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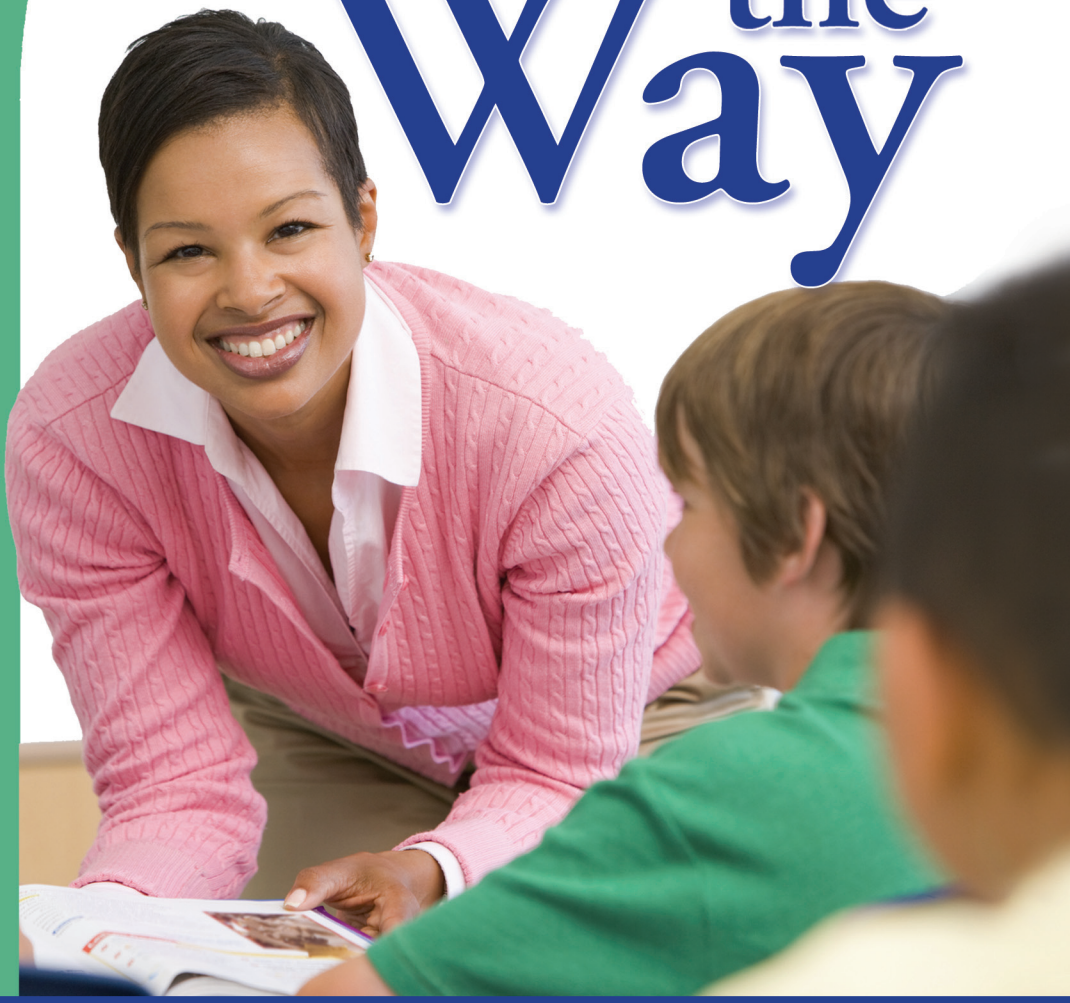
Lead the Way

24 Lessons in Leadership for After School Program Directors



Paul G. Young, PhD

Lead the Way!

24 Lessons in Leadership for After School Program Directors

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Dedication

To all of the leaders who have committed themselves to establishing quality programs and caring for children and youth during out-of-school time.

