

MARCH 2020: SCHOOL COUNSELOR LEADERSHIP

Sharpen Your Influence

By Rebecca Pianta and Caroline Lopez-Perry, Ph.D.



When you think of a true leader, who pops into mind? Do you think of CEOs, elected officials and other people in power?

Or do you think of the middle school student who fought against unfair education practices and rallied the entire student body behind her?

Or the single mother working multiple jobs to support her family and teaching her children to believe they're capable of attaining their dreams?

Or the elementary school student who stands up to the class bully and shows other students being a bystander isn't acceptable?

Leadership has little to do with titles or positions and everything to do with your ability to influence. Without it, your ability to make what you envision a reality will remain elusive.

Leaders can envision a desirable future, articulate how it can be reached, set an example and show determination and confidence. They can bring about systemic change and significant shifts in their stakeholders' thinking. These individuals inspire others by being a visionary, trusting others, stimulating people intellectually and possessing high emotional intelligence.

Step one in building your leadership ability is cultivating your emotional intelligence skills. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others and use this to manage your behavior and relationships.

- **Self-awareness** skills are the ability to accurately perceive your emotions and stay aware of them as they happen.

- **Self-management** skills are the ability to use awareness of your emotions to stay flexible and positively direct your behavior. Leaders skilled at emotional management are more likely to put others' needs first.
- **Social awareness** is the ability to accurately pick up on others' emotions and understand what is going on.
- **Relationship management** skills are the ability to use awareness of your own emotions and the emotions of others to manage interactions successfully.

Develop Organizational Awareness

Leaders with organizational awareness develop working relationships with key stakeholders who can advance their cause. When school counselors and district directors have organizational awareness, they use their understanding of relationships, hierarchies and decision-making processes to communicate more effectively.

- **Understand the structural framework:** To change the system, you need to understand it. Knowing your school's or district's organizational hierarchy is vital. For example, does your district have assistant or associate superintendents or directors? What are their positions and roles within the organizational hierarchy?
- **Understand interpersonal dynamics:** At what level in your school or district are decisions are being made and through which decision-making process? Are they centralized at the district level, or do sites have local control?
- **Identify key decision makers and influencers:** These individuals will play a decisive role in your cause and bring about change. Who are the key decision-makers that define the policy and practice changes you need? Who are the influencers consulted in the process? Who has formal and informal power within the process?

Navigate Different Political Styles

Politics are inevitable in any school or district, and school counselors and district directors must know how to navigate through politics to advance their initiatives. You may be hesitant to dip your toes into political waters. However, the policies and practices affecting our daily work and our students' lives are political in nature. School counselors can't afford to be passive recipients of policy with increasing demands and limited resources.

Being influential is complex and requires insight, analysis and careful handling. According to "The Politically Intelligent Leader: Dealing with the Dilemmas of a High-Stakes Educational Environment," a politically intelligent leader uses a moral compass to influence the organization in the right direction while considering others' wants, needs, values, motivations and emotions. The book identifies nine political styles and helps leaders learn to influence the different styles.

1. **Strategist:** Highly active in furthering a school's vision, the Strategist empowers others, which leads to innovation. Strategists frequently collaborate to design and market proposals and are skilled at building networks to further their initiatives. When working with Strategists, build a trusting relationship. They are visionaries, so always keep the big picture in mind and be clear and concise. Having a well-thought-out plan linking your initiatives with theirs will help engage Strategists.
2. **Developer:** Preferring to work behind the scenes, Developers are committed to the school's goals and priorities. They help others grow in knowledge and skills to strengthen contributions to the school or district. Developers prefer stability and limited risk. To develop trust with Developers, include them and others in plan development because they value the opinions of all sides. Highlight how your initiative aligns with the school's goal and think ahead about potential political blind spots so you can plan to avoid them.

