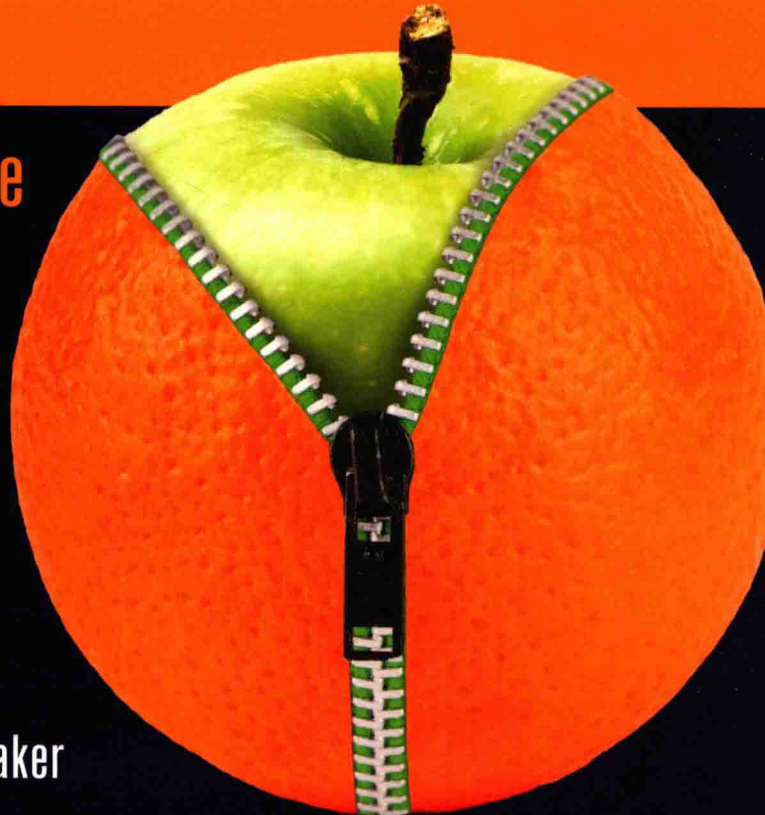


PJ CAPOSEY

MAKING EVALUATION

MEANINGFUL

Transforming the
Conversation
to Transform
Schools



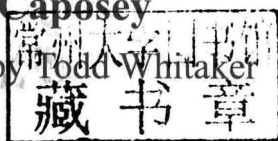
Foreword by Todd Whitaker

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PJ Caposey

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Foreword

It is important that we support initiatives in schools that make a difference. It seems that often, this is not what happens with teacher evaluation. We place tremendous time, energy, and resources into doing something that we “know we should do,” even if we can find little utility in the process. On top of the lost resources, we also add stress. This is not a winning combination, yet year after year we stumble through this process.

It is essential that we realize that people, not programs or policies, are what make schools great. We must inspire teachers and school leaders with strategies that help provide meaning to a job that can be overwhelming and stressful. In many ways, this is almost antithetical compared to much of the rhetoric surrounding teacher evaluation. That is precisely why this book is so exciting.

PJ Caposey has done an excellent job in understanding the human element of teacher evaluation. He demonstrates that he understands that no single framework or evaluation protocol is going to change a single teacher’s behavior by itself, let alone an entire school. He moves from this paradigm and then examines every element of the evaluation process in an attempt to make it more practical, user-friendly, and most importantly, effective.

Making Evaluation Meaningful: Transforming the Conversation to Transform Schools is precisely what the educational community needs right now to continue to grow and change the conversation surrounding teacher evaluation. Teacher evaluation has been an exceptionally hot topic in schools for about a decade, and most districts have radically transformed their practices in order to meet the trend of the day. What has happened is little to no improvement in overall school outcomes and a ton of teacher and administrator stress. I love this book, because it can help decrease stress for all parties involved *and* it puts forth a plan where the evaluation process can actually help teachers grow.

