

SCHOOL TURNAROUND LEADER ACTIONS

1. Focus on a Few Early Wins; Use the Momentum

- * **Collect and analyze data:** Successful turnaround leaders are focused, fearless data hounds. Initially, turnaround leaders personally analyze data about the organization's performance to identify high-priority problems that can be fixed quickly.
- * **Make action plan based on data:** Turnaround leaders make an action plan that includes annual goals and major steps, with enough detail that each group in the school community knows specifically what they need to do differently. This allows people to focus on changing what they do, rather than worrying about impending change. Plan should cover years 1 – 3, with more detail for year 1.
- * **Focus on a few early wins in year 1:** Successful turnaround leaders choose a few high-priority goals with visible payoffs and use early success to gain momentum. Although limited in scope, these "wins" are high-priority, not peripheral, elements of organization performance, and they are bold in speed and magnitude of change. Early wins are critical for motivating staff and disempowering naysayers.

2. Lead a Turnaround Campaign

- * **Communicate a positive vision:** Turnaround leaders start their turnaround campaign by communicating a clear picture of success and its benefits. This motivates others to contribute their discretionary effort.
- * **Gain support of key influencers:** Turnaround leaders gain support of trusted influencers among the staff and community, then work through these people to influence others.
- * **Silence critics with speedy success:** Turnaround leaders use early wins not just for success in their own right, but to cast vocal naysayers as champions of failure. This reduces leader time spent on "politics" and increases time spent managing for results.
- * **Help staff personally feel problems:** Turnaround leaders use various tactics to help staff empathize with—or "put themselves in the shoes of"—those whom they serve, to truly feel the problems that the status quo causes and feel motivated to change.

3. Get the Right Staff; Right the Remainder

- * **Require all staff to change:** When turnaround leaders implement an action plan, they make the change mandatory, not optional, beginning with accountable team leaders in the organization.
- * **Make necessary staff and leader replacements:** Successful turnaround leaders typically do not replace all or even most of the staff, but often replace team leaders who organize and drive change. After initial turnaround success, staff who do not make needed changes either leave or are removed by the leader.

4. Drive Decisions with Open-Air Data

- * **Measure and report progress frequently:** Turnaround leaders set up systems to measure and report interim results often. This enables them to rapidly discard failed tactics and increase the successful tactics essential for fast results.
- * **Require decision-makers to share data and solve problems:** Turnaround leaders report key staff results visibly and often. All key staff, starting with team leaders, must share periodic results in open sessions, shifting discussions from excuse making and blaming to problem solving.

5. Break Organization Norms

- * **Break organization norms:** In a failing organization, existing practices contribute to failure. Successful turnaround leaders break rules and norms to achieve success. Deviating to achieve early wins shows that new action gets new results.

6. Do What Works; Raise the Bar

- * **Focus on successful tactics, halt others:** Successful turnaround leaders quickly discard tactics that do not work and spend more money and time on tactics that do. This pruning and growing process focuses limited resources where they will best improve results.
- * **Resist touting progress as ultimate success:** Turnaround leaders are not satisfied with partial success. They report progress, but keep the organization focused on high goals. When a goal is met, they are likely to raise the bar. Merely better is not enough.

For more about staffing models that create teams of teacher-leaders to support school turnaround principals, see OpportunityCulture.org.