3. **Arranger:** With many connections, charisma and diplomacy skills, Arrangers negotiate deals. They use their networks for information to push their initiatives forward. They dare to take risks and can develop compelling presentations to sway decision-makers. To influence Arrangers, demonstrate your network with coalitions inside and outside the school or district. Think about possible blind spots and have a plan to address them. Include Arrangers in your planning, and be open to their ideas.
4. **Supporter:** Positive and optimistic, Supporters inject harmony into team settings. They like clear, concise messages that advance their goals. To keep Supporters motivated, encourage them, and celebrate small wins. Establish trust by being honest, transparent and consistent.
5. **Adaptor:** Skilled at adapting quickly to organizational changes, Adaptors will be open to your ideas as long as the ideas don't put them at risk. Emphasizing benefits and ease of change will help keep Adaptors grounded. Ongoing and open communication and recognizing Adaptors' work are key to maintaining their support.
6. **Challenger:** Quick to give commands and make decisions, Challengers are aggressive in pursuing their initiatives and like to take risks. They like the limelight, are task-oriented and like efficiency. Demonstrate your competence, show your support from key decision-makers and have a strong network to head off any opposing moves. Being clear about your vision and priorities will help keep you focused so you aren't swayed by Challengers. To gain their trust and support, acknowledge them in front of others and stay calm under pressure.
7. **Planners:** Cautious about their security, Planners are slow to adapt to change. To put them at ease, be patient and answer all their questions. Ensure that your plan is detailed and includes outcome data. Do your research so you are fully knowledgeable prior to meeting with them, and reassure them by having the support of key decision leaders.
8. **Balancer:** A great ally, the Balancer has connections with many people and can inform you of any potential blind spots. When trying to influence Balancers, highlight your commonalities, and generate multiple solutions they could select. They prefer compromise, so it is a win-win for everyone.
9. **Analyst:** Before buying in, Analysts like to see evidence of something working. They are focused on results and like to consider all the alternatives and potential consequences such as time, resources and political fallouts. Success stories from others doing similar work will help gain their buy-in. Proposals should include a detailed outline of an initiative's costs and resources needed. Showing that you have the support of others will help ease their anxiety.

Educate and Engage

Educating and engaging stakeholders allows you to use your networks to advocate for adequate school counseling program resources to meet students' needs. To stay at the forefront of your profession, attend school counseling conferences, watch ASCA webinars, read scholarly journals and magazines and consult with school counselor educators and other school counselors.

A strong support system will help you process your ideas, obtain guidance and persevere during challenging times. Use these strategies to engage and influence various stakeholder groups to recognize school counselors' value.

- **Staff:** Start the school year by presenting a school counseling program overview to staff and let them know how to make counseling referrals. Staff meetings are an excellent opportunity to engage and garner feedback from staff about site needs. Throughout the year, school counselors can share mid-year and end-of-year reports and share data related to student outcomes. Invite administrators and influential teachers from various grade levels to be part of your school counseling advisory council. When key staff members are involved with planning the school counseling program, the other staff members are more likely to buy in.

- **District officials:** District officials need to understand how school counselors' work directly affects district goals. To educate them, attend district leadership meetings to present an overview of the ASCA National Model. Have school counselors implementing the ASCA National Model share examples of their work and highlight how they have improved students' achievement, attendance and discipline outcomes.
- **School board:** Provide regular school counseling updates and present at school board meetings. Volunteer to write a column for your district's newsletter, with updates that include examples of school counseling interventions and how they improved student outcomes. Invite board members to be part of the school counseling advisory council so they gain an in-depth understanding of the school counseling program and can provide feedback. Board members will see firsthand your direct impact at your school and can become your most prominent advocates.
- **Parents and the community:** Host school counselor showcases and present at back-to-school nights, sharing how you spend your time and annual student outcome goals and results. School counselors facilitate workshops, including on the districtwide school counseling curriculum and ways parents can help their children succeed. Host informational tables where parents can consult with school counselors and preview materials school counselors use with students. Educating influential parents is imperative. Present at a districtwide PTA presidents' meeting, and invite one of these parents to be part of your advisory council. If your district has a parent legislative advocacy group, educate them about the crucial role school counselors play.

As a school counselor, you can't accomplish your program's mission and vision alone. Sharpening your emotional intelligence and broadening your sphere of influence can go a long way toward meeting your program goals.

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From Doer to Leader

By Anita Young, Ph.D.

Are school counselors doers or leaders? School counselors in K–12 settings often simply do what is needed to respond to the day-to-day obstacles limiting students' academic achievement and prohibiting social/emotional wellness. However, by simply doing, are you creating a sustainable impact?