There are two sections of the book that are particularly valuable—the discussion of the pre-conference and the improvement bank section. PJ does a great job of critiquing the pre-conference, by describing what many schools do but few people critically think through. It is discussed in detail with easy, tangible suggestions for improvement. Additionally, the back of the book contains a great compilation of

improvement suggestions that can have real-world impact for many teachers. As PJ affirms, no administrator intentionally does a poor job in evaluation, but some lack the tools needed to provide meaningful feedback. The improvement bank section provides more than “some” tools—it is the Menards, Lowe’s, or Home Depot of teacher evaluation, offering a plethora of resources.

This book is very exciting! PJ and I have worked together on multiple ventures, and I have always been a fan of his work, but this book is of particular value. Every chapter hits readers on multiple levels. It is philosophical and practical—it will change your paradigms and your everyday routine. PJ shares stories that many of you can relate to and he demystifies the cumbersome evaluation process into a series of smaller processes and systems, but most importantly, he never loses sight of the human nature of our schools and the evaluation process.

To paraphrase from my 2011 book, *What Great Teachers Do Differently*, any educator can study lists of guidelines, standards, principles, and theories. The difference between more effective educators and less effective colleagues is not what they know. It is what they do. The reason this book is so effective is that PJ does a great job of helping people understand what they need in order to *do* their job better. This is a practical, well-read, and potentially game-changing book when it comes to teacher evaluation. I trust you will enjoy it as much as I did.

—Todd Whitaker
Distinguished Adjunct Professor, PK12 Leadership
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Preface

Teacher evaluation has been a hot topic in education for over a decade. Increased emphasis on teacher performance originated from the era of accountability ushered in by No Child Left Behind. Since then, powerful and dynamic evaluation frameworks have been popularized, and a great deal of time, effort, and energy has been invested in transforming the once uneven and often routine process. After nearly a decade of effort and implementation to systematically improve evaluation processes in education, two things remain constant. First, achievement scores by nearly all measures have not significantly improved, and second, the overwhelming majority (95 plus percent) of teachers are found to be proficient or better in most states (Dynarski, 2016). This leads to the conclusion that current evaluation procedures are not fundamentally improving teacher performance. This book is intended to shine a new light on the evaluation process to help transform our practices as educators and ensure that the time spent in evaluating teachers is meaningful for both administrators and teachers.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I was once working with a district to revamp their evaluation procedures. On the second day of training, the chief administrators were called away, and I was left to work solely with the active practitioners. A principal, inspired to be more honest with the “bosses” out of the room, remarked, “I spend at least 80 hours per year evaluating teachers. How do I make sure that it is meaningful for both the teacher and for the school—because right now I am pretty sure it is not?” In that one short instance, I realized exactly why I was doing work centered on evaluation. Evaluation had become cumbersome, stressful, and time consuming, all while losing its apparent meaning to administrators and teachers alike.

In writing this book, I hope to do my part to help fix what ails the evaluation system. My experiences support and I truly believe that teacher evaluation when

done well can systematically transform a school. My steadfast hope is that this book provides principals with the tools they need to make the process meaningful, comfortable, and streamlined. Additionally, I hope to demonstrate how, when done thoughtfully, the evaluation process can serve as the tie that binds all school improvement activities together.

With this book, I hope to provide the following for educators and the schools they serve:

- Improved teacher practice as they receive better support from their principals
- Improved student achievement because of better principal and teacher performance
- Clarity and purpose for administrators; making them more effective and their role easier
- Improved school culture as a result of clear evaluative expectations and protocols and with an increased focus on conversations to promote teacher growth

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

This book is not a competitor to the established frameworks commonly used in schools. This is designed to be a tool that administrators can use to better implement the high-quality frameworks that are already in place. This book is not something you do once to fix a problem—it is a guide to transforming your school through a series of actions. More importantly, the focus of this book is to help teacher evaluators to rethink their role in the process and to help them critically analyze how they can adjust their practice to better serve their teachers and their school.