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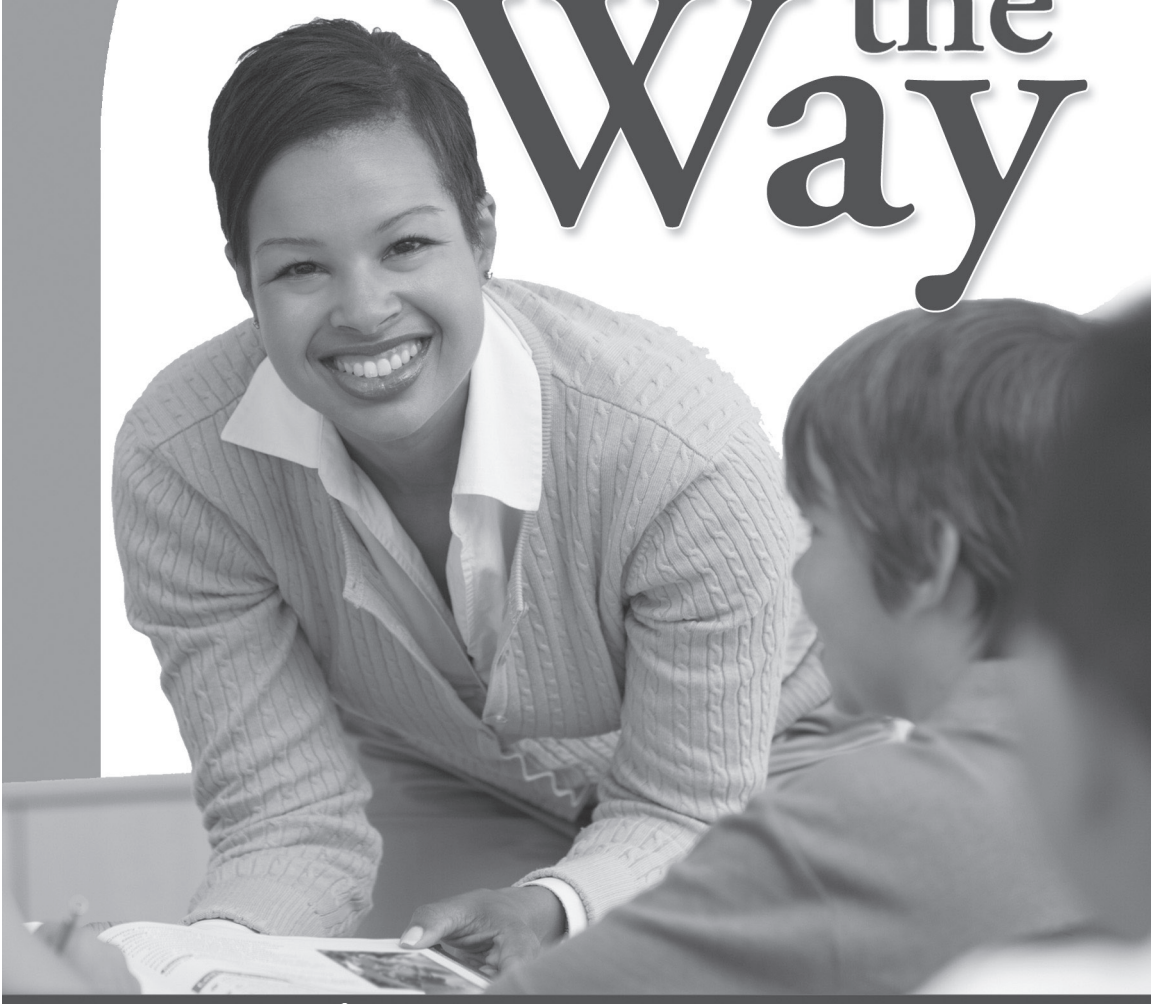

Paul G. Young, PhD

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About the Author

Dr. Paul G. Young served in public schools and nonprofit organizations for more than 40 years. He served as the president of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) in 2002–2003 and played a lead role in collaborations between the NAESP and the National AfterSchool Association (NAA) in the development of a training workshop entitled "Aligning the Learning Day."

