

MASTER

Unlocking
Talent Within
Every School
Leader



PLAN

FOREWORD BY PAUL BAMBRICK-SANTOYO

DANIEL BAUER

A JOINT PUBLICATION

AASA
THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

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What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

“Daniel Bauer has the ability to deeply engage others in how to be better leaders, share what he has learned in the process, and offer it in a book. *Mastermind* is not just engaging from the first sentence; it offers research and practice that can help us have a deeper impact on leading and learning.”

Peter DeWitt, Leadership Coach
Author, *Collective Leader Efficacy* and
Instructional Leadership
Albany, NY

“Daniel Bauer has created incredible communities for educational leaders worldwide. In this fun-to-read, inspiring, and practical book, Danny shares with us his rationale for starting mastermind communities and how he designs this specific type of professional learning for leaders. You learn how masterminds can create tremendous growth for all who participate.”

Jennifer Abrams, Communications Consultant
Author, *Stretching Your Learning Edges: Growing (Up) at Work and Having Hard Conversations*
Palo Alto, CA

“When we are isolated we are not fully aware of the possibilities. Daniel does an amazing job in *Mastermind* revealing what new perspectives offer. Leaning in on unbiased trusted advisors opens the door for unlimited opportunities. Don’t miss this one, school leaders.”

Aaron Walker, Founder
View From the Top
Hendersonville, TN

“Though Bauer’s book is about how masterminds allow K–12 leaders to reach their potential, I recommend it for those in higher education as well. As a college

president, I rely on the tools Bauer highlights: opportunities for mentorship, investment in personal growth, a push for innovation, support networks, and the capacity to see challenges and issues through multiple perspectives.”

Hilary L. Link, President
Allegheny College
Meadville, PA

“Bauer reveals how isolation, lack of trust, and inadequate professional growth opportunities not only limit the influence of a leader, but even worse, could propel them to leave the profession altogether. The mastermind concept coupled with his ABCs of powerful professional development™ provide the roadmap all school leaders should follow to ensure they develop the support and connectedness they will need to thrive and not just survive.”

Joseph Jones, Superintendent
New Castle County Vocational Technical
School District
Executive Officer of TheSchoolHouse302
Newark, DE

“As a university professor devoted to teaching excellence, I’d heard of masterminds but didn’t know what they did or value. Daniel Bauer explains them, who does them, why, how, and what to expect from them, illustrated with stories from principals and educators who did them. Now I want to do one. I wish I’d read this book a long time ago.”

Joshua Spodek, Professor
New York University
New York City, NY

“The concept of a mastermind has long been a way leaders not only transferred knowledge but deepened

their own understanding. Especially during a time of global uncertainty, this is an essential book for school leaders to learn how to use their collective experience to grow. Daniel Bauer takes concepts like ‘trust’ and ‘mindset’ and provides actionable ways to build these skills in yourself and others.”

Anthony Kim, Author
*The NEW School Rules: 6 Vital Practices for
Thriving and Responsive Schools*
Las Vegas, NV

“School leadership is tough, isolating work. In *Mastermind*, Daniel Bauer spotlights the urgent need for school leaders to connect with a supportive cohort of peers so they can grow, get help with the challenges they face, and anchor their work in deeply held values. No one has done more to help leaders connect with each other and continually challenge themselves to be their very best than Danny.”

Justin Baeder, Director
The Principal Center

“In his book *Mastermind: Unlocking Talent Within Every School Leader*, Daniel Bauer masterfully teaches the true power of creating a mastermind group to become world-class school leaders. From conducting difficult conversations to creating a vision, and so much more, Daniel has created a powerful playbook to unlock your highest leadership potential.”

Tommy Breedlove
Wall Street Journal and *USA Today* Bestselling
Author, *Legendary*
Roswell, GA

“Unfortunately, school leaders are the educators who receive the least professional learning in the building. No more! This book—one that reads like a casual

conversation, laughing with a trusted colleague—opens up a transformative approach to growing the leaders of our schools. Join Daniel Bauer to learn about a bold new approach to growing leadership skills.”

Jenn David-Lang, Editor
THE MAIN IDEA
Brooklyn, NY

“Leading with a mastermind mindset is now more than nice, it is a necessity. In *Mastermind: Unlocking Talent Within Every School Leader*, Daniel Bauer shares practical tips from extensive knowledge and research on the impact of becoming a better leader and building better schools. Educators will walk away with tool sets, skill sets, and mindsets that will enhance their practices tomorrow.”

