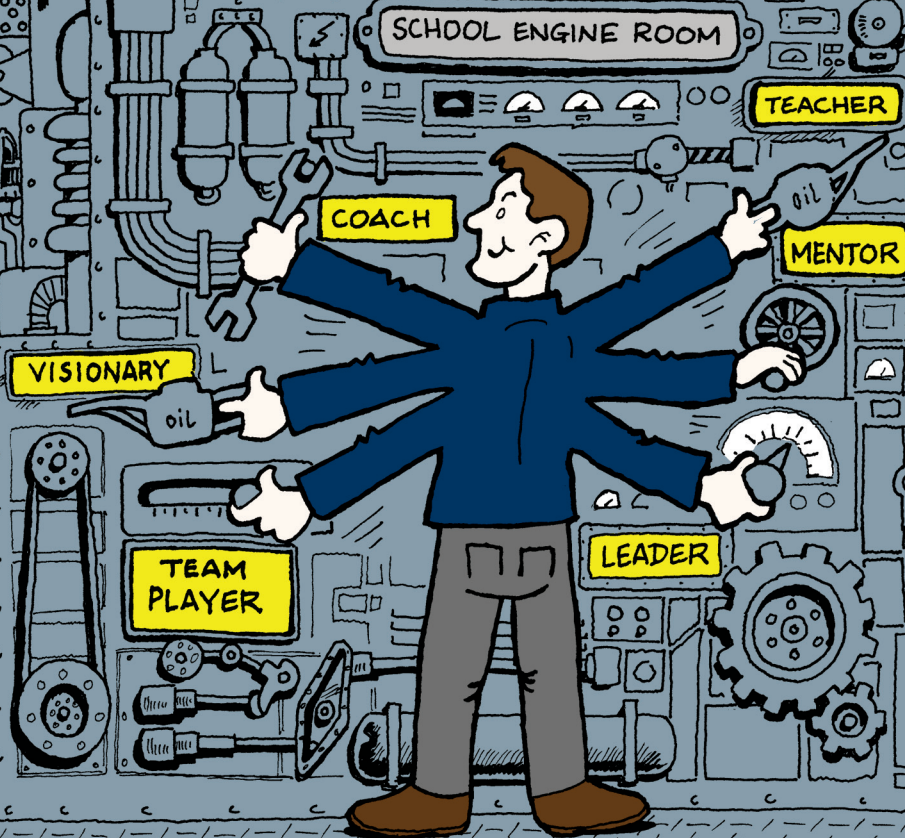


The Subject Leader

An introduction to leadership and management



Steve Garnett

Edited by Phil Beadle

Praise for *The Subject Leader*

As a primary teacher I came at *The Subject Leader* wondering whether it was going to be just as applicable to (for example) a KS2 music co-ordinator as the head of a history department in a large secondary school. It is. *The Subject Leader* contains principles and advice to ensure you focus on the things that matter and just give a cursory nod to the things that don't. If your subject department was run along the lines Steve Garnett sets out, amongst other things your pupil targets would be more meaningful, staff meetings would contain less waffle and your department would be a place both teachers and pupils would want to be. If you put into practice the methodology of *The Subject Leader*, you can lead effectively as opposed to doing what we so often do – muddle through.

Paul Wrangles, illustrator, author www.sparkyteaching.com

If you were to set an educational book a challenge perhaps none would be greater than to ask it to be so compelling that it manages to make exciting reading at the very end of the summer term. Steve Garnett has achieved this in *The Subject Leader*, I read the book on the first weekend of the summer holidays and found myself itching to put some of the ideas into practice.

This is a book written with a deep understanding of what the task of a subject leader is and of how it can become the most exciting and fulfilling role in your career. All too often good teachers are promoted into this responsibility and left to fend for themselves; little recognition is given to the new challenges that the job brings and to the new skills that *The Subject Leader* needs to do the job really well. *The Subject Leader* addresses that need beautifully, clarifying the priorities for any subject leader and providing suggestions about how to make that really important thinking a shared vision across the whole team.

The book is well structured, taking the reader from the fundamentals of context and vision, through the essentials of self evaluation, both for the work of the team and the leader, a very important section on how to make your team the envy of the school and finally a chapter on handling

the really difficult issues that can arise in teams. Steve deals with each topic with honesty and sharp focus; there is no room for ambiguity in the methods he suggests for analysing your team and its performance. However the writing is full of emotional intelligence and this makes the challenges acceptable, necessary and easy to respond to. The intriguing mechanical cartoons by Les Evans provide an excellent counterpoint to the text.