As a principal, Young played a key leadership role with community activists in the development of the West After School Center, Inc. (WASC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide after school, summer enrichment, and food programs for students and families in Lancaster, Ohio.

After retiring the principalship in 2004, he became the WASC's executive director and worked to expand the concept of community-wide after school programming. He joined the board of directors of NAA in 2008, became president and CEO in 2010, and retired in 2012. Young is the author of *Principal Matters: 101 Tips for Creating Collaborative Relationships between Afterschool Programs and School Leaders.* He has a strong passion for recruiting, developing, and mentoring a new generation of principals and after school program leaders

and connecting them with state and national professional associations.

Young holds a bachelor of fine arts degree in music education, a master's degree in music, and a doctorate in educational administration from Ohio University, Athens.

Acknowledgments

During my career leading both elementary schools and after school programs, I have observed and learned from men and women across the nation who effectively led the way in their unique settings. Each possessed high levels of competence, successfully built relationships, and focused on getting results by skillfully developing his or her staff. I acknowledge that much of the advice embedded in the lessons in this book is a tribute to them. Whenever possible, I listened to presentations of their best practices or observed their leadership in action. The lessons shared in this book have been affirmed by years of practice and observation of what others have or have not done to achieve success.

I especially acknowledge some special, critical friends who have modeled lessons and provided support related to the development of this book. Members of the board of directors of the National AfterSchool Association and leaders from state affiliate organizations provided me numerous opportunities to test ideas and model leadership strategies. My colleagues at the West After School Center in Lancaster, Ohio, provided a learning laboratory that

helped me discern what works and what does not in leading after school programs. My friend Judy Nee, who served before me as NAA's president and CEO, continues to be a visionary leader in the field. Her professional example, insights, and encouragement of my writing endeavors are greatly appreciated.

I especially thank the editors at Gryphon House, Stephanie Roselli and Laura Laxton, for their patience, encouragement, guidance, and support. Their perceptiveness and thoughtful comments were vital as this book progressed through various stages of development.

Special thanks to my wife, Gertrude; my daughters and sons-in-law, Katie and Jonathon Steele and Mary Ellen and Eric Rahn; and my extended family members, without whose support any ventures such as this would be impossible.

Introduction

After school program leadership matters. In an area of the educational continuum where research, professional work, and opportunities are expanding by leaps and bounds, it is increasingly important to recruit, grow, and retain effective leaders. The need for effective after school program leaders has never been higher, and because of that, an understanding of leadership theory, philosophy, and practice is needed. Program directors must understand and be able to demonstrate the essential standards of leadership from the start. This book provides aspiring and practicing after school professionals with many of those essential, realistic, on-the-job lessons that will help them thrive as they lead.

What Does It Take to Be a Leader?

According to leadership expert John Maxwell, it is influence—something he says everyone has. Because of your position as an after school program leader, you wield a tremendous amount of influence over children, adults, and members of your community. But, do you know how to use your influence? Discovering the key aspects and components of what matters most when leading an after school program is critically important to the preparation

of new leaders, their job satisfaction, and their ability to thrive and survive and to advance extended learning opportunities for children everywhere.

This book contains 24 leadership lessons designed as short, self-help, introductory overviews of complex issues. Perfecting leadership skills requires months of study and practice. Adults are autonomous and self-directed learners. They learn best when what they study relates and applies to their work; adult learners appreciate practical, hands-on learning experiences.

In addition to studying after school leadership lessons, I encourage readers to reach out and connect with others in the field by developing multiple professional relationships and networks. Join and become active in state and national professional associations such as the National AfterSchool Association and its state affiliates, the Afterschool Alliance, and Statewide Afterschool Networks. The support these organizations provide is essential to the health and well-being of leaders. Because people hold their leaders to high standards and because fulfilling expectations is hard work, we need each other. Group learning supports educators as we strive to meet expectations. Reading this book and discussing your insights from the leadership lessons with a peer group will enhance your knowledge and experience, help you implement leadership skills and strategies, support your achievements and professional recognition, and help secure your advancement in the field.

