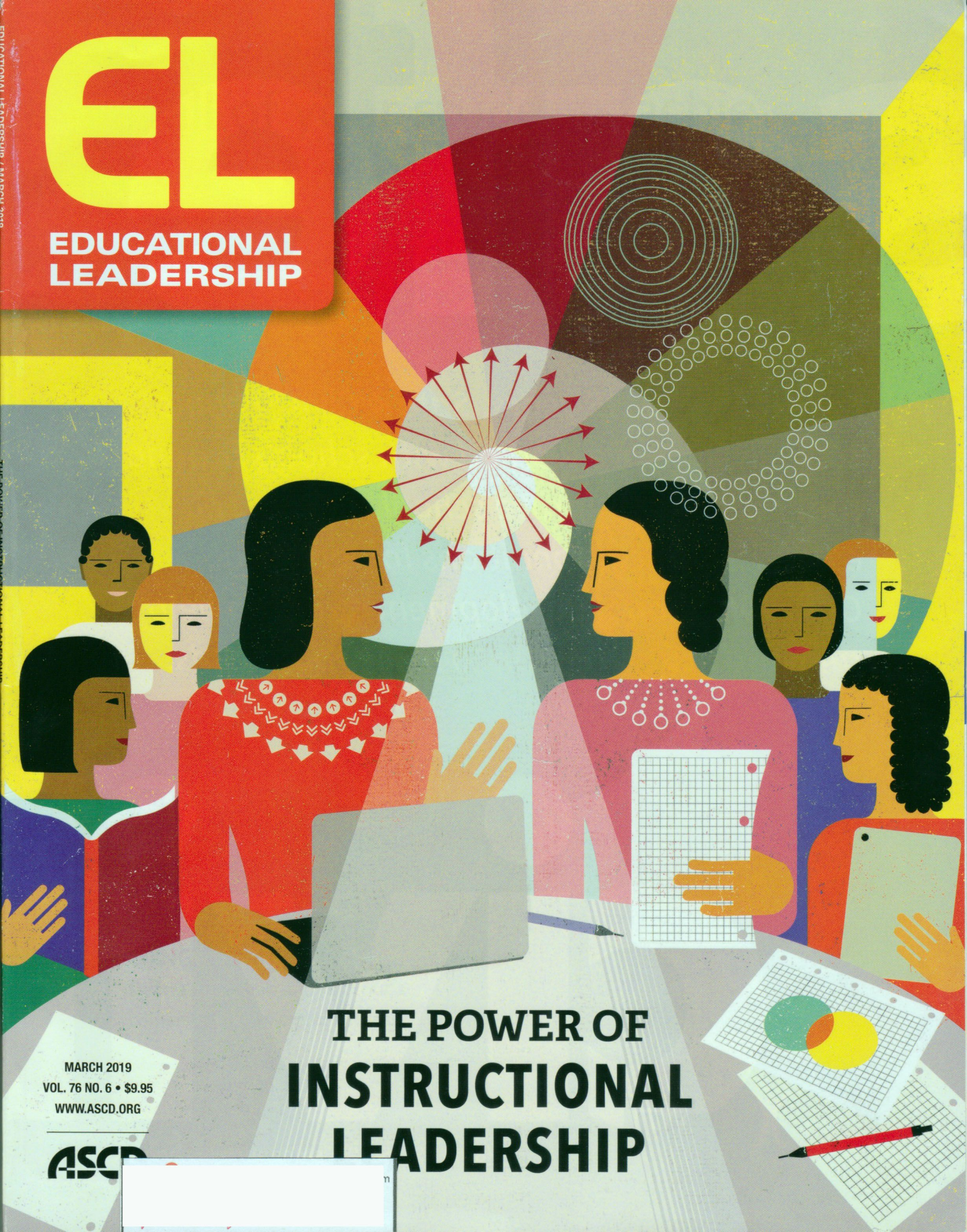


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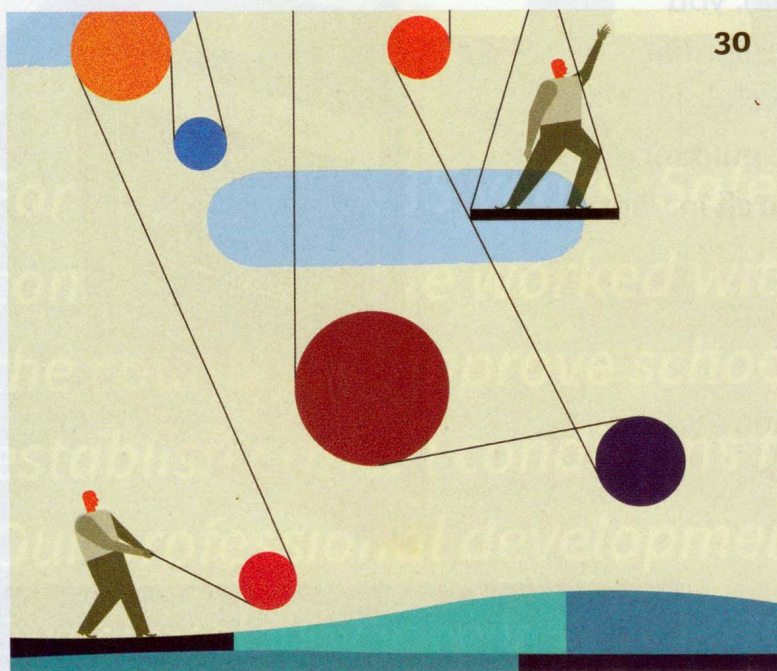


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The Power of Instructional Leadership



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Anthony Rebora

Lessons in Leadership

As a history buff, I was excited to learn that Pulitzer Prize-winning author Doris Kearns Goodwin will be a keynote speaker at ASCD's Empower19 conference this month in Chicago. The choice is particularly apt because Goodwin's latest book holds special interest for school leaders.

In *Leadership: In Turbulent Times* (Simon & Schuster, 2018), Goodwin examines the leadership development and characteristics of four major presidents—Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon B. Johnson. Goodwin's is a nuanced and in-depth study of different eras and complex national crises, and she doesn't aim to offer a simple formula for great or effective leadership. But she does note that the leadership traits of these very different presidents shared a “family resemblance,” and she draws out a number of these qualities.

She explains, for example, that in young adulthood, each of these men exhibited “a fierce ambition, an inordinate drive to succeed.” Equally notable, however, is that all of them suffered “dramatic reversals” at an early stage in their political rise—demoralizing setbacks or tragic events that “ruptured their sense of self and threatened to curtail their prospects.” In responding to these adverse occurrences, these then-future presidents showed formative signs of their vaunted resilience. Significantly, they also allowed these experiences to “deepen” and shape them, to enlarge their perspectives.

Goodwin also argues that all these presidents were guided by a

strong “sense of moral purpose,” which enabled them, at key points, to “channel their ambitions” toward the greater good. Indeed, this is what enabled them to confront—and at least partially overcome—some of the greatest crises in U.S. history. As Goodwin writes in a short article:

At moments of great challenge, all sought to heal divisions, to bring various parts of the country together, to summon the citizenry to a sense of common purpose. They were able to use their talents to enlarge the opportunities and lives of others.¹