Jessica Cabeen, Principal
Author, *Lead With Grace*
Austin, MN

“A consistent theme from educational leaders is how isolating the work can be—how alone they feel. A powerful antidote to that is to join a community of peers that illuminates perspectives on education-related issues. If you’re looking for a surefire roadmap on how to engage in such conversations, look no further. *Mastermind*—an artful blend of research-based principles and real-world practices.”

Jeff Ikler, Director
Quetico Leadership Coaching
Forest Hills, NY

“Every school leader should read this book, and every school leader deserves to be in a mastermind group. Not only does Daniel Bauer outline the qualities of a great school leader, but he also defines the specific ways

that we can grow together as a community of learners. At its core, this book reimagines the professional growth experience that school leaders need to be effective in their roles. A must-read!”

T. J. Vari, Assistant Superintendent
Appoquinimink School District
Executive Officer at TheSchoolHouse302
Newark, DE

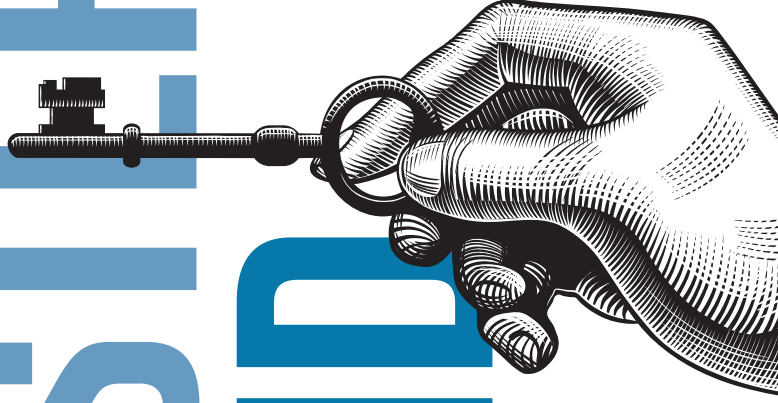
“If you are not currently participating in a mastermind group, Daniel Bauer gives compelling reasons why you should be. He shares the necessity and importance of connecting with others in order to reach our maximum potential. The reflection questions, assessment tools, and visuals make this book an interactive learning experience. As you read, enjoy a growth opportunity at your fingertips!”

Sanée Bell, Author
*Be Excellent on Purpose: Intentional Strategies for
Impactful Leadership*
Cypress, TX

“This is a must-read for educational leaders looking to transform antiquated public learning systems. Transformation starts within and around other like-minded leaders. Bauer’s approach to professional learning is a game-changer.”

D’Andre J. Weaver, Superintendent
DeSoto ISD
DeSoto, TX

MASTER MIND



This book is dedicated to all the Ruckus Makers who allow me to live out my dream. It is a pleasure and privilege to serve you. Let's keep making positive change in education.

MASTER KEY

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Talent Within
Every School
Leader



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Foreword



by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo

The juggler has much in common with the modern-day school leader. Both are skilled at keeping multiple balls afloat, and both can make the work seem so effortless that all we see is an arc of balls seemingly suspended in perpetual flight.

But turn your attention to what happens after the routine ends. The juggler somersaults, neatly collects the balls, and exits. The show is over, and all is well. The school leader, in contrast, is still at it. The juggling seems to be perpetual, with an abundance of differently sized and weighted balls, making it nearly impossible to keep them all in flight. As they fall—one by one or all in a heap—some leaders see those dropped balls and resolve to do a better job juggling tomorrow. Perhaps they will hand off a ball or two to the assistant principal or juggle a few more observations. Although they will continue to juggle daily, they're often finding themselves overcome with frustration—and sometimes, despair—in the face of the repeated pattern of drops. And the stakes are so much higher than for a juggler: when the leader falls short, students and staff do as well.

Daniel Bauer steps into that space of frustration and sense of failure and offers a way out. He doesn't do so by offering a guide on how to do this alone (school leadership is a lonely enough job as it is!). Rather, he

proposes that we do this together. Daniel's mastermind is powered by the belief in teamwork: a cohort of like-minded school leaders who come together to improve their leadership. Through a foundation built on authenticity, belonging, and challenge, mastermind members push each other to become the leaders their school communities need. At the Leverage Leadership Institute, I have witnessed firsthand the power of school leaders practicing and problem solving as a community. When leaders get better together, everybody wins.

At its heart, the mastermind is an authentic community that challenges and inspires. Thank you, Daniel, for bringing the mastermind concept to the education field and creating a space for leaders to learn from and be supported by one another. Each time we do this work together, we remind ourselves that we are not alone and we find the power in community.