After School Leadership 101

LESSON 1

All after school program directors can learn to lead successfully. Remember that leadership skills are developed daily, not in a day. Just like any other skill, leadership is attained through continuous learning, building relationships, looking forward, stepping up to challenges, give and take, trial and error, and wielding influence. In his book *Leadership 101: What Every Leader Needs to Know,* John Maxwell explains that leadership can be broken down into five levels, each one correlating to a level of influence, the quality of skills, the relationships, and the results:

- Position
- Permission
- Production
- People Development
- Personhood

The Position Level

At this initial leadership level, your influence comes from a title and a successful display of basic skills as detailed in a job description. People will follow you—at least initially—because they have to, making it essential that you maintain exemplary personal and professional work habits. Followers immediately will size you up and, if they discover any weaknesses, will tolerate them only until your influence wanes. The longer you stay at this level, the higher your staff turnover and lower the staff morale is likely to be.

The Permission Level

People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. You need people to work for you and need to gain their permission to lead them. At this level, you must inspire enthusiasm, show empathy and goodwill, and gain admiration. You will achieve success by establishing relationships, not regulations. When people follow you because they want to, your shared work becomes fun. But the longer you stay at this level, the more likely it is that your highly motivated, goal-oriented staff members will become restless. They will respond to a positive culture, but they want to see results from their efforts at work.

The Production Level

As a result of your exemplary personal and professional characteristics and strong relationships, good things happen at the production level. Your staff members clearly understand your purpose, and they are responsible and accountable for results. The program mission is clear, and the vision of what needs to be accomplished is shared and communicated by all. People like you because of how you listen, provide directions, and give

feedback. Problems get fixed without much risk to others. People follow you because of who you are, what you stand for, and what you do for the organization.

The People-Development Level

At the permission level, followers learn to love you as their leader. At the production level, they admire you for your influence and the results that are mutually attained. At the people-development level, they become your loyal supporters because of your interest in their well-being and career development. Long-range growth occurs. At this level, you become a mentor and focus on growing new leaders. You need to do what it takes to get to and stay at this level.

But when you do, a good problem often develops. Other organizational leaders will recognize your success, seek you out, and offer to hire you—and then you will begin the leadership path again at the first level!

The Personhood Level

Maxwell describes *personhood* as the pinnacle of a career. It takes years of growing people and organizations. Often, those who accomplish great things at lower levels move to more challenging positions where they must begin the process anew. If you do reach the pinnacle and manage to stay in one place, people might think you are bigger than life—and name the after school program after you.

Putting It Together

The more you grow and move along the continuum, the longer it will take to step up to a higher level. Each new level requires more commitment. But, the higher you go, the easier—and more fun—the work becomes.

Advocating for After School

LESSON 2

Policy and community leaders need to hear from you. You are the expert. They need to hear from those in the trenches who lead after school programs. Elected officials, school and community leaders, and other stakeholders will learn about the real issues, needs, and opportunities that exist in after school from you. The following tips will help you succeed.

Prepare by Doing Your Homework

First, study the issues you face and how they impact your program. Prepare your message, making sure it is specific and succinct. Create a list of talking points, and practice presenting your message to friends who will give you honest feedback. You can establish yourself as a reliable, expert spokesperson on after school issues by speaking with conviction and telling your story effectively.

Before making contact with your national, state, and local representatives, study their backgrounds. Find out what political parties they belong to, their committee assignments (if applicable), and what specific issues interest them. Visit their websites, read their biographies, and look for connections to your issues and needs.

Schedule Visits to Legislators

Most often, the legislator's assistants arrange visits. If you call or send an email to schedule a visit, make sure to state that the elected official represents you. If you have a personal acquaintance or shared history with the official, mention this information. Do not be discouraged if your elected representative has a last-minute cancellation or if you are only able to speak with an aide. A legislator's aides are quite knowledgeable and skilled about synthesizing information to share with their boss after your scheduled visit.

