

The Teachers We Could Have Kept

Why They Leave—and What Schools
Must Change to Bring Them Back

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The worked examples in this book are hypothetical. They are offered to help readers examine decisions and consequences; they are not presented as accounts of actual individuals or schools.

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Introduction

The question before the replacement

A teacher's departure can begin a search for a replacement. It should also begin an examination of the job that person was being asked to do.

The immediate needs are real. Students need instruction. Families need someone who knows where learning left off. Colleagues need to know which responsibilities will become theirs until a new teacher arrives. A school cannot postpone those needs while it studies the reasons someone left. But hiring and examination can proceed together. If the conditions that contributed to a departure remain in place, a new appointment may leave an important problem unresolved.

This book asks what schools could reasonably have changed while a teacher was still there. It also asks what would need to be different before inviting that teacher, or another experienced educator, to return.

The word "reasonably" matters. A school cannot control every circumstance in a person's life. Teachers have their own responsibilities, and schools must be able to address inadequate practice fairly. A teacher can also leave a well-run school for a good reason.

The Teachers We Could Have Kept focuses on the losses that deserve a closer account. Was a manageable problem allowed to become a reason to leave? Did someone request support that the organization had the power to provide? Was a promised change delivered in a form that helped? These questions require attention to the particular job, the particular response, and the choices available at the time.

Why I am writing this book

This subject is personal to me. I also bring to it academic work in education and business administration, together with a newly completed master's in special and gifted education with a

focus on twice-exceptionalities. Those fields give me several ways to examine a teaching job: what good instruction requires, how a school organizes people and resources, and how the needs of individual learners change the work.

I want to bring those perspectives into the same conversation. When a school sets an instructional expectation, it should consider the time and support required to meet it. When a teacher describes a condition that makes the work difficult, that account should inform the staffing decision. Students' learning and teachers' working conditions belong in the same examination.

The research in these chapters provides evidence beyond any one person's experience. The practical proposals invite a further question: if a school made this change, what would teachers and students actually receive? Readers should be able to examine the reasoning and judge the result.

A loss that can be examined

Support needs a concrete meaning within a teaching week. A useful response might require a staffing decision, planning time, access to a specialist, or clearer responsibility for a task. The right response depends on the problem. A conversation about the concern needs to lead to a decision someone can carry out.

For that reason, the book returns to the relationship between a request and a response. What did the teacher need? Who could act? What happened next? These questions are a way to examine a case, not a claim that every departure follows the same sequence. Sometimes a teacher makes no request. Sometimes a useful request is refused for a stated reason. Sometimes a leader responds promptly and the teacher leaves anyway. Each outcome tells us something different about the limits and responsibilities of a school.

The same care belongs in a conversation about returning. An invitation should make room for a former teacher to assess what has changed and what remains uncertain. Return cannot

be the only acceptable ending. Some people will decide that another role or another workplace is right for them. Their decision can still help a school understand what it needs to improve for the people who remain.

How to use the book

The book asks who leaves, what the job requires, when decisions take shape, where conditions differ, why responses help or fail, and how a school can act.

Teachers can use this book to describe an assignment, explain a need, and judge whether a response changes the work. Administrators can use it to examine departures and take responsibility for decisions within their authority. District leaders can identify constraints that one school cannot resolve. Read with an actual assignment in mind. The worked examples are hypothetical; their purpose is to let readers examine decisions and consequences without presenting invented events as lived experience.

If a staff group reads together, members should be able to discuss the hypothetical examples without disclosing a personal employment decision. Agree on which school decision the discussion can inform and who has authority to act. A book discussion should not become another task that produces recommendations nobody can carry out.

The practical tools have not been validated as measures of school health or predictors of resignation. Judge them by whether they help people make useful decisions and whether the resulting changes reach the classroom. The decision sheet at the back brings Chapter 7's six fields together. The separate Performance and Support Review helps examine a performance concern alongside preparation, resources, and the teacher's full record. Use either when it fits the need, or adapt an existing record. Completing a sheet should not become a condition for receiving assistance.

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