Other leadership traits Goodwin has highlighted in discussing these four transformational presidents—some of them familiar from previous leadership studies—include empathy, openness to different perspectives and ideas, adept communication skills (including storytelling), and the ability to unwind and replenish their energy.

Presidential Qualities

Granted that leading a school is different from leading a nation, I don't think it would be out of line to reflect on some of these presidential traits as you read this issue of *EL* magazine on “The Power of Instructional Leadership.” The issue explores how school leaders can effectively guide and support instructional quality across a school—what journalist Jennifer Gill calls the “greatest challenge facing principals today” (p. 43). Qualities like ambition, resiliency, and moral purpose—not to mention empathy, strong communication skills, and openness to different

perspectives—form a definite undercurrent to the stories.

A number of the pieces look at the difficult decisions education leaders must make in order to pull their schools out of ruts or downward turns—for example, in addressing teachers' performance issues (p. 12), in zeroing in on key school-improvement priorities (p. 24), or in managing their time to better support teachers (p. 36). Others highlight the sometimes wrenching organizational and philosophical course corrections that may be needed to ensure that underserved students are given the opportunities and support they need to thrive (pp. 58, 64)—or that leaders truly understand the impact of their decisions on classrooms (p. 76). Finally, several articles examine the importance of strategic collaboration and creating nuanced support systems within schools (pp. 18, 30, 43)—of bringing people together and “enlarging the opportunities and lives of others,” to use Goodwin's words.

All this requires deep leadership skills. As an educator, you may not be heading a nation. But like Goodwin's presidents, you are confronting “great necessities” of your time. **ER**



Anthony Rebora

¹Goodwin, D. K. (2018, October 24). These are the essential traits a president needs, says Doris Kearns Goodwin. *History Channel*. Retrieved from www.history.com/topics/doris-kearns-goodwin-on-presidential-leadership