Stay on Topic

Because elected officials and their aides have limited time, be specific and state your issues and what you want. If the representative sits on a committee that covers after school as part of its work, he might be familiar with the facts. However, many officials rely on their aides to brief them on what they

need to know about an issue. Use your prepared talking points, and provide the elected official or aide with printed copies of your issues and positions.

Invite Legislators to Visit Your Program Site

Site visits can be a very effective form of advocacy. By providing opportunities for legislators to observe children learning in a safe and nurturing environment, you can fill their information gaps and establish your program as a best practice. Legislators appreciate photo opportunities and speaking with their constituents. Encourage the legislator to speak with students, staff, parents, and other key supporters of your program. You also can prearrange some meetings for her, if there will be enough time during her visit.

Establish Common Ground

Avoid getting emotional about issues. Work to establish common ground, and always leave visits with elected officials on a positive note. If you find that you disagree about a topic, do not burn your bridges. Even though elected officials work for you, you do not want to leave your elected representative with a bad impression. Be courteous, but remember that *courteous* does not equal *intimidated*.

Advocate with Local Officials and Community Groups

Advocacy with your local officials matters just as much as it does with state and national representatives. Do not overlook the influence of your mayor, who may support grant writing, connect you with funding sources, and support partnerships.

Never underestimate the importance of familiar, positive relationships with the chief of police, school-board members, superintendents, city and county government officials, and the business community. Advocate for after school by speaking at gatherings of local service clubs, senior citizens, and faith-based groups.

Advocate with School Personnel

Jamie Vollmer, author of *Schools Cannot Do It Alone: Building Public Support for America's Public Schools,* says that schools have a "system problem" instead of a "people problem." To change the system, however, requires the support of the entire community, as well as time and a stellar record of progress.

A key part of your local advocacy effort is dispelling the common myths about after school programs sometimes found among teachers and principals, myths such as a lack of standards, competencies, accountability, or expectations. School personnel need information and assurance that after school programming can and will partner with them to support student and family needs. Advocacy is much more effective when all educators present a united front.

Creating Vision and Mission Statements

LESSON 3

The terms *vision statement* and *mission statement* are often vague, confusing, and used interchangeably. But they do differ. Vision statements describe the "what" about your after school program, and mission statements the "how" and "why." One cannot replace the other. Vision statements describe what your program will look like in the future. Mission statements describe the purpose of your program. Both are important and necessary for success. Once you decide and know what you want in the future, then think about the actions that should get you there.

A vision statement answers the question, "Where do we want to go?" A mission statement answers the question, "Why do we exist?"

Clarify Your Vision Statement

Which statement comes first—the vision or the mission? That depends. If you open a new program, the vision statement will guide the mission statement and the rest of the strategic plan. If you have an established program with an existing mission statement, then the mission statement will guide the vision statement and the rest of the strategic plan. Either way, you need to know your fundamental purpose. The mission statement guides organizational actions toward

visionary goals for the future. Keep the end in sight from the start. Effective vision statements inspire, energize, and help others develop a mental picture of the program's outcomes.

Writing Your Mission Statement

Effective after school program mission statements clearly and precisely describe activities and guide decision-making processes. They are often a simple, one-sentence description of why an after school program exists. Mission statements describe the following:

- what you do,
- your target audience,
- the scope and value of your services, and
- the effect your services are designed to have.

As your program changes, so should your mission statement. Your stakeholders should be able to easily recite your mission statement, which should give direction to your program employees.

Writing Your Vision Statement

Your vision statement can be longer than your mission statement, because it must describe in detail the best possible future outcomes of your program. Effective vision statements have at least three key components:

1. A significant purpose and reason for existence
2. A picture of the future
3. Values that help guide behavior

Make it emotional, and write it so that others will be able to see, hear, think, and feel the program's ideal outcomes. An emotional vision statement infuses passion and will