Doers are like first responders, trained to make a situation better, and their attention improves the situation but not necessarily the outcome. Being a doer isn't enough for school counselors. Student needs demand that school counselors move beyond reacting to leading.

Two basic principles transform a school counselor from a doer to a leader. First is acknowledging you have all the capacity and power to lead. Identifying your own leadership characteristics and style, coupled with the presence of effective leadership practices, is essential to build a sustainable school counseling program.

The second step is to expand your leadership capacity by seeking opportunities to develop and increase your leadership skills. Familiarize yourself with leadership theories and principles applicable for your school setting. Simple habits such as reading journal articles, participating in district professional development or attending

professional conferences that emphasize leadership in educational settings can broaden your leadership capacity.

The term school counselor leader means a responsive change agent who is able to integrate instructional and school counseling best practices to initiate, develop and implement equitable services to all students. School counselor leaders move beyond doing because they have confidence to influence and effect change from a social justice advocacy stance. School counselor leaders propel above doing because they also know how to collaborate with others to resolve problems.

School counselors can move beyond doing by using the five dimensions of school counselor leadership described below. These narratives are meant to invoke reflective school counselor leadership characteristics and future innovative practices. Contact the author for a copy of the survey used to identify the five dimensions.



1. Interpersonal Influence

Leadership is defined in myriad ways and influence and vision are common terms used to capture the characteristics of a leader. Influence is exerted through verbal and nonverbal communication and how others perceive the school counselor's role.

When school counselors volunteer or are selected to serve on schoolwide, district and community councils, they are in a position of power and influence. Their presence allows communication of the value of school counseling interventions aligned with the instructional mission and vision. For example, they can communicate to stakeholders how the ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success can be used as an innovative resource to close achievement gaps and promote college readiness. Serving on a schoolwide or district committees is "doing;" initiating policy changes as a member of the committee is leading.

- How can you expand your circle of influence?
- How do you encourage colleagues to share their new ideas?
- Are you knowledgeable about communication styles? If so, how do you use communication to impact student outcomes?
- Do you effectively navigate through the politics of the school? The district?
- Do you have a clear vision for the school counseling program?

2. Professional Efficacy

Leading takes courage. The belief in your ability to lead creates efficacy and confidence that helps school counselors challenge mediocrity. Not only does efficacy breed confidence, it also fertilizes advocacy for self and others. Efficacy is what keeps school counselors returning each day.

To design and execute all of the components of the ASCA National Model requires grounded efficacy. For example, imagine yourself as a new school counselor in a school without an established school counseling program. You have been trained to be a school counselor leader; therefore, your belief in yourself catapults you to design a school counseling program aligned with your school's instructional goals.

- Do you view yourself as a change agent?
- Have there been opportunities to lead and you chose not to do so because of fear of failure?
- If needed, are you confident you are equipped to design a school counseling program?

3. Resourceful Problem Solving

Often, parents enter the school building seeking answers to questions that have nothing to do with school counseling, and school counselors find solutions or direct parents to appropriate resources. Stakeholders often rely on school counselors to fix problems that run the gamut from simplistic to complicated.

A doer reacts; a leader responds with data-informed options resulting in systemic solutions producing self-regulated behaviors for students. Resolving problems also requires leaders to be goal-oriented. A school counselor leader with acute problem-solving skills operates with annual student outcome goals in mind.

A school counselor leader provides services that fill data gaps presenting barriers to student achievement. Similarly, forging a business partnership to sponsor college tours or purchase learning manipulatives for an afterschool tutoring program are examples of integrating resourceful problem-solving strategies.

Consider the day-to-day hiccups school counselors encounter. Are you providing random acts of improvement or resolving problems that provide equitable outcomes for all students?

- Are you leading or reacting?
- When faced with obstacles, what steps do you take to remove barriers?
- Can you identify systemic barriers plaguing students in your school?
- Do you know how to find resources to secure what is needed to improve services for all students?

4. Systemic Collaboration

To meet the needs of all students, collaboration is a mandate not only for school counselor leaders, but all educators. Imagine working in a school as the sole school counselor. Building relationships and partnerships with parents, staff and community members produces sustained outcomes.