AUDIENCE

This book is written for teacher evaluators and those who are working hand in hand with teachers to help improve their practice on a daily basis. It is also my hope that superintendents and other district leaders read this as well. My experience informs me that teacher evaluators often feel isolated and rather unsupported. District leaders must too see themselves as instructional leaders who provide the resources and support necessary to construct a system that is meaningful and purposeful for all involved. It should be noted that the final few paragraphs of the concluding chapter are a direct plea to superintendents, with some logical next steps they can take to begin serving as leaders in this process.

GOALS FOR THE READER

Ultimately, I wrote this book to accomplish one primary goal—make the reader a better teacher evaluator. This can be accomplished by exploring the following, smaller, objectives:

- Help the reader understand the broad-reaching impact that teacher evaluation has upon student achievement, school culture, and sustained professional growth.
- Break down each element of the evaluation process in detail and help the reader to improve both through “quick fixes” and through cultivating a lasting mindset and paradigm shifts.
- Convince the reader that communication and confidence are key elements to being a great evaluator that truly supports and encourages teacher growth.

SPECIAL FEATURES

This book is designed to be user-friendly, by placing as many tools as possible in the hands of practitioners.

- **Personal Experiences and Stories**
 Personal experiences with districts and administrators drive this work, informed by research on best practices. Well-intentioned administrators who are struggling to make the evaluation process work for them will find that the stories resonate with their own experiences. The stories shared will help readers to personally connect with the content and help them understand that they are not alone in the struggle in trying to make evaluation meaningful.
- **Tips for Tomorrow and Mindset Shifts**
 Every chapter has a handful of Tips for Tomorrow, designed to be tools an evaluator can implement immediately. These smaller transitions toward positive practice help to keep the reader engaged and demonstrate easy ways in which incremental progress can be made. In contrast, Mindset Shifts are larger paradigm shifts. People often debate whether you can think your way into new behavior or if you have to behave your way into new ways of thinking. The combination of Tips for Tomorrow and Mindset Shifts appeal to both ideals and if employed, will lead to sustained change.
- **Culture Assessment**
 The connection between school culture and the evaluation process is often not readily apparent. When explored, however, the influence of

evaluation and administration's role within the process have a significant impact upon the culture of a school building. Since this connection is not easy to see for some, this book contains a culture assessment focused largely on teacher evaluation. This tool will not only provide great insights for practitioners; for most, it will also create a sudden sense of urgency when they begin to look at both evaluation and culture through new lenses.

- **CHANGES**

The book breaks down the seven ways a school leader can use evaluation to systematically transform the culture of their school. A playbook is given on how to leverage the evaluation process to positively influence the culture of a building so that it better serves the needs of both the adults and students within it.

- **Suggestion for Improvement Bank**

At the conclusion of the book, a suggestion for improvement bank is provided. Often, administrators provide little to no feedback on how a teacher can improve their practice. As a result, the evaluation process becomes an assessment of value to the organization instead of a systematic process to help teachers grow. The reason for lack of suggestions for improvement is not evaluator effort as commonly believed—it is instead the perceived lack of valuable input to provide as an evaluator. As a result, sample suggestions for improvement are provided as an addendum at the end of the book.

- **Dos and Don'ts for Teacher Self-Assessment**

Teacher self-assessment is a practice performed with different parameters in different ways throughout the United States and other countries. While the benefits of self-assessment are known, teacher evaluation can also bring forth anxiety for administrators. A simple dos and don'ts checklist provided in this book will allow administrators to have a strategic approach to teacher self-evaluation in order to capture all the benefits while mitigating the vast majority of the risks.

- **Evaluator Self-Assessment**

One of the best features of this book from a practicality standpoint is an evaluator self-assessment that captures the three major phases of the process: pre-conference, observation conversation, and written document provided to the teacher. This not only serves as an assessment of practice, but also serves to help evaluators begin with the end in mind. A quick glance at the desired outcomes helps evaluators to remind themselves of what is truly important and to work to improve their own professional practice.

