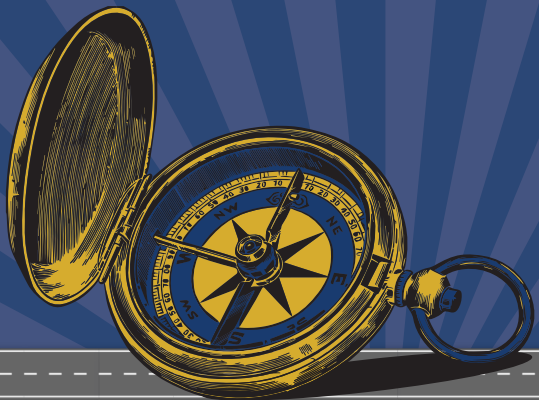




# Resilient, Representative Leadership™ Guidebook

*featuring the*  
10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color ©

**MCCEL**



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# LETTER FROM OUR CO-FOUNDERS

## A Tale of Two Leadership Journeys

*Educators of Color and Equity-Minded Partners,  
Allies, and Co-Conspirators:*

“I, too, am America,” Langston Hughes wrote in 1919. It was a plea, an exhortation, a bold statement of self-worth and belonging in a country that routinely, systematically, and legally denied African Americans the opportunities — and basic sense of safety and human dignity — afforded to white people. It was the era of Jim Crow laws, of state-sanctioned segregation, when schools, restaurants, shops, entire neighborhoods, in some places just about *everything*, was “separate but equal.”

Sent to the kitchen when the company arrives, behind closed doors, relegated to the margins, a microcosm of an unjust world, Hughes’ protagonist is nevertheless filled with resolve. “But I laugh, and eat well, and grow strong,” he proclaims. “Tomorrow,” he declares, “I’ll be at the table.”

More than a century later, Hughes’ poem continues to resonate. Racism looks different today, but it is no less pervasive. At home, in our schools and workplaces, across society at large, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and all communities of color are systematically denied the resources, respect, and opportunities afforded to our white friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

As a result, we do not have enough people of color entering careers in education. Even fewer are advancing into the upper echelons of leadership. And too many teachers and leaders of color leave the profession each year, burnt out from unrealistic expectations, inadequate support, and routine discrimination. The status quo is a problem for those of us who value diversity *prima facie*. It’s also doing a real disservice to our students and education system as a whole, which is more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse than ever.

In fact, a large and growing body of research finds better academic and other outcomes for our students, both white students and students of color, when educators of color have greater opportunities to teach and lead. After years of pandemic-induced disruption and widening opportunity and achievement gaps, it is imperative that our schools become more welcoming and inclusive spaces for communities of color. Accelerating learning is a priority for all of us, and increasing the strength and diversity of the educator workforce — and educational leadership, in particular — is absolutely essential to those efforts.

We are educators who have had many opportunities to lead: as teachers, instructional coaches, deans, assistant principals, principals, assistant and deputy superintendents, and superintendents. We each got a seat at the table. But leadership is a journey, not a destination. And due to the color of our skin — Harrison a Black leader and Steve a white leader — our pathways to and through leadership have looked and felt quite different.

Harrison has spent large portions of his career in spaces where he was made to feel unwelcome. He has been treated differently, received differently, with different expectations thrust upon him, all because of his race. His leadership journey has been filled with potholes, unexpected detours, and unclear or missing signage — when the roads weren't closed to him altogether. Like educators of color across the country, and people of color spanning our nation's history, Harrison figured it out *and* achieved remarkable results for the students and communities he served. But his success navigating our schools often felt precarious, unsustainable, fueled by fierce resolve and a series of chance encounters with fellow travelers who offered invaluable roadside assistance.

Steve, on the other hand, fits the mold. His race matches that of 78% of America's school leaders and 91% of our nation's superintendents. It's not that Steve wasn't qualified for his many leadership roles. It's not that he hadn't done the work. And it's not that he didn't encounter any challenges along the way. He was, he had, and he did. But Steve didn't *also* have to contend with unspoken rules and unwritten expectations as he navigated leadership opportunities. Steve has had access to the equivalent of Google Maps, built-in systems enabling him to relatively easily plan and optimize his routes, pivot quickly to locate a rest stop or charging station, and access up-to-date information and tools that address his emerging needs along his leadership journey.

