

Praise for How to be an Amazing Middle Leader

How to be an Amazing Middle Leader is a very inspiring read, with relevant anecdotes and useful tips with puzzling questions to reflect upon. The 5 As questionnaire identified my characteristics and helped me review on how I respond to day-to-day situations. I now have great ideas on how to use 'pupil talk' more effectively in my department and across the school.

**Reahgan Quartermaine,
PE advanced skills teacher and GCSE coordinator**

How can middle leaders be an outstanding practitioner, proactive manager and visionary leader? With her calm, authoritative narrative, Caroline Bentley-Davies mentors you through the myriad of skills, such as the art of delegation as well as balancing the needs of your team versus the pressures of school improvement, that are indispensable for a busy middle leader today. As an experienced head of department, I feel refreshed and rejuvenated after reading it: Caroline Bentley-Davies provides an excellent mix of advice when undertaking this daunting, demanding, exhilarating role and opportunities for reflection on your journey towards being an outstanding middle leader – this is professional learning at its best.

**Dawn German, head of modern languages,
The Clere School, Hampshire**

I really enjoyed the easy-to-access structure; you can dip in and out of it as well as read it from cover to cover. Very handy chapter titles, reflection points and relevant content. I particularly liked the quiz at the beginning which really made me focus on myself and my development instead of just learning about someone else's experience. Very refreshing. Very current and salient points regarding leadership and management too. Caroline's experiences are so relevant. Also enjoyed the 'What not to do' section which provided an amusing but sensible reminder not to fall into any traps – we all know a few of the huge characters Caroline mentions!

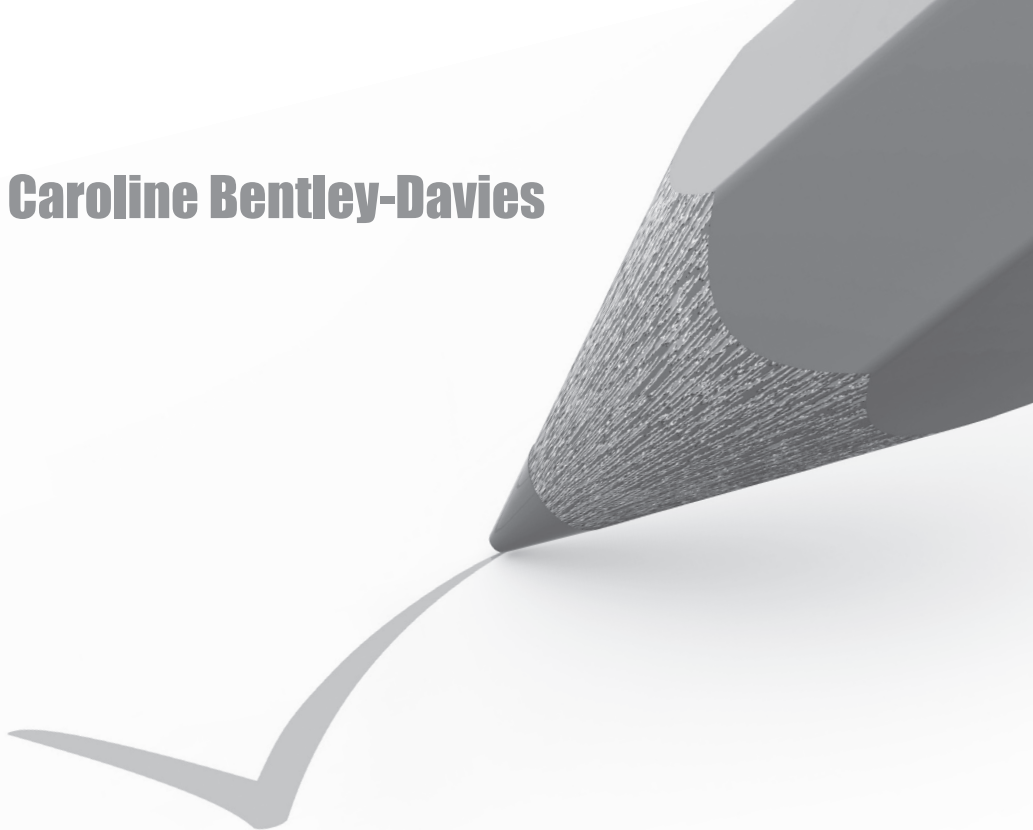
**Kate Lewis, head of English,
Arthur Mellows Village College, Peterborough**

