



## Learning from the heart this summer

Even though I no longer follow an academic schedule, my years working in schools, along with Learning Forward's connection to practitioners, keep me aware of when the summer months start and end. So, staying in the rhythm of that schedule and echoing our intentions with this issue of *JSD*, I find myself planning my summer learning.

This year, I'm going to turn back to a favorite author, introduced to our staff years ago by former Executive Director Dennis Sparks. John Kotter of Harvard University writes about leadership and change. I intend to explore his ideas more deeply in the coming months. I encourage you to take a look at his writing if some of your work requires you to help others deal with transformation.

In two of his books, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (2002) and *Leading Change* (2012), Kotter explores an eight-step process to achieving transformation. The eight steps will resonate with anyone who has read much of what we write about at Learning Forward.

Kotter's eight steps cover establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating a vision,

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empowering employees, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring the changes within the culture.

While these are all valuable steps to explore more deeply, what fascinates me is the role of the heart in change efforts. As Kotter (and others) write, it isn't just the head that we need to reach in our efforts to achieve and sustain transformation. The heart is just as important. This means we need to think about the emotions at work in our schools and organizations when we ask those we work with to completely upend how they go about their day-to-day work.

For example, if we set out to create a sense of urgency to impel our change efforts, what emotions will play a part in how our colleagues respond? Not only might they experience fear, but we'll also be pushing against a sense of complacency. We also know that their deep passion for the work we do in schools will be a force. How can we tap into that passion?

Another key step in the change process is how we as leaders communicate what's happening in our systems and organizations. As Kotter writes, it is important to send simple and heartfelt messages that clarify the direction we're headed and help to



establish open lines of communication and trust.

As I work to deepen my leadership skills, I'll be examining how I talk about specific elements of change within and beyond Learning Forward. How can I make my messages more straightforward and keep them honest, straight from my heart to those with whom I am eager to connect?

These are just some of the questions I'll ponder as I embark on my summer learning journey in leadership. How might they apply in your situation? What else do you need to learn about leadership? I'll be eager to hear how it goes and happy to share what I find.

### REFERENCES

**Kotter, J.P. (2012).** *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

**Kotter, J.P. (2002).** *The heart of change: Real-life stories of how people change their organizations*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press. ■