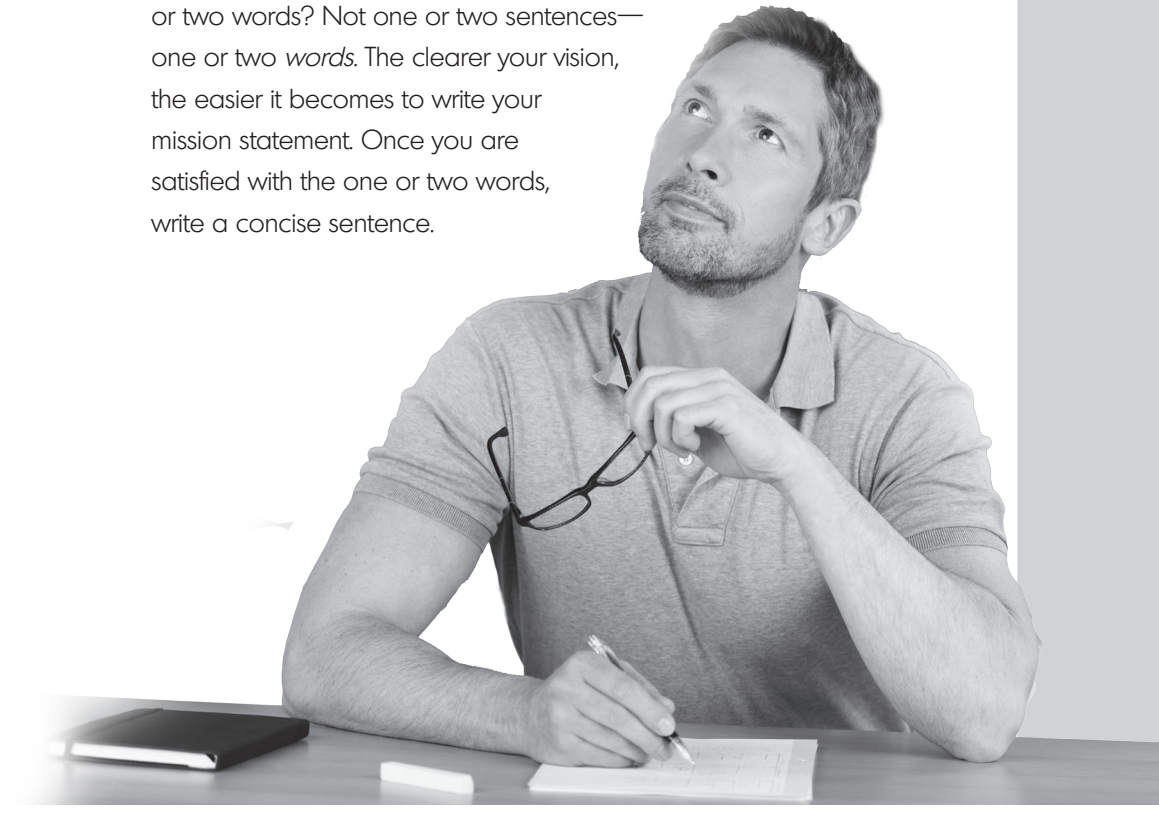
make achieving goals even more compelling, inspiring, and energizing.

Connecting the Statements

Once there is a clear vision of goals and outcomes, convene a team and write down these four questions about your organization's mission:

1. What do we do?
2. Who is our targeted audience?
3. What are our guiding values?
4. What are our success measures?

Can you answer those four questions in one or two words? Not one or two sentences—one or two *words*. The clearer your vision, the easier it becomes to write your mission statement. Once you are satisfied with the one or two words, write a concise sentence.



Edit it, and then put your finished mission statement to two tests:

1. If a stranger asks you about your program mission, would she nod and clearly understand your answer?
2. Ask your team, "Would other after school programs have this statement? Does our mission statement describe what makes *us* different?"

The best mission statements pass both tests. The writing process can take days, weeks, or even months, but do not try to rush the process. If you do, the result will be a mediocre mission statement that inspires no one.