This amazing book is a must read for anyone who aspires to be a high-performing middle leader. A concise, practical read that provides middle leaders with the strategies to ensure they have day-to-day impact in this crucial and challenging role. Bentley-Davies covers the role from every angle, from how to drive consistent teacher quality, through to how to effect long term change and influence whole school behaviours, this book delivers on it all. An essential read for any outstanding middle leader.'

**Sarah Martin, associate principal and
teaching and learning leader, Academies Enterprise Trust**

How to be an Amazing Middle Leader

Caroline Bentley-Davies



**How to be an
Amazing
Middle
Leader**



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To my brother, James Davies, an incredible man

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Introduction

How to be an Amazing Middle Leader in Schools

How do you find time to inspire others in the busy day-to-day running of a school? How can you learn to delegate and develop staff, rather than just 'dumping' tasks on them? Is it a leadership or management task? Today the myriad of skills needed to be an amazing middle leader in schools can seem mind boggling. What's more, middle leaders are taking up the leadership reins with fewer years of experience than ever before. Recently, when training middle leaders in London, several commented that they were just out of their first year of teaching and were now expected to lead and inspire others! It can seem like a very tall order indeed.

Here's the good news: whether you are new to the role, or are more experienced and aspiring to become a leader, leadership skills *can* be taught. You might not have ten years' leadership experience under your belt, but understanding the important tips, techniques and tools for improving your leadership skills are right at your fingertips.

We've all had some experience of leadership: being led or managed by others. Some of us will have been lucky enough to have experienced the transformational power of the gifted leader; the head teacher or business leader who inspired us to give our best, who communicated their vision for their organisation and, most importantly, had the skills to translate that into reality. When you meet leaders like this the effect

they have on everybody in an organisation is immense. Some of their skills appear obvious – clarity of vision, great communication skills and an analytical approach – but they also have other, less obvious skills. These include the way they empower others, deal with change, manage conflict and improve staff motivation and morale.

Some of us have been underwhelmed by the leaders we have worked with. Unfortunately the besieged, dictatorial or just plain ineffective leader is still a reality in some schools, although with increasing accountability their existence is likely to be much shorter lived than in previous years. Many leaders fall somewhere in the spectrum between outstanding and incompetent. Many of us, if truthful, admit that we have real strength and insight in some areas, but lack skill or confidence in others. It is important that we are willing to hold up a mirror to our skills and think about what we can do well and what we need to work on in order to improve ourselves, our staff and move our organisations forward.

I've trained hundreds of middle leaders in the last seven years and have met many more when I've been reviewing schools. This book has partly been written as a result of the emails I receive from the delegates that have attended my Outstanding Middle Leaders training courses, telling me their good news and sometimes requesting further advice on specific issues and examples of good books that they can refer to as a 'practical everyday guide'.

I've also met many excellent middle leaders with strategies, solutions and a heap of helpful ideas; more than can possibly be shoehorned into a couple of days of training. This book has been written so you can learn about the successes of others and avoid the mistakes and missteps that can occur when entering the world of management. It is important to learn from our misjudgements and errors – I've certainly made a few over the years! Making mistakes

can be a painful process and reading this book will help you to avoid a few of the common pitfalls. It will also equip you with fantastic tools and helpful tips so that you can strive to be the best middle leader you can, learning from the skills of others, reflecting on examples and getting involved in some of the activities suggested.

Being a successful middle leader in today's world of education is a very exciting proposition – I've been a middle leader in three schools and one large Local Authority. Now I train, coach and assist leaders in schools from across the UK and abroad. I have reviewed departments in many schools, undertaken inspections and met some cracking leaders (and believe me they come in a range of styles and packages!). I've observed how they've inspired, motivated and encouraged other staff so that the pupils in those schools flourish and achieve their very best. Some of their strategies are easily transferrable, others come from a clear personal vision, a high level of interpersonal skills and a relentless enthusiasm to do the best for the pupils in their charge by setting high standards and helping their staff achieve these.