Our disparate experiences are, in part, why we co-founded MCEL (Men of Color in Educational Leadership): to create spaces for male leaders of color to openly discuss issues of race in public education and to address the common challenges they face. We created a table just for our guys, where they can voice their frustrations and commiserate, and get the tools, professional development, and support they need to reset, problem-solve, and get back to work, energized and restored, ready for whatever comes their way.

Through our work with leaders of color, we've heard again and again that existing leadership frameworks and solutions are helpful only up to a point. There is tremendous appetite for resources designed specifically to help educators of color grow as leaders and flourish in our careers.

Last year, we embarked on a nationwide tour to more deeply understand the practices and approaches that a broad network of both male and female educational leaders of color rely on to survive and thrive in their careers. These conversations revealed a wide range of perspectives and lived experiences; despite their differences, these leaders expressed a fundamentally shared conception of what it means, and what it takes, to successfully navigate the American education sector as a person of color.

The 10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color © are the result of that nearly year-long exploration. The competencies comprise our Resilient, Representative Leadership™ Framework, a coherent, yet flexible roadmap for educators of color on the leadership journey. It's our inclusive, "big tent" version of the Green Book or the Jewish Travel Guide, popular resources developed to promote safe, stress-free, joyful leisure and adventure for travelers legally discriminated against in 20th-century America due to their racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. (Read on to learn about the travel guides that inspired the ethos of this publication.)



This Resilient, Representative Leadership Guidebook consolidates the advice we share with our friends and colleagues of color who are planning their pathways into educational leadership, rerouting around a career roadblock, or navigating a difficult or unexpected development in their leadership journey. It's where we want our white allies to turn, too, when they need advice and support to be part of the big, bold systemic solutions we so desperately need.

Our vision is that the Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework can, first and foremost, support educators of color in more deeply understanding the specific practices of outstanding, transformational leaders of color in our schools. By illuminating oft-overlooked strengths and highlighting opportunities for intentional growth, the 10 Essential Competencies offer entry points for educators of color to begin your leadership journeys and guideposts to help you navigate your leadership pathways, from the classroom to the board room and beyond. *You, too, are America*, and we're here to help you get — and keep — your seat at the table.

And we know that creating more equitable, joyful leadership journeys for educators of color takes all of us, working together. Emboldening resilient leaders of color without corollary systems change is just another recipe for burnout. The Resilient, Representative Leadership Toolkit includes aligned, adaptable, actionable resources for equity-minded allies of all racial, ethnic, and cultural identities to be great co-pilots to leaders of color along their journeys. Further, it offers guidance for local, state, and federal officials on how to foster school systems that serve as true welcome centers — places that break down barriers and create greater opportunities for educators of color at all stages of their careers.

If this resource were one of the 20th-century travel pamphlets that inspired us, we would hope for it to get dog-eared and marked up from regular use, passed from one person to the next, its worn cover and creased pages a testament to the immense value our collective wisdom brings to bear on your leadership journey. We hope you bookmark the webpage, copy the reflection templates into your weekly planner, adapt the discussion prompts for your meeting agendas, and text or email the most useful tools and practical advice to your friends and colleagues. We also encourage you to let us know what resonates most and which tools would help you on the next leg of your leadership journey, so we can incorporate your feedback into the next edition.

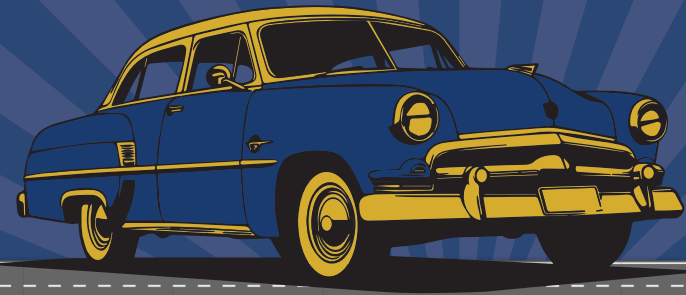
No matter your role, no matter your background, we're glad you're here. Together, we can make leadership a more accessible, welcoming, and sustainable experience for educators of color — and, in so doing, foster a more just and equitable future for all of our children and communities.