LESSON 4

Defining the Standards of Leadership

After school program leaders cannot be isolated, independent administrators; they must be astute community leaders and partners with all educators. By actively pursuing knowledge about diverse aspects of student learning and development, they know how to structure their programs to complement the school's educational goals. Collaboration with school officials furthers the availability of high-quality extended-learning opportunities for all children. But even more, after school leaders must establish the following standards of program leadership.

Share a Vision, Mission, and Values

After school leaders must demonstrate that the vision, mission, and values of their programs align with and support students' learning experiences from the traditional school day. The vision also must reflect the importance of out-of-school extended-learning opportunities. Both school and after school leaders must understand the value of seamless learning experiences and must work to create supportive, cooperative, and inclusive learning environments where resources are shared and respect is shown for all learners.

Lead a Learning Community

Leaders are focused on people; managers, on systems and structures. Yet, the reality is that after school leaders must do both, especially assuring that programs are well-managed and use sound fiscal practices. There must be a balance between routine management and leadership activities. Ingenious ideas and ambitious plans require a strong leader capable of connecting diverse groups and persuading them to adopt goals that lead to success.

Define High-Quality Program Standards

The National AfterSchool Association (NAA) has published *The NAA Standards for Quality School-Age Care,* and many states have specific regulatory quality standards for after school programs. Leaders must know those standards, teach them to

all stakeholders, and ensure that an infrastructure exists that supports quality.

Use Data in Decision Making

Collect both quantitative and qualitative data, such as student-parent surveys, student progress reports, attendance, test results, homework completion rate, and so forth, so that you can use it to guide decision making about program improvement. Programs that work closely with schools should have access to student data (with parental consent, of course), or programs can collect their own information. Look deep into the data. Despite an era of high accountability that is focused on student test scores, use multiple sources of data and best practices to drive continuous improvement in after school programming.

Embrace Technology

Learn about and acquire appropriate technology, and implement its use in after school programs. Leaders must use their ingenuity to develop needed resources or to arrange alternative access to computers, tablets, cameras, SMART Boards, and other technological aids. Establish a vision, promote practices and utilization, innovate, and create a culture that values both learning about technology and using it to enhance learning.

Develop Human Resources

Effective leaders surround themselves with committed, caring, and well-prepared people. Research and use best practices to recruit, hire, and inspire your team. Provide incentives, such as paid time off, and resources for continuous staff development, such as conference registration. Empower your team to share the responsibilities and success of your program.

Lead in an Ethical Manner

Set the tone. Be courageous and courteous. Lead and treat people fairly and justly. Create a sense of structure and order. Ensure that programming has choice, flexibility, diversity, and appropriateness for all children. Encourage and build strong family connections.

Ultimately, the leader's work is to create opportunities and to develop responsibility in others so that attaining program standards becomes a team effort. A leader working alone cannot create a quality program. The best reflection of successful after school leadership is when others assess the work of your entire staff to be of high quality and in a sustainable program.

Lead the Way

Learn fundamental insights and strategies essential to leading a successful after school program! **Lead the Way!** 24 Lessons in Leadership for After School Program Directors provides powerful lessons to help both aspiring and practicing after school professionals thrive in their roles. The short, self-guided overviews tackle some of the most challenging topics community program leaders and after school professionals face:

- How to Advocate for After School
- How to Avoid Common Pitfalls
- How to Handle Encounters with Difficult Family Members
- How to Conduct Effective Meetings
- How to Motivate Program Members
- How to Lead Ethically
- How to Create Vision and Mission Statements
- And much more!

Use these lessons as professional development topics with your after school program staff, and watch your program recruit, retain, and grow effective leaders!

Paul G. Young, PhD, worked as a teacher and administrator in Ohio for more than 35 years. He taught 4th and 5th grades and served as an elementary school principal for nearly 20 years before retiring from work in the public schools. As a principal, Young played a key leadership role in the development of the West After School Center, Inc. He also served on the board of directors and as president and CEO of the National AfterSchool Association. Young is the author of *Principal Matters: 101 Tips for Creating Collaborative Relationships Between After-School Programs and School Leaders* and is a columnist for *EducationWorld.com.*

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