Acknowledgments



The reason the Better Leaders Better Schools mastermind exists is because I experienced it firsthand at View From the Top. Because of that, I am indebted to my mentor, Aaron Walker, for creating *Iron Sharpens Iron*. My own cohort is named “The Legacy Builders,” and I’d like to acknowledge the current members who push my leadership to the next level: Charlie Cichetti, John Cole, Stu Brandon, Pat Lordo, Mark Nichols, Trace Blackmore, and James Mills. Thank you to former members of our community as well, especially Jonathan Bates, Anthony Woolever, Scotty Neal, Joshua Elliott, and Keith Harris—rest in peace, my brother.

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To the other edupreneurs who push me and generously share wisdom: Jennifer Abrams, Jethro Jones, Justin Baeder, and Anthony Kim.

Everyone at the altMBA who helped me clarify “What’s it for?” and “Who’s it for?”: Alex Peck and Marie Schacht; my head coaches, Pete Shepherd (Noodles), Aray Till (Colorful), Rick Kitigawa (KA-BLAM!), Lisa Lambert (Woof), and Rebecca Channer (Owl); my first coaches as a student, Conor McCarthy and Cat Preston; my co-coaches, Michelle Welsch, Eve Stankiewicz, Eric Moeller, and Stacy Richards; and the rest of the altMBA

coaches, including Ainsley McCaskill, who specifically encouraged me on this project.

The fantastic Corwin team led by Ariel Curry made this all possible. Thank you for inviting me to make a ruckus by sharing this work. Thank you also for challenging me to create a second draft that was more tightly organized. This challenge is what inspired my breakthrough idea, “The ABCs of powerful professional development™.”

The Better Leaders Better Schools team takes care of day-to-day operations so I can create: Abby Santiago, Željko Tomić, Dragan Ponjević, Christina Lufrano, Derek Archer, Katie Novak, Michael Smith, and Laura Correa.

Current Better Leaders Better Schools mastermind members are the reason this book exists. You give me the opportunity to live out my dream each day.

Celebrating our current mastermind members . . .

No Pockets: Colin Hogan, Kathy Jo Standefer, Kyle Borel, Shbrone Brookings, Clayton Reddie, Jason Dropik, Ellen Herman, Franklin Day, David Beard, Nick Hoover, John Mathews, Cassie Gannett, Eryn Smith, Jicela Soto, and Jessica Gamble.

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Free Spirits: Jessica Cabeen, Karine Veldhoen, Suzanne Mitchell, Loren Brody, Nancy Alvarez, Beth Wartzenuft, John Middleton, Chris Horton, Erinn Fauteux, Fran McGreevy, Dana Goodier, Kim Gibbs, Sheila Diaz, Patrice Henry, and Bill Renner.

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Redefining what it means to be courageous, daring, and strong: Andi West, Melissa Gleason, Kristen Craft, Jess Hutchinson, Rebecca Tiernan, Mary Jo Walker, Regina Collins, Kendra Chapman, Tracey Runeare, and Melissa Peterman.

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One-on-one leaders: Kyle Wagner, Sarah Van Brimmer, and Mo Ali.

A special place in my heart is reserved for former mastermind members who contributed to this adventure.

Always and endless thanks are due to my family: the Pertells, Murtaughs, and Bauers. Thank you for your love and support. And to my Zimbabwean side of the family, ndinotenda zvikuru, ndinokudai mese.

Alba, you are a cute puppy. Thank you for making me stop writing from time to time to go out for walks and allow good ideas to come into my head.

And most of all, to my amazing wife, Shupi. Your support is everything dali wangu. Ndinokuda. Now that this book is out, let's celebrate. Which country do you want to visit next?

About the Author



Daniel Bauer is the Chief Ruckus Maker at Better Leaders Better Schools (BLBS). He launched his *BLBS* podcast in September 2015. With over one million downloads, the *BLBS* show is the most influential podcast available for educational leaders. In 2016, he changed how professional development is offered to school leaders through the structure of a mastermind. Since then, Daniel has coached and mentored over 100 school administrators from every continent in the world.¹ In 2017, Daniel launched *The School Leadership Series*, his second podcast, which amplifies the diverse voices in school leadership today. He is the author of *The Better Leaders Better Schools Roadmap: Small Ideas That Lead to Big Impact*, which released as an Amazon #1 new release. Daniel's Just Cause is "to connect, grow, and mentor every school leader who wants to level up." Reading this book helps move his Just Cause forward, and sending it to your colleagues in educational leadership helps even more.

¹ Except Antarctica, of course.

“Here’s to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes . . . the ones who see things differently—they’re not fond of rules. . . . You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can’t do is ignore them because they change things . . . they push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

—Steve Jobs

Introduction



“Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.”