## In Partnership,

### Harrison Peters and Steve Gering

CO-FOUNDERS  
MCEL (MEN OF COLOR IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP)





## OUR INSPIRATION

Guidebooks Focused on Safe,  
Comfortable, Joyful Travel

A century ago, the proliferation of affordable, assembly-line-manufactured automobiles paired with the construction of an immense national highway system transformed American life. People of all races and ethnicities were more connected than ever, having greater opportunity to explore new parts of the country through the convenience of their very own car. It was an exciting time to live in the United States.

But well into the second half of the 20th century, segregation was still legal. Racial, ethnic, and cultural prejudice was pervasive. Excitement to explore and enjoy the heretofore untraveled road was a risky, stressful, even dangerous proposition when you didn't know whether someone who looked like you would be welcome in new parts.

Members of racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities — especially Black travelers, but also Jewish Americans facing persistent anti-Semitism, Mexican-Americans during the periods of forced repatriation and the coercive bracero program, Japanese Americans during and in the aftermath of World War II, Indigenous Americans who were increasingly living off reservation land as a result of the government's termination policy, and so many others — needed to carefully plan their itinerary, have contingencies, and be prepared in ways that a typical white traveler did not.

Where could a Black family comfortably dine in South Carolina? Which roadside motels in the Catskills would welcome a Jewish couple on an anniversary trip? How should an American-born Chicana respond to questions from a local official about her "homeland"? How could a Japanese family safely complete their errands in 1950s-era Los Angeles? Had that general store in Denver ever catered to a Native American customer? What do I do if I accidentally find myself in an unfamiliar and hostile situation?

These types of questions were on the mind of Victor Hugo Green, an African-American mail carrier from Harlem, when he traveled — with a great deal of uncertainty and discomfort — with his wife to her hometown of Richmond, VA. They made it there and back safely, but the journey was fraught. The mental load of those questions, about the relative ease (or not) of their interactions and very real safety concerns along their chosen route, meant that what should have been a pleasant family vacation was instead a source of stress and anxiety.

But not traveling — unable to connect with family and friends, to enjoy the thrill of adventure — was not an option.

When he returned home, Green consulted with other mail carriers in the region and compiled a resource that listed the names and locations of New York City-area businesses that welcomed African-American customers. It was the first edition of what would become known as the "bible of Black travel" and it wouldn't be the last. In the years that followed, the Green Book expanded beyond the New York region to include hotels, restaurants, drugstores, beauty salons, and other shops across the United States and, later, the world, whose owners — people of all races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds — welcomed Black customers.

With more than 2 million copies in circulation at its height, the Green Book is the most well-known such guide of the era, but it was by no means the only one. Notably, Green was inspired by the Jewish Vacation Guides, first published in 1916, which catered to Jewish travelers seeking respite from discrimination ubiquitous in New York City.

These guides, along with advice dispensed through newspapers, oral traditions, and neighborly conversations, were a survival response to discrimination. Yet their ultimate goal was more energizing and empowering: to proactively support safe, stress-free, joyful leisure and adventure for Americans of all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. “For Rest — Relaxation — Recreation,” the 1936 Green Book stated. “With the introduction of this travel guide... it has been our idea to give the Negro traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trips more enjoyable.”

In addition to business listings, these guides often offered a range of practical guidance for travelers facing discrimination. Much of this advice was just that — practical — logistically useful for any traveler setting out on the open road. The 1937 publication of the Green Book offered guidance on “Preparedness,” including how to change a flat tire as well as tune-up and maintenance schedules. The 1938 edition included a whole section on “Safe Driving Rules.” The 1962 edition extolled the opportunity to travel by plane, along with advice on dressing in layers for the voyage.