How you use this book is up to you. However, there are a few guiding principles that underpin the way it has been written so understanding them will help you to get the most out of it. As you will realise on your quest to become an outstanding leader, excellence rarely just happens. Learning to lead is a dynamic process. Yes, I know you want some fail-safe tips about leading improvements, sharing your vision and dealing with tricky members of staff and passing Ofsted with flying colours. You can certainly use the book like this. You will gain lots of tips and strategies to use in your leadership role and it will provide food for thought to help you on your way.

However, becoming an amazing leader is a process. Becoming a really amazing leader might involve changing some habits, thinking about things afresh and looking at

problems from a completely new angle. With this in mind, at key moments there are **thinking points**. Thinking points let you know that the concept is really rather important and that you might wish to pause and reflect on it. They highlight a key issue connected with leadership and ask you: Is this true in your situation? Do you agree with it? What might be the implications of these actions? In many organisations things run exactly as they always have – sometimes this is a very dangerous thing. Being an amazing leader is having that ability to say, ‘Hey – why are we doing it this way?’ and to think actively and curiously about the reasons for these behaviours and actions. Thinking points will encourage you to do just that.

Similarly, at the end of some chapters there are **reflection moments**. These encourage you to note down a few things, asking questions such as: What are the three things that have helped you in this chapter? What has caused you to think? What might you want to try in your meetings or your planning? It also encourages you to record a couple of targets related to this area. As research has shown, writing down our intentions is a key way of ensuring that they happen. It provides not only a written reminder, but a commitment to try out and trial some new techniques or ideas. An amazing leader is never afraid to take a risk and try out something new. It’s up to you to make the effort to try them and evaluate them, and if they work (remember, not everything works first time – you might need to persevere) you can add them to your leadership repertoire. There is sufficient space in each section of the book for you to write these directly onto the page, but you might like to buy a small notebook and keep your intentions private. This also gives you the opportunity to review chapters as your experience grows as a leader and you can reflect upon your previous answers. Either way, I would urge you to jot down your views.

Feel free to dip into the book and read the chapters you need most. If you feel that an aspect of your leadership needs a boost in a particular area, feel free to start there. Each section makes sense on its own and has been written as a complete unit. Individual chapters also make good INSET material or are helpful for you to look at in detail as a way of improving your practice.

However, since this book is designed to take you on a journey, you will benefit most if you read it from start to finish. Section I looks at the aims, aspirations and skills of an amazing leader; Section II moves on to the practicalities of everyday management tasks, team building and ensuring your vision is shared; Section III looks at the important area of strategic planning and self-evaluation skills; Section IV tackles some of the concerns of leaders about how they will be viewed by Ofsted and what they need to know about this (although following the advice in the whole book will really help you prepare to face scrutiny). The book concludes with a chapter that considers some of the challenges that middle leaders face, as well as looking at how to deal with senior management team (SMT), school governors and external consultants.

This book is the result of visiting hundreds of schools and meeting thousands of middle leaders. A good leader is open-minded and willing to listen to others, so try out some of the techniques and ideas and let me know what works for you – or if you have an even better way of achieving amazing results then let me know! I am always keen to know about the tips and techniques that help you along the way. Like the pupils we teach, we are still developing and learning from our experiences and it is this openness that will set each of us on the right track to become an amazing middle leader.

So, let's get cracking!

Section I

The Skills of an Amazing Middle Leader

Chapter 1

Why We Need to Develop the Skills of an Amazing Middle Leader

So you are a middle leader – congratulations! Now you've decided that you want to be an *amazing* middle leader, let's look at how you can develop your skills to become exceptional. We'll begin with motivation.