For example, a school counselor leader communicates with the principal to share the school counseling program vision and mission and how they align with the school's mission. Collaboration with teachers, administrators and parents is needed to schedule appropriate services.

- Do you know the key stakeholders in your school community?
- Do you work with stakeholders to implement school counseling programs?
- Is collaboration encouraged in your building?

5. Social Justice Advocacy

School counselor leaders give voice to marginalized students and their families with the aim of producing equitable outcomes for students through transformative methods. Leading from a social justice lens involves public acts that energize others to work toward collaborative multicultural competencies. Social justice advocates cannot simply do, they must lead. When leadership, social justice and advocacy are joined the outcome is riveting.

Our day-to-day work should be driven by an explicit emphasis on social justice activities and advocacy. School counselor leaders should be ever-vigilant to produce equity in educational outcomes across all student groups. For example, challenging and eliminating policies and practices that negatively affect students or parents who might be marginalized due to race, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation promotes transformative change.

- Do you ask for help when needed to advocate on behalf of students and parents?
- When you recognize an inequity, how do you respond?
- Do you challenge status quo to advocate for all students?

The complexity and uncertainty of today's society should not prevent students from creating goals and fulfilling their dreams. The primary role of a school counselor leader is simple: Help students reach their maximum potential. If you are doing, aim to lead instead.

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Clear Eyes, Full Hearts, Can't Lose

By Amy Dauble-Madigan



Do you feel overwhelmed working at a school site (or several) as a lone school counselor? Are you dealing with high student ratios and feel like no one understands what you do? Sometimes our daily struggles and workload can feel defeating as we try to do what's best for all of our students.

I once wore a T-shirt to school that said, "You think my hands are full, but you should see my heart," and I couldn't have related to anything more as a school counselor with high ratios and multiple school sites. With the following leadership and advocacy tips, you can work your way out of being a lone soldier to one of the team captains.

Start by taking the ASCA National Model piece by piece and making it work for you and your unique working environment. Here are some ways I have implemented the ASCA National Model successfully, little by little, at multiple school sites.

Step One

Defining your role is where it all begins. You have the capacity to change how your role is defined with your administrator(s).

Create a foundation for your program by branding your program and being visible. Set up a school counseling table at open house and back-to-school night with information on your school counseling program, a brochure, parent resources (such as your favorite books, coping skills, positive language to use with students, etc.). Advocacy can make a huge difference in becoming a leader. It's not easy and it's never over, but it starts with you, at your school site.

Be visible. When I find myself sitting in my office with no students or staff, that's a signal for me to move. Get out to the playground or into classrooms, greet students in the morning and smile at the people around campus. Just being visible shows you're invested in the school community, and it also lets students know you are a friendly face around the school. Every Friday I go out in the mornings and congratulate students on trying their best all week, wishing them a wonderful weekend and telling them how excited I'll be to see them on Monday. It makes a huge difference when you're visible as a fun, friendly face.

Live Your Standards

Create a mission and vision statement – it isn't as hard as you may think. If you are the only one at your school site, get together with other school counselors in the district or in neighboring schools and make it a fun activity to create mission and vision statements together that align with your school's or district's statements. Post them on the website, your office door and on social media accounts. Shout them from the rooftops – whatever it takes to let them be known. Having mission and vision statements makes clear that you're running a program to support all students at the school, and you're not just a specialist.

Set up a meeting with your administrators and have a conversation about how school counselors are held to standards just like teachers. Show them the [ASCA Professional Standards & Competencies](#) and the [ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors](#). When administrators are holding you accountable to the correct standards, they are supporting school counselors and advocating for distribution of resources to students. Use the annual administrative conference template in the ASCA National Model to begin this conversation.

Share your annual programming calendars with staff and administrators. When staff members see what you have planned, they know you aren't just sitting at your desk all day. When you show people that you have a plan and a program to run, they respect your profession and start to understand the supports you provide students.

Stand and Deliver

Prioritize your direct and indirect services. If you demonstrate to teachers that enhancing and increasing school counseling curriculum instruction helps you reach more students, they start to understand that you are available to all students, not just the ones who have problems. Does this mean every classroom, every week? Maybe or maybe not, but don't spread yourself too thin. Keep it organized in a way that works for you and your schools.