If you are already a subject leader then you will find much to celebrate in this book as you reflect on what you are doing well and what you relish about your job, you will also find yourself challenged and equipped to be better at what you do. If you are just about to embark on this role then this could be the book that makes your new job possible; there are some excellent ideas that will help you to start your team thinking along the right lines from the very first. If you are an aspiring subject leader there is a wealth of experience here that you will find inspiring and that will affirm your choice. From very practical suggestions about how to run team meetings, how to recognise and use the right leadership style and how to manage stress to the more fundamental issues about your own philosophy of education and the emotionally intelligent way to work with a team.

I think the book deserves to be given a wider audience. I would like it to be required reading for all senior leaders and indeed for all teachers; there is much wisdom and clarity of thinking here; in the current educational landscape we need books like this.

**Geraint Wilton, Lead Practitioner,
St Ives School – A Technology College**



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Foreword

A word on the editing process of this book ... when it was delivered to me I downloaded the draft, pressed 'Word Count' in the tools section of my croaking Mac, and was concerned that it was short, too short and that, perhaps it needed to be twice as long.

And then I started to read it ...

And slowly it became apparent that I was wrong. Slowly and seductively it became apparent that what I was reading shone.

What shone, in particular, was Steve's engagement with being a Subject Leader as being a creative, potentially joyous process.

Yes, you, as Subject Leader, have more than your fair share of thankless, bureaucratic tasks to contend with. Yes, you, as Subject Leader, do not get anywhere near enough time off timetable to do all the manifold tasks – big, small or unbelievably 'Oh God I just can't do this' massive – that senior management blithely throw in your direction. You can get lost in the workload. I know this. I've been a Subject Leader, and I've witnessed friends – people who were serious about doing the best for the kids – destroy their health trying to keep up with the demands of the role.

What's special about what Steve has written is that it connects back with the idea of the Subject Leader as being the guiding visionary of the department: the specialist, with the specialist knowledge; the specialist drive; the specialist, subject-specific passion; the specialist understanding that theirs is obviously the most important, valuable and intellectually taxing of all the areas of the curriculum. Its focus is sharp and steely on improving the learning experience for your students, and he seeks to and succeeds in redefining the role so that it is a collaborative and creative task where the focus is not on who had done too much photocopying this week, or whose birthday is coming up; but is, as it should be, on managing teaching and learning so that it becomes a more joyous transaction for everyone who enters the department.

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It gives you the tools to define your vision (corporately), to articulate it, and, from then, to bring in into being and maintain it.

Steve's vision for subject leadership is entirely cohesive: you can follow the steps in this manual, implementing them along a chronological timeline and it will give you the structure, the scaffolding, to rely on, and to consult back to, as you get on with the job of driving things forward. It also has an intellectual clarity that is all too rare in the genre of 'teacher self-help' books. You will not feel patronised following the steps in this book. Steve does not think you are an idiot to be talked down to: he respects your professionalism and your passion, but he has insights and tools that not everybody has access to, and he wants to share them with you.

The fact that Steve's vision and his outlining of the process of leading a subject is so cohesive, means that it is easily encircled in this format. So, whilst apologising to you, the reader for such a short text and not forcing Steve to water down his vision with weeks upon weeks of re-writing wind and waffle, I recommend this book to you.

Every word helps.

Phil Beadle

Chapter 1

Setting the Context

When you take those first early steps as a head of department (or to give it its new title, subject leader) you are introduced to a whole new language that perhaps you may not have come across in your school life before. Words and phrases like *ethos*, *vision*, *self-evaluation*, *sampling*, *data analysis*, *leadership* and *management* are now part of your working vocabulary. To help decode some of this language, here are some helpful definitions of what these terms mean:

- **Ethos** – taken from the Greek word ‘character’ it means the beliefs and customs that guide a community. Translated into school life, your department ethos represents your core values and underpins everything. This could extend from the professionalism shown between colleagues to the fundamental principles that underpin learning.
- **Vision** – the process of articulating the experience that you would want pupils and staff to have as they work and learn in your subject area. It helps to be something that colleagues can ‘see’ hence vision. For example, types of teaching styles or resources that would inspire, engage and motivate.
- **Self-evaluation** – the process of reviewing the performance of a department and drawing out evidence-based conclusions. The key questions to ask are: ‘How are we doing?’ and ‘What and where is the evidence to inform me of this?’ Evidence and data can be either ‘soft’ (attitudinal surveys amongst pupils) or ‘hard’ (exam results).
- **Sampling** – a process of analysing a portion of pupil work (e.g. exercise books or folders) with a view to understanding what has been learnt and the effectiveness of lessons and/or assessment.
- **Data analysis** – the process of examining the results of assessments (both external and internal) to identify where pupils are performing

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beyond, at, or below expected levels. The crucial aspect to data analysis is to look for trends in results and to expose pockets of underperformance and then, critically, to take remedial action to address those issues.

