Head she was already demonstrating the characteristics of a mature leader and could easily have gone on to be a leader of leaders. I still watch her career unfold with great interest.

But please don’t think speed is the be all and end all. Quality of leadership is far more important and I refer to speed simply because people will progress through
these stages at different paces. Whilst people progress at different speeds I have found that there tends to be a point where a leader can get stuck.

**Getting stuck at Stage 2**

Most Heads will progress to Stage 2 between three to ten years into their career. At this stage they know how to do the job well but are not yet the great leaders they could be because they haven’t developed their leadership skills fully. And this is where a leader can get stuck. This is because in Stage 2 you can be a competent Head and as we know good is the enemy of great.

You could say competency is good’s ally because at Stage 2 you are competent in your role, which means you are in your comfort zone and good at what you do.

Moving to Stage 3 means you will have to move out of your comfort zone and the motivator to do this is usually one of ‘towards pleasure’, which as I have already discussed is generally not as motivating as moving away from pain. In the process of moving out of your comfort zone you create pain because stretching comfort zones is usually a bit, well, uncomfortable. Moving to different schools, taking on challenges like amalgamating schools and having a new school built will all develop a leader, and these challenges may or may not develop the leadership skills they need to take their leadership to that of Stage 3, an extraordinary Head who is regarded as a leader of leaders.
I hope you can see how Stage 2 is place where a leader can remain. It’s not a bad place for a leader to stay but it doesn’t lead to great. It’s like the student whom is happy achieving a grade C, but for their own reasons does not strive to achieve an A.

My question to you is: What grade from A* to C do you want for your school?

The dual role of Heads as managers and leaders

In the life cycle of leadership you will see there is a transition from being a manager to being a leader. Neither is better than the other. Both are needed to lead well: if a leader isn’t able to make sure their school is being well managed it doesn’t matter how capable they are at leading because their school operation won’t function well.

In some organisations this isn’t as huge a challenge as it is in schools because there are teams who take care of the operation, freeing up the leader to focus on leadership.

You and I know that in schools, particularly primary schools, managing and leading falls mainly to the Head and senior leadership team and so you need to be able to manage through others so you can become a ‘leader of leaders’.

Figure 4 illustrates how the amount of managing and leading changes over the course of the leadership life cycle.
Figure 4: Illustration of the amount of management and leadership required at different stages of the leadership life cycle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: New leader – your first 3 – 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 2: Maturing leadership - 3 – 10 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 3: Leader of leaders - 10+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The rest of this book is dedicated to helping you develop your skills in the three core leadership strategies. You might have some already or you might want to improve on others. Wherever you are I believe, and hope, you will benefit from reading on.

These are skills though and skills require practice in the same way as if you were learning to play the guitar: I could show you how to play a C chord, I could ask you to have a go at playing a C chord and after a perhaps a few goes you could do this well, but if you don’t pick up that guitar for a week the chances are you won’t be able to play a C chord. Skills require practice and you are probably aware of various models of learning, including the learning hierarchy:

![Learning Hierarchy Diagram]

**Figure 5: Learning Hierarchy**
Haring, Lovitt, Eaton, & Hansen, 1978
Learning or developing skills often takes us out of our comfort zone. If we want something enough then we are usually willing to stretch, so the question is: **Are you willing to stretch yourself in order to create the best education you can for your school children?**

If your answer is a yes then your comfort zone is ready to be stretched and the good news is once you’ve expanded your comfort zone it doesn’t shrink back, you automatically have a larger comfort zone for keeps!

I wouldn’t be surprised if you feel like it’s a lot to do; it is, but I hope what I will make it easier. Over the rest of this book I’d like to share with you the work I do with schools to help them make a culture of excellence through these three strategies.

I’ve shared this information with hundreds of school leaders up and down the UK and I’m proud to say they have loved and learnt from it. Most importantly I hope you enjoy it and find it useful.

### CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Leaders create culture through their teams
- Know where you are on the leadership life cycle
- Be aware of getting stuck in Stage 2, unless it is a conscious choice
Discovery session registration

At Heads Up, we show you how to create an outstanding culture by giving you the knowledge and training in the three core leadership skills you need. We know your school is unique and so, whilst we know our programmes work well, we always take time to understand your school’s particular circumstances so we can shape the course to suit you.

If you think you’re the kind of Head we work with, and you like the sound of working with us, you can book a discovery session.

At the discovery session, we will meet you for an hour, and from this you will have:
1. Clarity about what leadership skills, if any, need developing
2. Where you are on your journey to outstanding
3. A plan, tailored to your school, to create a higher performing team

To book a discovery session please visit: http://www.ukheadsup.com/discoverysession/