



## Book Review

### Reviewed by

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### Citation

Wilson, J. M., & Levine, A. (2018). *The human side of changing education: how to lead change with clarity, conviction and courage*. Corwin, A SAGE Company.

129 pages

Paperback

\$31.45

**Keywords:** change systems, change agents, school leadership, human development, redesigning learning systems, postindustrial models of education, self-efficacy, sustained leadership

Julie M. Wilson's *The human side of changing education: How to lead change with clarity, conviction and courage* is a practical and applied approach to initiating change in the most important aspect of education, the humans who make it happen. Throughout the book, readers are taken through the process of identifying and setting a vision, examining redesigning systems, identifying factors that lead to successful change, and finally reflecting on oneself as a leader in the process. Wilson offers practical, common sense approaches to tackling change while at the same time bringing in anecdotes to make connections as well as incorporating activities and exercises to implement with teams. Visuals and figures throughout the chapters bring another aspect of understanding to the concepts and ideas discussed. Each of the five chapters ends with a section identifying key points of the chapter as well as questions for reflection and action and notes sections, making this book a practical choice for book study.

Although the need for change has always been a pressing issue in a system that is slow to respond, Wilson's *The human side of changing education* can find exceptional relevance in our current times in education policy as unforeseen circumstances such as the move toward online or hybrid learning models due to the health pandemic are now forcing change within our school

systems and this model is most likely shaping up to be the type of scheduling schools will see starting this fall (Superville, 2020). This book helps the reader to create their own individual path, while keeping the hearts and minds of the humans who enact these changes at the center of the process to lead systematic change in their communities through vision and empowerment. Wilson also touches upon the ideas of unlearning practices of ineffective instruction (including learners as receptacles of knowledge) often mirrored by Freire (2018) as a means to bring about change.

In the introduction of the book, Wilson sheds light on the processes of adult learning that require unlearning of the industrial approaches, including the consumption model of education that they are accustomed to (perhaps from their own schooling), and move toward a post-industrial type of education that allows for creativity and personalization to flourish. Self-efficacy and human development are identified as keys to helping learners to take ownership over their change processes. The importance of schools as agents to support human development is brought to light and a roadmap for change, ultimately leading to the “North Star” which is later described in Chapter 1, is laid out to help make sense of the messiness and complexity of change itself. Wilson keeps humans as the root of the change reminding the reader that systems follow after change happens first on an individual level.

Chapter 1, entitled “What’s Worth Learning? Your North Star,” begins by focusing on what is deemed important for learning communities and thinking of this vision as the “north star” and the guiding force of the system. Wilson goes on to explain how today’s schools and education programs cannot expect children to learn “skills and habits of mind” (p. 11) if adults are not afforded the same opportunity. Wilson further explains that in order for adults to move away from their industrialized ideas of education and breakthrough to the much-needed post-industrial era, worthy skills are needed to be held by the adults themselves. These 8 worthy skills include 1. self-directed learning, 2. creativity and innovation, 3. planning, adaptability, and agility, 4. strengths awareness and application, 5. self-efficacy, 6. global citizenship, 7. relationship building, and 8. critical thinking and problem solving. When these worthy skills are held on behalf of the adult, education can begin to shift from a culture of the “banking method” (Tyler, 1949) to one in which both students and teachers are empowered to ask questions and become agents of their own learning through the process of change.

In Chapter 2, Wilson focuses on the process of redesign and delves deeper into the ideals of moving the education system into the post-industrial era. Again, keeping the educator’s adult learning experience at the forefront of change in order to then, in turn, be reflected in their work that they do with their students, this chapter challenges the pedagogy needed in order to allow for risks to be taken. Examples are given for potential “north stars” that may be the driving force of communities’ educational change including self-directed learning, creativity and innovation, and strengths awareness and application. Wilson goes further to provide questions for these examples

in which examination of pedagogy can begin to unfold. A listing of characteristics of both industrial and postindustrial schools helps the reader to see the difference between the two models and internalize where their own school systems may lie on this spectrum in order for deep culture changes to begin to unfold. The idea that school systems redefining their own successes should be of importance is discussed although bureaucratic mandates such as achievement test results may define it otherwise. Chapter 2 also examines the dimensions of three different approaches to change including directed change, planned change, and iterative changing. Wilson explains the need for differentiation of the types of change in order to proliferate the paradigm shift from the industrial to postindustrial model and ultimately prepare the students for their own futures in a world that is yet to be revealed.

Chapter 3 drives home the need for deep culture change and suggests that the move from the patriarchal institutions of over a century ago must be overcome. Wilson lays the framework for success with five success factors to provoke this change of organizational structure that moves from learners (both adult and children) being receptacles of knowledge to becoming active participants in their own learning experiences. This shift focuses on the teacher as the change agent, moving away from compliance and control. Wilson uses an anecdote throughout the chapter to remind the reader of the importance of building trust first and foremost before moving forward in the process of human development.

Practical tools and strategies are provided in Chapter 4 that can be selected to develop success for the factors outlined in Chapter 3. Therefore, these tools revolve around sustained leadership and a visionary school board, a shared vision for change, unleashing talent and building teams, rethinking the use of time and space, and overhauling the assessment structure of learning and school performance. A number of real-life practical examples and exercises, including such strategies as “Measuring What We Value” are given and include resources and tools in the Appendix so that readers may bring these directly to their own teams to utilize. These exercises outlined in Chapter 4 help shift the mindset of the people involved from that of a compliance mindset to that of a creator, seeking and identifying one’s own path toward change.

Chapter 5 is one in which the reader is invited to self-reflect and see themselves as the hero archetype in Joseph Campbell’s “The Hero’s Journey.” Through explaining the stages of the journey, Wilson challenges the reader to find their current placement between the known and the unknown world and reminds us that anyone in any position, formal or informal, can be called to lead change. Risk-taking, failure, and roadblocks are all part of the process and must not deter the leader from their calling along their own individual hero’s journey.

The North Star analogy is brought full circle as Wilson ends with a conclusion that includes inspiration for taking the first steps toward much needed change while staying grounded in your “why?” As arguably recommended components of the process, the importance of human

connection, empathy, and embracing possibilities with like-minded people are discussed as elements needed to successfully bring about change as being an individual change agent. The book concludes with inspirational notions toward making a difference and ultimately, rising to the occasion to be the change that you wish to see in the world.

What Wilson does well is recognize that change needed to transform schools is a human endeavor and she empowers readers to unlearn industrial ways of thinking about education so that true reform can begin to happen which can be held in comparison to critical theory perspectives of Freire (2018). With the crisis of the pandemic at hand and the need for change in our education system arguably needed now more than ever, Wilson challenges the reader to take the first steps on their own journey as a leader. She then provides examples and exercises within the book that are able to be taken straight to teams and put into practice. The framework provided in *The human side of changing education* is both timely and necessary to move individuals, schools, and education systems forward into the unknown with both determination and conviction.

## References

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