- **Leadership** – the difference between leadership and management is the notion of positive change. Leadership has to find a new direction that will create positive change for the good of the department. The style of leadership chosen to effect these changes is crucial: it needs to reflect the situation the leader is in at that time. Some leadership styles are collaborative and personal whilst others are more assertive.
- **Management** – essentially the process of getting people together to accomplish desired goals using available resources effectively and efficiently. It comes after leadership because it involves putting the leadership vision into practice. It often implies a hierarchical arrangement with the leader tasked with supporting the team in delivering shared goals. Management tends to maintain the status quo.

When taking those first steps into leadership you may want you revisit your own educational philosophy. After all, this should really underpin what you are about as a leader. Some ‘big’ questions you might ask yourself include: Why did you become a teacher? What do you believe are the fundamental principles associated with learning? How do you see the role of teachers in a broader sense within the community?

Here is an example of a teacher’s statement about their educational philosophy:

I believe that every pupil needs a secure, caring and stimulating educational setting in which to grow and mature emotionally, intellectually, physically and socially. All pupils should aspire to fulfil their fullest potential. Teachers should seek to foster a love of learning through developing resilience and independence.

When the teacher’s role is to guide, providing access to information rather than acting as the primary source of information, the pupils’ search for knowledge is met as they learn to find answers to their questions. Providing pupil access to hands-on activities and allowing

adequate time and space to use materials that reinforce the lesson being studied creates an opportunity for individual discovery and construction of knowledge to occur.

Equally important to self-discovery is having the opportunity to study things that are meaningful and relevant to one's life and interests. Developing a curriculum around pupils' interests fosters intrinsic motivation and stimulates the passion to learn. Inviting pupil dialogue about the lessons generates an atmosphere of mutual respect. Using this opportunity for input, pupils generate ideas and set goals that make for much richer activities.

Helping pupils to develop a deep love and respect for themselves, others and their environment occurs through an open sharing of ideas and a fair and consistent approach to discipline. I believe pupils have greater respect for their teachers, their peers and the lessons presented when they feel safe and sure of what is expected of them. In setting fair and consistent rules, pupils learn to respect themselves, others and their environment.

Teaching itself provides an opportunity for continual learning and growth. One of my hopes as a teacher is to instil a love of learning in my pupils, as I share my own passion for learning with them.

At this point the real work can begin. The teacher then has the task of analysing the data to reveal any issues of concern. Obviously the teacher needs to understand on an individual basis who has done well and who has done less well. This is relatively easy: they are the pupils who are either on the 'Meeting targets' line or above it (e.g. B1 and B4).

The real challenge for the subject leader is to look for 'hidden' pockets of underachievement in the midst of the overall data. For this class there might be several issues of interest/concern for the teacher. (Whilst the teacher will look for patterns of achievement with their own class the subject leader will need ensure the right 'issues are spotted but also to see the 'bigger picture' across the department too.)

- Five out of the six boys are either on or exceeding their target grades (the exception being B6 who has a target grade of a D but achieved an E). Overall, the teacher could conclude that the boys are doing well.
- Four out of the six girls appear to be achieving below their target grades. The teacher could conclude that girl underachievement appears to be an issue.
- Looking more closely at the girls' underachievement, how would you characterise the profile of these individuals? As they all have predicted grades of an A, it appears that the real problem in this class is underachievement in high ability girls.

The teacher has now 'smoked out underachievement' by identifying the type of underperforming pupils that need some action. Next they need to understand the reasons for this underperformance.

Here are some possible reasons for pupil underperformance. This information could act as a useful discussion point within a departmental meeting and serve as a prompt or framework from which to look for solutions.

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Reason for underperformance	Solution
1. Lack of pupil motivation and disaffection	Letters home expressing concern, meeting with pupil, possible involvement of pastoral team
2. Pupils not sure how to perform at grade A level	Teacher identifies nature of task and challenge for A grade answers and work is done on deconstructing and modelling the 'how and what' of this type of answer
3. Teacher not sure how to teach to A grade level	A teacher who does understand the nature of the task and challenge supports one who isn't in deconstructing and modelling the 'how and what' of this type of answer so there is clarity about what is required. Attendance at meetings held by examination boards is critical, as is using materials held by exam boards exemplifying A* responses

Reasons and solutions for underperformance

Epilogue

There is a process to go through in order to become the most effective leader you can. It starts with clarifying what you believe education should be about on a fundamental basis because this should underpin what you do in the classroom. Remind your colleagues of the absolute importance of focusing on learning and teaching as the core purpose of schools. Leadership of learning captures this core purpose of teachers and its leaders.