Use the power of collaboration. When you attend meetings and show interest in collaborating with parents, community members and teachers, you show that you share responsibility in helping students be their best. Reach out to the parent organizations within your school and ask to present on the school counseling program or social/emotional tips for parents. Another part of collaboration is making people feel valued. Sarah Slemmons, middle school counselor in Culver City, Calif., writes teachers a thank-you note for giving her classroom time to reach students. Showing your appreciation can go a long way.

Streamline your referral process. Using Google Forms and other technology can help if teachers refer students to school counseling services, reducing email and letting you organize your caseload and collect data. However, be careful with confidentiality and limitations around technology.

Show Yourself

Share your data. This can be as simple as mentioning your results at a staff meeting. Or, share a one-page infographic with district directors or at a school board meeting; this is a great way to capture school board members' attention and highlight your results. Use the data report form from "Making DATA Work," published by ASCA, or create a colorful infographic using Picktochart or similar sites. When you share student outcomes illustrating how students are different because of school counseling, people will listen.

Stay accountable even if no one is holding you accountable. Talk to your administrator about basing your annual performance evaluation on ASCA documents and templates, such as the [ASCA School Counselor Professional Standards & Competencies](#). Share the [school counselor assessment tool](#) with your administrator or supervisor.

Lead and They Will Follow

Being a leader and practicing self-advocacy takes courage, but all of this advocacy and implementation begins with knowing you are a leader. After implementing these pieces of the ASCA National Model and being an advocate in my school, I went from being a 60% school counselor at two school sites to a 100% school counselor at one school site. I share that because I believe advocacy makes a difference. Advocacy is never easy, and it's never over, but it makes a world of difference.

Our students need us to advocate and lead so every student has access to a school counselor and a school counseling program. It may be hard to think of yourself as a leader within the school system, but no matter your school level or how long you have been a school counselor, you have something unique to offer to your students, your school and the profession.

Remember, people don't understand what they don't know, so we have to educate them any way we can. Start today by making school board presentations, serving on district teams, strengthening the school counselor/administrator relationship, using National School Counseling Week as a week for advocacy and

implementing the ASCA National Model piece by piece, little by little. This all helps overcome the challenges of role inconsistency and high ratios.

Change starts with you and your advocacy, wherever you are. You have the capacity to start change, even if it's small. Lead. Advocate. Empower.

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Expand Your Reach: Marketing Without Fear

By Lachelle Metcalf



I can guess what this title has you thinking.

“Marketing? Ha! When will I have time to do that?”

“Marketing isn’t my thing. Sorry (not sorry).”

“People go to school for marketing, right? I’m a school counselor, not a marketer.”

Marketing’s definition is “the action or business of promoting and selling products or services.” Sounds simple enough, right? So why does the sheer mention of marketing bring about cold sweats, hot flashes and nausea? Why does marketing seem so overwhelming?

Here’s a little secret most marketing professionals will never tell you: You don’t need a college degree in marketing or years of marketing experience to successfully promote your school counseling program. You really only need four simple steps:

1. understanding your audience

2. taking inventory of available resources
3. establishing goals
4. infusing a bit of creativity

Let's explore the basics of creating a marketing plan for your school counseling program.

Identify your target audiences: Students are school counselors' primary target audience. They are the individuals who directly benefit from the school counseling program. They are the reasons we do this work. It's a no-brainer to realize that marketing efforts should focus on reaching this audience.

However, students aren't and shouldn't be your sole audience. When brainstorming your marketing plan, take a moment to identify additional audiences that have a direct impact and influence on your students. Let's call them influencers. These influencers would include fellow educators, administrators, families and community organizations. Each of these groups can benefit from your marketing efforts and will help push your message to the direct beneficiaries of the school counseling program, the students.

Consider this example: A parent is concerned about his student's waning interest in middle school as winter break approaches. Initially, he's unsure about who to approach at the school about his worries. Then he remembers the back-to-school email you sent to parents at the beginning of the semester outlining your role. He decides to contact you to discuss his child and seek advice. This connection leads to an ideal collaborative relationship among parent, school counselor and student to provide essential support for this student.