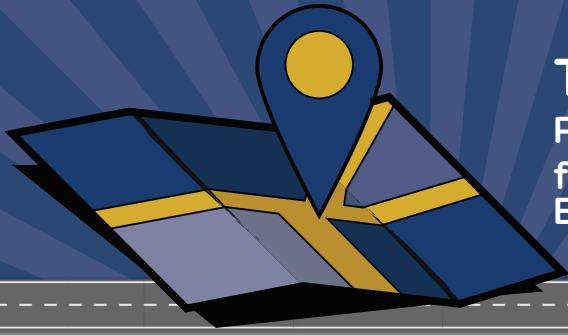
Such tips were of utmost importance to travelers facing discrimination, for whom the availability of help or the ability to adjust course mid-trip should something go wrong was often unknown. And for whom danger — people harboring ignorance, scorn, or worse — could very well be lurking nearby. The risks associated with travel were greater for Americans of color; so, too, was the importance of their planning and the tools they brought along for the journey.

These travel guides were a window into the experience of Americans who confronted discrimination due to their racial, ethnic, or cultural identity. They showcased shared hopes, desires, and dreams — to explore, to expand one’s direct knowledge of the wider world — along with shared experiences of both the pleasures and challenges of travel. They also opened doors for others to partake in travel, offering guidance and tips on how to chart a route and prepare for what might otherwise have felt like an impossible endeavor. And many of these guides benefited from the contributions of white business owners; in this way, the travel guides illuminated the role white allies played in supporting initiatives led by and for people of color and other marginalized communities to create a more open, connected, and inclusive world.

We draw inspiration from these guidebooks in our work to promote safe, comfortable, joyous leadership journeys for educators of color. We’ve designed this resource as an homage to these travel guides, and we hope you feel the imprint of previous generations of Americans whose leadership and resilience in the face of injustice created greater and more equitable opportunities for us today.

That work continues. We also hope that our guide feels firmly oriented toward the future we are creating, together, through our work to support more resilient, representative leadership in our schools and society at large. The Green Book authors anticipated “a day in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States.” We, too, are hopeful that there will be a day when our guide for educational leaders of color will become unnecessary, as Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, multi-racial, and other educators of color will have equitable opportunities to grow and thrive as leaders for our nation’s schools.

In the meantime, we invite you to explore opportunities for each of us, no matter our racial, ethnic, or cultural identity, to play our part in creating more welcoming, just schools and communities for all of us.



# THE ROADMAP

Resilient, Representative Leadership™ Framework  
featuring the 10 Essential Competencies for  
Educational Leaders of Color ©

## BACKGROUND

### Discovering the Competencies

In 2022, MCEL spent 9+ months talking with educators of color serving in leadership positions across the country to more deeply understand their lived experiences and leadership journeys. Our ultimate goal was to uncover how leaders of color both survive and thrive in their careers.

We set out to understand the diverse perspectives and experiences of male and female leaders of color across geographies and in a variety of educational settings. We spoke with principals and assistant principals, superintendents and other chief officers, and educators in a wide range of leadership roles within and adjacent to our schools and school systems.

- We met with **300+ leaders of color** across the country of **all gender identities**.
- Focus group participants worked in **urban, suburban, and rural school settings**.
- Leaders shared insights from **traditional public schools, public charter schools, and career and technical education programs**.
- Focus group participants brought experience working in **small, mid-size, and large schools and school systems**.
- Leaders served in a variety of roles, including **school-/site-based leaders, middle managers, and c-suite executives**.

We asked focus group participants to share their perspectives on three key questions:

1. **What factors contribute to the low numbers of people of color in education overall, and in educational leadership specifically?**
2. **Why do leaders of color struggle on the job?**
3. **What has led to your successes as a leader of color? What specific moves, behaviors, and dispositions have been most helpful as you've navigated your leadership journey?**

In partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership, we reviewed and coded the details of these sweeping conversations. Our analyses revealed a notably consistent set of responses regarding the practices and approaches leaders of color rely on to successfully navigate tricky situations, capitalize on emerging opportunities, and ultimately accelerate student, school, and community success.

