



BY DENNIS SPARKS

Leaders Relate, Repeat, and Reframe

People can change the deep-rooted patterns of how they think, feel, and act.

— Alan Deutschman

Imagine that you have a serious illness that requires you to change your life style or risk death. Further imagine that your doctor gives you explicit instructions about what you must do if you are improve your chances of living. And then imagine that within one year, you—and 90 percent of people like you—will have fallen away from whatever good intentions you had to change and returned to an unhealthy lifestyle. That’s the reality described by Alan Deutschman in *Change or Die: The Three Keys to Change at Work and in Life*.

To help readers understand what does and doesn’t work, Deutschman offers compelling examples from health care, prisons, and major corporations. Deutschman dismisses as ineffective several widely-used approaches to changing ourselves and others: facts (human beings are not as rational as we think we are), fear (at best it’s a short-term motivator), and force (there are many ways it can be resisted).

What does influence people to change? Deutschman offers three linked elements he calls relate, repeat, and reframe. *Relate* underscores the importance of sustained relationships with individuals and groups

that inspire and sustain hope and provide support. Such relationships can be formed with teachers, mentors, support groups, or communities. *Repeat* means learn, practice, and master new skills until they become habits. And *reframe* means providing other ways to think about a situation. Because established frames resist facts and reasoned arguments, deep-rooted beliefs and conceptual frameworks must be identified and altered to support desired changes.

Change or Die explains why well-intentioned innovations in schools often expire rather than thrive. Leaders often rely on facts, fear, and force to motivate change rather than providing hope that student learning can be improved or creating a genuine sense of community and teamwork that supports the implementation of new practices (relate). Teachers’ learning is seldom sufficiently deep and sustained enough to enable deep understanding of desired practices and the development of new habits of mind and behavior (repeat). In addition, leaders often do not appreciate the power of underlying cognitive frameworks to resist new practices, nor do they understand how new frameworks can be developed (reframe). Each of these topics will be addressed more fully in upcoming columns.

When leaders create relationships that inspire hope, help establish new habits in themselves and others, and stimulate new ways of thinking, they lead through learning.

Dennis Sparks

DENNIS SPARKS is an “itinerant teacher” who assists leadership teams in developing their capacity to continuously improve teaching and learning in all classrooms. He is emeritus executive director of the National Staff Development Council, where he served as executive director from 1984-2007. He can be reached at thinkingpartner@comcast.net.