Take inventory of available resources: Successful marketing initiatives don't require state-of-the-art design software or big budgets. If you have access to a computer, tablet or smartphone with a reliable internet connection, you have the ability to execute a marketing plan for your school counseling program. Standard word processing software such as the Microsoft Office Suite products usually incorporate the basics like Word and PowerPoint. Both offer built-in and downloadable templates for marketing materials including newsletters and posters.

If you want to get a bit fancy, use free apps and online design programs, such as [Canva](#), that offer professional templates for all purposes, including social media graphics and fliers. Don't forget to check with your district's communications team to see if they offer promotion help to school-based staff (e.g., graphic design, printing, etc.)

Set goals: School counselors often explain to students the importance of planning for their future goals. You are not exempt from this advice. To execute a successful marketing plan, you must set realistic goals and establish a strategic plan. This is a crucial first step in planning your marketing strategy. How can you develop a plan without knowing the end result you want?

Ask yourself what you're hoping to accomplish by your marketing efforts. Increasing awareness about what the school counseling program does? Alleviating the stigma around school counseling? Enhancing the school climate and culture? Once you determine your goals, you can start designing your marketing plan to meet those goals.

Let's Get Started

Now that you have identified your audience, assessed your resources and developed your goals, it's time to design and implement your plan. Creativity is important to successful marketing activities, but sometimes simplicity is best. Don't overthink this.

When considering how to implement the ideas in your plan, mirror how your audience obtains information.

- Students often use social media to receive and share information. If your school allows social media use, use Twitter or Instagram to distribute your message.
- Within the school building, design brightly colored posters using limited text or catchy phrases, and post them near lockers, in restrooms and in the cafeteria.
- To reinforce important information, draft brief yet informative emails and send to school staff and families to keep them in the loop about your programming.

Don't forget to review your school year calendar as you plan. This practice will help you pinpoint important dates that link to the school counseling program and schoolwide events like back-to-school season, cultural appreciation events and exams. This will also help you organize a long-term plan for an entire school year versus drafting a month-to-month strategy.

Ideally, you should attempt to implement at least one marketing initiative per month. If you have time for more, go for it.

School counselors provide a necessary and significant benefit to students, administrators and the school community. In other words, school counselors and their roles are marketable. Taking the time to promote the benefits you provide to your stakeholders will help them better understand your value to students and the school community. So, take a deep breath, open your mind, be intentional and start planning. You've got this.

Lachelle Metcalf is a Virginia-based marketing expert.

School Counseling Leadership Specialist

By ASCA



The need for effective leaders in school counseling has never been greater. Students need school counselors to be effective educational leaders who can effect systemic change in their schools. ASCA and state school counselor associations need leaders who can guide the school counseling profession into the future.

Leadership is an attitude and a state of mind, not an innate ability. Everyone has leadership qualities and the potential to lead, no matter what official position we may hold.

To address these needs, ASCA has developed a new professional development package: The School Counseling Leadership Specialist program. This course is meant to be transformative. It doesn't focus on how leaders behave but how leaders think, not what leaders do but what leaders are. At the completion of this course, you should not only know what makes a good leader, you should *be* a good leader – in your school building, your district, and your state school counselor association. Completion of the course also fulfills training requirements for leadership positions in ASCA at the national level.

Learning Objectives

At the completion of the course, you will be able to:

- Discuss the nature of leadership and leadership attributes
- Recognize various leadership theories and principles
- Demonstrate effective leadership in traditionally non-leadership roles
- Identify the sources of power and authority
- Develop your own personal leadership attributes
- Develop a greater self-awareness and identify personal attributes, such as motivations and limitations, that may become obstacles to effective leadership
- Explain how leaders effect systemic change in organizations
- List ways to collaborate with people at higher levels of authority as well as peers and how to foster collaboration throughout an organization
- Explain the challenges of leadership in educational settings
- Describe Policy Governance and how it can be used effectively in a variety of settings
- Learn how to monitor and evaluate organizational (and management) performance
- Be an effective leader in your state school counselor association and in ASCA

Program participants earn five CEUs (equal to 50 contact hours) focused on developing effective leadership qualities and learning how to use those qualities in a variety of settings and situations,

[Learn more and register](#)