People decide to become middle leaders for a whole host of reasons. Some know, right from the start of their teaching career, that the management path is right for them. They are not just interested in being the best Maths teacher they can possibly be, they desire to shape the mathematical experience for *all* the pupils in the school by becoming a curriculum leader. For these individuals, leadership is about seeking and shaping the opportunities of those around them; both the pupils and other teachers. In some cases, their leadership skills are obvious; they have a clear purpose and a relentless drive for leading improvements. Even from their teacher training days their ability to innovate and to inspire others was obvious.

Others are more reluctant leaders, perhaps realising that others in the school are looking to them for guidance, realising that over time they have developed some skills that could be used to encourage and inspire others, almost by osmosis. For some, their leadership skills sneak up on them.

A friend often protested that she didn't want to become a school leader but recently became a cracking deputy head teacher. However, this only happened when she met some external candidates being interviewed for the position and realised, 'Actually, I could do that and I think I'd probably do a much better job!' In her case, her confidence was increased by comparing herself to others in the role.

Are great leaders born -- not made?

Some people do appear 'born to lead', but others feel that they have had leadership thrust upon them through circumstance, perhaps by being the only subject specialist in the school, or through the sudden ill health or misfortune of others. Some observe other 'would-be leaders' and realise that they could do the job just as well, if not better than those around them. It doesn't matter *how* you decided to become a leader, what matters is that you did and that while you are leading you seek and strive to become the best leader you possibly can. It sounds relatively straightforward, doesn't it?

I have met a huge range of middle leaders in my role as an adviser, but when I first started on the leadership road in school I felt uncertain and unsure about my role. I had been promoted because an observant Ofsted inspector believed I could teach the much sought after 'outstanding lesson'. I was marked as having management potential. Teaching great lessons is an important aspect of a subject leader, not least because you should be a role model to others; however, there is much more to it than that. Being an outstanding teacher didn't mean that I knew how to set or share a vision, deal with budgets or resolve difficult issues with staff and pupils. These were all important challenges to overcome.

I was lucky in some respects as when I started on the leadership path it was common to 'shadow' and unofficially

help out, working alongside more experienced leaders (in those days, without any extra pay), rather than just gaining a quick promotion, as is more often the case now. The advantages to this rather old-fashioned approach are that it was possible to observe and reflect upon the leadership skills of others, and to trial things without having the actual weight of accountability. My head of department was extremely effective (he achieved a great deal), charismatic (he managed to keep us all 'on side' and got us working well for him), and he was extremely well organised and clear sighted (which impressed us and made sure that he actually got the things done he intended to). These aren't all characteristics that come naturally to all of us; however, observing those around us who are successful and effective is one way of helping us see what skills we value. It also helps us to see what strategies these successful people employ to get things done (and of course, to make sure that they are getting the right things done!). Hopefully in your school you will have some examples of excellent leadership to emulate and aspire to, but if you don't then this book will guide you through scenarios and examples for you to reflect on.

Do you need to be an expert about everything?

Developing the skills of an amazing middle leader takes time. It takes effort and ability to have a clear vision about the direction in which you want to take your team and to ensure that you take them on the journey with you. It is all very well rallying the troops, but it takes honesty and integrity to reflect on your own skills, and to consider your own achievements, future possibilities and current limitations. A good leader is not afraid to hold up a mirror to themselves – being honest about their own shortcomings is important. This is so they can be rectified and developed over time, making them a better leader. It does take confidence to be able to do this and to admit that no, you don't

actually know everything or have all of the answers – at least, not yet – but you are going to do your best to fill those gaps in your knowledge and expertise so that you and your team continue to make great progress.

Can you do it better?

A good leader realises that along with not having all of the answers all of the time, there is often a better way of doing something. The curriculum and the world of education (both through technology and through politics) means that teachers' jobs are ever changing. A good leader needs to be prepared and flexible enough not only to change with it, but to see the opportunities and obstacles and lead their team over them, reshaping and changing direction as necessary. It takes a good pinch of courage to admit that we don't know everything, even if we have been teaching and leading others a long time, and to be willing and prepared to look at things through fresh eyes.

How long should you have been teaching before you are 'leadership ready'?