This vision then needs clarifying as to what should be happening on a day-to-day basis in your department's classrooms. This clarification can come through planning for both the short and medium term. Encourage colleagues to see content, process and resources as the three most important aspects of planning – because if this is effective then learning in the classroom is likely to be effective too. This can generate exciting and inspirational approaches to learning and can invigorate and inspire colleagues to deliver high quality lessons.

What comes next is possibly the hardest part of the role. What separates the highly effective leader from the good leader is the quality of their self-evaluation. Do you really know what is happening in your classrooms on a routine basis, and what evidence do you use to make these judgements? Does this evidence tell you where you are most effective and where there are areas for improvement? I have suggested taking evidence from performance data, work samples, pupil voice and lesson observations.

These represent most of the 'hard' skills needed to become effective, but then we have to consider what 'soft' skills make you most effective. The focus on leadership rather than management is clear from your title: you are a *subject leader*. Your leadership style should be person specific so it will change depending on the situation. But there is one preferred leadership style you should follow – transformational. This requires an

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understanding of emotional intelligence as well as techniques to promote coaching and democratic and affiliative working.

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the members of your team is the first step to getting the best out of them. Then, understanding the components of an effective team allows you to work on a 'best fit' basis to match your team's strengths with the elements of an effective team.

There is no doubt that the stresses of the role will challenge you – the secret is how you cope. Emotionally intelligent leaders use smiles and praise as powerful tools in their daily interaction with others as well as a coping mechanism for themselves. Knowing some techniques to manage tricky colleagues always helps, as does an approach that sees really difficult colleagues as being one of three types – a can't, a don't or a won't. Understanding which one they are, and then taking appropriate action, will promote the effectiveness of the team and its members.

Finally, the subject leader should always remind themselves why they went into teaching in the first place. If whatever you do is going to improve learning, then ultimately learning should be what you do.

The mediocre subject leader tells, the good subject leader explains, the superior subject leader demonstrates, the great subject leader inspires.

The role of a subject leader is one of the most important in any school, second only to that of the head teacher. Subject leaders are working in the 'engine room' of school life, expected to turn the vision, values and ethos of a school into reality.

If you are a newly appointed Head of Department the future may well feel daunting. You probably came into teaching to teach, rather than become a manager and leader. Where do you go to gain an insight into how the role should be carried out? Any training you have experienced up to this stage in your career probably hasn't focused on leadership and management. Any non-contact time on your timetable, devoted to running your department may not be enough.

So if you are 'time poor' and need a handy synthesis of the main aspects of the role this book is designed for you. If you are looking for a range of practical solutions to the challenges the role presents that are accessible and realistic this book is designed for you too.

It doesn't purport to be the definitive guide to Middle Leadership but it does try to focus on the absolute essentials of the role, that if implemented, will serve you and your school well.

Start your journey into leadership with this book.

"As a primary teacher I came at *The Subject Leader* wondering whether it was going to be just as applicable to (for example) a KS2 music co-ordinator as the head of a history department in a large secondary school. It is. *The Subject Leader* contains principles and advice to ensure you focus on the things that matter and just give a cursory nod to the things that don't. If your subject department was run along the lines Steve Garnett sets out, amongst other things your pupil targets would be more meaningful, staff meetings would contain less waffle and your department would be a place both teachers and pupils would want to be. If you put into practice the methodology of *The Subject Leader*, you can lead effectively as opposed to doing what we so often do – muddle through."

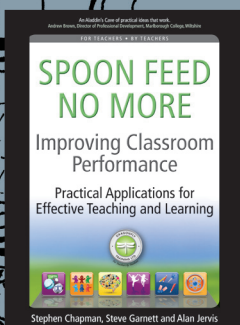
Paul Wrangles, illustrator, author, www.sparkyteaching.com

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Geraint Wilton, Lead Practitioner, St Ives School – A Technology College



Steve Garnett delivers innovative, exciting and inspirational learning and teaching focused inset. Such is the demand for his work that it not only involves working across the UK but also internationally in Europe, the Middle East and South East Asia too.



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