The result? The 10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color, which articulate the knowledge, skills, mindsets, dispositions, and behaviors most critical to the success of leaders of color. The competencies are part affirmation and part roadmap: mirrors that reflect the shared experiences and strengths of leaders of color, and concrete strategies that help open doors for more educators of color to successfully step into and stay in leadership roles.



Though deeply interconnected, for ease we organized these ten competencies into three domains critical to resilient, representative leadership. Our Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework (below) includes a summary of each of the 10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color.

## Resilient, Representative Leadership™ Framework

featuring the 10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color ©

### DOMAIN 1 Projects and Maintains Steady, Confident Leadership

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 1

**Strategic Disarming:** Understands who is in the room, and takes proactive steps to mitigate potential issues by displaying warmth, openness, and a sense of humor.

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 2

**Executive Stance:** Communicates confidence and steadiness during difficult times, and adapts readily to new situations.

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 3

**Equanimity:** Demonstrates self-control in difficult situations.

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 4

**Handles Disequilibrium:** Can put stressful experiences into perspective and handle mistakes, stress, and ambiguity with poise.

### DOMAIN 2 Effectively Navigates Organizational Dynamics and Relationships

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 5

**Acts Systematically:** Recognizes the political nature of the organization and works appropriately within it, including by establishing collaborative relationships and alliances.

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 6

**Interpersonal Savvy:** Is aware of own impact on situations and people, and accurately senses when to give and take during negotiations.

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 7

**Recognizes Trade-Offs:** Understands that every decision has conflicting interests and constituencies, and balances short-term pay-offs with long-term improvement.

### DOMAIN 3 Knows Oneself and Lives Core Values

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 8

**Acknowledges Mirror Moments:** Has an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses and is willing to improve.

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 9

**Credibility:** Acts in accordance with stated values, follows through on promises, and uses ethical considerations to guide decisions and actions.

#### ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 10

**Work/Life Harmony:** Balances work priorities with personal life.



## Four Cardinal Truths

Before reviewing the 10 Essential Competencies for Educational Leaders of Color in depth, we believe it is important to orient ourselves around four critical concepts—cardinal directions, if you will—that should guide our understanding and support appropriate application of the competencies in our work in schools and communities across the country.

The Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework is:

### **1 | A window into the shared experience of a diverse network of leaders of color. It represents the significant mental load leaders of color carry in nearly every aspect of our work.**

When we asked our network about the knowledge, skills, mindsets, dispositions, and behaviors that were most critical to their success as leaders of color, we heard a notably consistent set of responses. Educators of color are by no means a monolith, and the competencies are not universally representative of our diverse experiences. At the same time, there is broad agreement on the role this core set of interrelated competencies play in our day-to-day experience navigating the American educational ecosystem.

### **2 | A framework with common language primarily designed to support leaders of color to grow and thrive in our careers.**

The competencies were developed by leaders of color, for aspiring and seasoned leaders of color, alike, and informed by the complementary insights of white allies working to dismantle oppressive systems. The competencies are designed to foster our personal and professional growth and improvement—to make our leadership journeys more effective, sustainable, and joyful—rather than for use as an evaluative tool. As such, the competencies are designed to complement, not replace, other leadership frameworks, such as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL).

As educators of color, we don't get opportunities to demonstrate our instructional leadership prowess if we aren't also adept in a core set of skills that allude to the unwritten rules and unspoken expectations that so profoundly shape our leadership journeys. Unlike white educators, we often aren't considered "the right fit" for leadership roles if we don't consistently showcase a wide range of social-emotional and interpersonal skills—tools all leaders need, but that are especially important for leaders of color navigating terrain rife with racial stereotypes, unconscious bias, and inequitable systems.