People often ask me if there is a length of time they need to have served to become an effective leader. I've met heads of department who have been teaching for twenty-five years who have been innovative and inspirational. I've met some leaders who've only been teaching a couple of years and are highly effective too. Sometimes more so than more 'experienced hands'. They know that because of their obvious inexperience they need to think carefully and really consider their actions and not be afraid to ask others for good advice. It is about having a leadership mindset and following through with the correct actions, aspiring to be

the best leader you possibly can for your pupils and team; but it's also being alert to the fact that there might be much better ways of doing things and, if there are, being keen to ferret them out.

Never be complacent!

Complacency is the death of good leadership. I was painfully reminded of this when I was an adviser for a Local Authority. One of my least popular tasks was, in the early weeks of September, visiting the schools who had failed to meet their targets (advisers, after all, are held accountable for the results of schools in their patch). I remember visiting one department where, for a couple of years running, the GCSE results had been in a steady decline. I quizzed the head of department and she shrugged and repeated with hands held aloft that 'we've done what we can ... we're not sure what had happened (again!), and of course, we'll continue to do the best we can this year'. I made my way back to my car with a heavy heart, knowing that without external intervention it was unlikely there would be any real improvement and I would have some difficult follow-up conversations in the following months.

I set off to visit the last school that had also suffered a dip in results that year. I was prepared to be much gentler with the head of department since she was new to the school, and hadn't even been around when the pupils had sat their exams. I didn't really expect much of a response to the question: 'What do you think happened to explain these results?' but I was exceptionally impressed when the head of department gave me her clearly thought-out ideas *and* told me what steps she had already taken to improve things. Not satisfied with the evidence of underachievement, she had scrutinised some of the papers that had been returned with her team (these were the heady days of the SATs papers)

and she saw there was evidence that some had been under marked so she sent these back for a re-mark. She also noted that there were some weaknesses in the pupils' approaches to one of the questions, so in consultation with her second in department she made plans to amend some schemes of work to tackle these skills more explicitly. She had produced a very brief action plan with not only intended actions, but also dates and evidence, and talked me through it. She then explained that these were the *only* immediate actions that she was going to take, because if she changed too much in one area the balance of the curriculum would shift and pupils would do less well on other important areas. This was another wise statement; we all know what can happen when we go overboard in one area – it creates an imbalance in the curriculum which creates a different problem for us later on!

Although only a new leader, she had already demonstrated much better leadership skills than the much more experienced head of department who had been 'leading' in the other school for the past fifteen years. It was no surprise when the new head of department's team rapidly improved its results; and as for the other school, well that's a different story.


So as an amazing leader we have to be willing to think and sometimes rethink the way we go about doing things, whether that is planning to raise achievement, dealing with staff members or deciding how best to spend the budget. What is clear about exceptional leaders is that they are always aware that there might be a better way of doing things and that they still have plenty to learn about teaching, getting the best out of their team members and, ultimately, themselves as leaders.

How to be an **Amazing Middle Leader**

Today the myriad skills needed to be an amazing middle leader in schools can seem mind-boggling.

Whether you are new to this role or are more experienced and aspiring to become an outstanding middle leader, this book will give you the vital information you need in order to understand what is really important about your role and how to improve your key skills. This practical guide covers:

- **The skills of an amazing middle leader**
- **How to inspire others against the backdrop of the busy day to day running of a school**
- **Leading a team and getting the right things done**
- **Effective delegation**
- **Developing excellence in your team and sharing good practice**
- **Preparation for inspection**
- **Middle leader challenges and next steps**



“Very refreshing. Very current.”

Kate Lewis, head of English, Arthur Mellows Village College

“As an experienced head of department, I feel rejuvenated after reading it: Caroline Bentley-Davies provides an excellent mix of advice when undertaking this daunting, demanding, exhilarating role and opportunities for reflection on your journey towards being an outstanding middle leader – this is professional learning at its best.”

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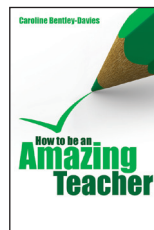
Sarah Martin, associate principal and teaching and learning leader

“A very inspiring read, with relevant anecdotes and useful tips.”

Reahgan Quartermaine, PE advanced skills teacher, GCSE co-ordinator



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