

Book Notes

LEADING WITH HEART AND SOUL: 30 INSPIRING LESSONS OF FAITH, LEARNING,
AND LEADERSHIP FOR EDUCATORS

by Irvin L. Scott

Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2024. 205 pp. \$25.00 (paper), \$15.00 (e-book).

In her book *Identity Affirming Classrooms*, Erica Buchanan-Rivera (2022) writes, “When I redirected my life to a process of learning and unlearning, I could feel a shift in my pedagogy, leadership and my humanity” (20). With headlines echoing the seismic shifts in our society—from the pandemic’s impact on learning, to contentious debates over affirmative action, to global political tensions seeping into campus life—educators find themselves grappling with unprecedented challenges. As they confront a reality starkly different from what they might have predicted, educators are called to not only adapt but to undergo profound transformations in their beliefs, practices, and understanding of their role in shaping the future, leaving them wondering, *What is the path forward?*

Offering a compelling roadmap, Irvin Scott’s *Leading with Heart and Soul: 30 Inspiring Lessons of Faith, Learning, and Leadership for Educators* chronicles the author’s remarkable three-decade odyssey as teacher, principal, superintendent, foundation leader, and Harvard professor while striving to be a dedicated husband and a present father. For education leaders looking to infuse their work with values, beliefs, and self-awareness, Scott offers practical guidance rooted in his own experiences and shares insightful lessons he has learned on his journey through the “Education Ecosystem.” Inspired by principles of ecology, this ecosystem framework establishes the various roles inside and outside school systems and how they interconnect, providing a means to understand and navigate the complex dynamics of educational roles and emphasizing the importance of holistic leadership centered on empathy and purpose. Throughout the book, Scott illustrates the lessons with real-world examples using stories and anecdotes from his own career, bringing the lessons to life and demonstrating how they can be applied in various leadership contexts. Scott characterizes his book as “a gift” to educators, one that blends the knowledge generously imparted to him by influential leaders with his own experiences as an educator and administrator.

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He describes his career in education as “full of experiences and interactions, many of them complex and difficult to endure, but most of them fulfilling and life-giving” (xxi).

Scott encourages readers to actively engage with the text by using the three guideposts that appear at the end of each chapter: “My Personal Reflections,” “A Quote for My Story,” and “The Story Behind the Quote.” These opportunities for personal reflection help readers document salient takeaways and consider their own role in “making our nation’s educational system a better place for students to learn” (xxxv). This introspective journey is captured by the incorporation of thirty quotes, each representing a year of Scott’s extensive tenure in the field of education. He was inspired by his colleague and friend, Deborah Jewell-Sherman, who uses quotes as a “community strategy” (xx) to leave people with a sense of deep meaning. He maintains that “leaders learn in video, but they lead in snapshots” (xx), suggesting that while leaders may accumulate knowledge and insights over time, when exercising leadership they must synthesize these varied experiences into a coherent story, capturing the truths, feelings, and experiences of the people they lead. He explains, “Every person has a story worth telling. At a basic level, to be human is to listen to one another’s stories” (xvii).

Each of the ten chapters is introduced by an epigraph—such as “You can’t raise America’s children if yours don’t know you” (65), an admonition to educators to be present for the children they are parenting, and “Never forget the bridge that brought you over” (185), a heartfelt reminder from Scott’s mother to honor the people who served as guideposts and sherpas through the mountains and valleys of life—to evoke an intimate experience through engaging and accessible anecdotes. Each chapter delves into key topics, including vision, disappointment, faith, and servant-leadership, offering invaluable lessons and practical advice and illustrating a commitment to vulnerability that Scott hopes will “cause readers to pull out their own pen . . . and start writing” (xxxv). Scott’s exhortation for leaders to “cherish the person; challenge the employee” (83) in chapter 5, for example, recalls a request by a teacher that he understand that “the work of education touches educators at a personal level” (89). His candid and humble approach adds a refreshing authenticity to this insightful book.

Whether acknowledging pain and trauma, such as the time he knelt on the concrete next to a student who was stabbed by another student, or highlighting the importance of his role as a husband and father, as poignantly described in the section entitled “Goodnight, Leon,” when he left an important dinner meeting to be present with his family, Scott’s stories collectively emphasize faith and the journey of becoming. Scott acknowledges that he has made plenty of mistakes and has had challenging days, but he emphasizes that he has strived to use these experiences as “opportunities to mature” (108). In one of the concluding chapters, he describes his role as the academic superintendent of high schools in the Boston Public Schools, recounting the challenge of

creating a program to reengage students who had stopped coming to school. This endeavor was driven by his belief that the issue wasn't solely that these students had failed school but, rather, that the educational system had failed them. In a heartening and inspiring conclusion, he writes of how the mayor at the time, Tom Menino, chose to forego the opportunity to attend the nomination of Barack Obama as the Democratic nominee for the president to attend a citywide celebration honoring students who transitioned from credit-recovery programs to becoming high school graduates.

Through carefully selected anecdotes, *Leading with Heart and Soul* vividly portrays the challenges and triumphs Scott has encountered navigating, adapting to, learning, and leading with unwavering faith. This reservoir of wisdom extends beyond the realm of just educational professionals, offering valuable insights to anyone grappling with today's societal uncertainties and striving to enact positive change in their lives and communities. How can we shift our lives toward a continuous process of learning and unlearning? The compelling narratives within this book serve as exemplary case studies from which valuable lessons can be extracted. In the words of bell hooks (1994), "learning at its most powerful could indeed liberate" (4). In a world often consumed by relentless to-do lists, perfectionism, and the pursuit of quantity over quality, Scott's book emerges as a profound instrument for liberation from useless frenetic activity and self-criticism, inviting us to embrace the richness of the human journey. It's a call to action for educators to lead with intention, compassion, and grace.

PENNIE GREGORY

Editor, *Harvard Educational Review*

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