—Aldous Huxley

Alarming Trends

A massive study of all principals in Texas from 1995–2008 found three alarming trends in educational leadership. First, although principal retention varies, elementary schools have the highest retention rates, while high schools have the lowest rates. Second, high school leader retention rates are abysmal. Just over 50 percent of newly hired principals stay for three years, and less than 30 percent stay for five years. Finally, and most alarming, about 90 percent of those leaving a school actually leave the principalship altogether. Principals from this study weren’t leaving one school to go to another; rather, a majority of principals left the profession entirely (Fuller & Young, 2009, p. 17). Principals are leaving the profession for what they have identified as a better situation, and when they leave, they’re gone for good.

The good news is this: districts can use coaching programs to reduce negative job factors and improve principal retention (Bauer et al., 2019, p. 386). The even better news: principals and other building leaders can take control of their own development through the structure of a mastermind. It is the aim of this book to show you how to do just that.

What Successful People Do

Successful investor Charlie Munger said, “I believe in the discipline of mastering the best of what other people have figured out” (as cited in Parrish & Beaubien, 2018, p. 14). What Munger knows from experience has also been proven by many researchers. Studies show that collaboration is essential to leadership reform (Sherman, 2005, p. 709). Research also established that formal mentoring programs encourage collaboration and promote a culture of lifelong learning for participants. Not only that, but leadership development programs also lead to greater productivity and a more capable staff (Sherman, 2005, p. 710).

I call this the Big Domino. By investing in the development of local school leaders, not only do you get a better leader, you get a better school. School leaders across the globe are discovering the impact that joining a structured coaching program like a mastermind can have on their leadership and their lives. Throughout this book, we’ll meet many of these school leaders and see the impact.

These leaders have occupied the same position that you currently have. That challenge you currently face—someone has seen it before. Although you may *feel* like you are the only leader who is facing “X” problem, the truth is, you’re not. There is tremendous value in being able to unpack and solve challenges that all school administrators face at some point with a trusted board of advisors:

- Building ownership of vision
- Designing core values that guide your school’s work

- Deciding what the first ninety days of your principalship should look like
- Navigating tough conversations successfully
- Dismantling systemic racism in the system of school

Masterminds are quite common in the business setting—I should know, I joined one in early 2016 before starting one myself. Prior to 2016, I had never heard about a mastermind, but after joining, I realized there was a rich history of masterminds operating in the business sector. Business entities know something schools would be wise to adopt: we'll go further, faster, together. Too many schools pay lip service to collaboration, when in reality they reward competition. It's easy to think "winning" businesses operate this way too, but the truth is, they don't. My mentor credits his business success to the fact that he has been a part of masterminds for decades. He often tells me that he'd rather be "an inch wide and a mile deep versus a mile wide and an inch deep." His mastermind peers have helped him eradicate blind spots and navigate challenges skillfully. Successful people will always figure out a necessary solution, but the most successful realize they have a choice—the much easier independent path versus the more robust collaborative path. A mastermind provides the latter.

One reason successful people continue to be a success is that they build a system that supports their high performance. Blind spots and a lack of perspective get in the way. Our egos and overconfidence harm us. The further we are from a choice we make, the greater the likelihood we will make the same mistake and believe

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a false narrative of what actually occurred. It is difficult to admit when we lack understanding or are actually incompetent. To ask for help requires safety and courage. Successful people know this, which is why they surround themselves with people who will push them to be better and protect them against their natural weaknesses.

The philosopher Alain de Botton said, “The chief enemy of good decisions is a lack of sufficient perspectives on a problem” (as cited in Parrish & Beaubien, 2018, p. 33). The mastermind presents the perspectives you need to be your best and produce the results that you’ll be proud of. You just need to bring yourself and be willing to show up authentically, admit where you need help, and plug into a community of support.

The Origins of the Mastermind

The mastermind concept is not new. In 1937, Napoleon Hill devoted an entire chapter to the concept of what he called a “Master Mind.” He found that a mastermind was the driving force behind power and riches.

He defined the concept this way: “The ‘Master Mind’ may be defined as: ‘coordination of knowledge and effort, in a spirit of harmony, between two or more people, for the attainment of a definite purpose’” (Hill, 1937/2005, p. 195). What Hill’s definition shows us is that a mastermind is a community where two brains are better than one, or, as he says it, “a group of brains coordinated (or connected) in a spirit of harmony will provide more thought-energy than a single brain, just as a group of electric batteries will provide more energy than a single battery” (Hill, 1937/2005, p. 197).

It was Andrew Carnegie who taught Hill about the mastermind concept. Carnegie used a mastermind to