- Connections to Popular Frameworks and Best Practices

While this book is not intended to compete with popular evaluation frameworks, it certainly acknowledges they exist and works to create clear connections between these tips to transform the conversation and the existing frameworks. Additionally, the book works to incorporate what we know as best practice through the work of Hattie (2012) and Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) to better guide evaluators in their attempt to use research to support their teachers.

- Online Resources

Visit pjcaposey.com for additional resources to improve and transform schools.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my wife, Jacquie, and our children, Jameson, Jackson, Caroline, and Anthony for continued support and encouragement. My greatest hope is that something I write someday benefits you or someone you care about.

I would also like to thank my Board of Education—John Smith, Kristine Youman, Tim Devries, Tim Flynn, Marsha Welden, Jill Huber, and Matt Rhodes. Your belief in me and willingness to provide me autonomy with accountability allows me to pursue all of my professional dreams. I cannot thank you enough for that opportunity.

Additionally, many thanks go to my Leadership Team, faculty, and staff at Meridian CUSD 223. I am beyond fortunate to walk alongside you and hope that I provide you one-tenth of the inspiration that you provide me.

Lastly, thank you to Tom Mahoney. Everyone should have a mentor and friend like Tom. He challenges me every time I speak with him and I grow as a result.

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About the Author



PJ Caposey has had a wide range of educational experiences throughout his career. Mr. Caposey's educational career began by receiving the Golden Apple Scholarship in high school, which supports students in pursuing their dream to teach by providing scholarship money and training in return for a commitment to teach in a need-based area. Mr. Caposey did just that after completing his studies at Eastern Illinois University by teaching at Percy Lavon Julian High School in the inner-city of Chicago.

After completing his administrative certification at National Louis University, Mr. Caposey served as an assistant principal in Rockford Public Schools before becoming the principal of Oregon High School at the age of 28. After arriving at Oregon High School, Mr. Caposey and the school received many honors. Personally, PJ was acknowledged by winning the Illinois Principal's Association/Horace Mann Partners in Education Award and IPA Principal of the Year for NW Illinois. Additionally, Mr. Caposey personally has been selected as an Award of Merit winner by the Those Who Excel program sponsored by the Illinois State Board of Education, was honored as one of the nation's top young educators when announced as an Honoree for the ASCD Outstanding Young Educator Award, and has been named an ASCD Emerging Leader. PJ was named one of 25 superintendents to watch nationally by NSPRA and won the INSPRA Distinguished Service Award of Excellence in 2016 as well as being named to the 40 Leaders under 40 cohort in the NW part of Illinois. More important, Oregon High School was named one of the nation's top high schools by *US News and World Report* in 2012 and one of the top 2000 high schools in the country by *Newsweek* in 2013. Meridian has also been named a District of Distinction by *District Administration* magazine and is home to 1 of 20 schools in the nation named a School of Opportunity.

PJ recently earned his doctoral degree through Western Illinois University and continues to write and guest blog for many websites such as Huffington Post, Eye on Education, ASCD, Edutopia, My Town Tutors, and Test Soup. PJ has also penned

two books—his most recent co-authored with Todd Whitaker—named *Building a Culture of Support: Strategies for School Leaders* and *Teach Smart: 11 Learner-Centered Strategies to Ensure Student Success*. In addition, Mr. Caposey also serves as an adjunct professor for Aurora University within their educational leadership department and a principal coach for the Illinois Principals' Association.

PJ is a sought-after presenter, consultant, and professional development provider and has spoken at many local, state, and national conferences. A short list of those entities which PJ has presented on behalf of include ASCD, Illinois Principal's Association, National Rural Educators Association, and AdvancEd. PJ also enjoys the opportunity to work in different consultative capacities for schools and other organizations.

PJ served as the Oregon High School principal for four years and currently is in his third year as the superintendent of Meridian 223. He is married to a teacher who works with gifted students and lives with his four children: two sons, Jameson and Jackson; and twin toddlers, Anthony and Caroline, in the Northwestern part of Illinois.

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