Further, leaders of color can be rated highly effective on the PSEL or another state- or district-specific leadership framework, but we may not actually experience success on the job if we don't also demonstrate mastery of these competencies. We are held to another set of standards, whether district/network leaders (not to mention other educators, parents, and community members) choose to recognize it or not. By naming these shadow expectations, we can support one another to not only get a shot at leadership roles, but also have the opportunity to be retained in leadership roles where we can make a difference for our students and communities over time.

### 3 | Adaptive v. technical in nature with competencies that are mutually reinforcing.

Unlike technical problems, adaptive challenges can be hard to identify — and easy to deny. They require changes in values and core beliefs, in traditional roles, responsibilities, and relationships, and in longstanding approaches to our work, all of which entails a great deal of both intrapersonal self-reflection and exceptional interpersonal communication and collaboration. Adaptive challenges do not come with clear, straightforward solutions; rather, new ideas and approaches must be tested, revisited, and continuously recalibrated over time and across settings. This iterative work takes place both within ourselves and alongside and in partnership with our colleagues and allies. Change typically occurs more gradually, as individuals and organizations wrestle with uncomfortable truths and revisit deeply ingrained assumptions and ideas.

The competencies reflect the adaptive nature of our work to identify and respond to discriminatory and inequitable policies and practices, so that we — and our students and communities — can flourish. While we have organized this resource into three domains comprised of ten discrete competencies, the knowledge, skills, mindsets, dispositions, and behaviors embedded within each are overlapping and mutually reinforcing. As a result, there is a recursive nature to the competencies that illuminates the value of considering them as a cohesive package rather than an à la carte menu. While there are certain use-cases in which the competencies ought to be considered individually (e.g., to identify concrete actions in support of self- and organizational improvement), we firmly believe that successive application of all ten competencies yields results that far exceed the sum of each component part. This is the true power of the competencies — their collective impact when applied with care and consistency over time — and we encourage leaders of color and allies to consider them together.

**The Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework affirms that we don't have to choose between supporting leaders of color right here, right now, and fixing unsupportive, toxic environments. Indeed, we can, we must, do both. The competencies are designed to help us flourish today while ushering in a brighter and more equitable tomorrow.**

### 4 | A response to the conditions leaders of color face today, even as we work tirelessly together toward a more just future.

When we asked about the competencies most critical to their success, leaders of color shared a range of coping strategies and survival tactics. These responses illuminated the persistence of racial bias in our schools and society at large. In one important respect, then, the competencies affirm our experiences and, through the benefits of affect labeling, can help to ease our stress (in addition to serving as an essential roadmap for navigating unwelcome and sometimes hostile terrain).

Ultimately, the Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework is a resource that enables us to do what we love. Our students and school communities need us today; they cannot wait for us to eradicate racism and bias, and nor can we. The competencies equip us with specific tools and practical support we need to keep showing up and doing our life- and world-changing work each and every day. In so doing, we continue to transform our schools and communities into more equitable and inclusive spaces for all of us.

That said, the competencies should not be interpreted as an excuse or a pass for those in a position to enact desperately needed change. If anything, the competencies offer a more concrete and holistic picture of the current, unacceptable state of affairs in our schools. It is our sincere hope that the competencies highlight the urgent need for decision-makers to address the root causes and systemic issues that perpetuate the existence of a different set of rules, expectations, and burdens for educational leaders of color — and take immediate action.

The guides that follow can support leaders of color — and our support networks — as we navigate professional responsibilities across a wide range of leadership roles and contexts, our own distinct career trajectories, and in recognition of our unique identities and personal circumstances. And they offer critical insights for school system officials, policymakers, and other decision-makers as they consider ways to improve the experiences of educators of color within their spheres.

(Additional resources for leaders of colors and equity-minded allies can be found in the full Resilient, Representative Leadership Toolkit: <https://mcelleaders.org/RRLToolkit>.)



## LEGEND

### Components of the Pocket Guides

While the competencies are best considered as a complete package, we have developed individual resources — “pocket guides” — to help leaders of color and allies unpack each competency deeply and discretely as you move toward more holistic understanding and use of the Resilient, Representative Leadership Framework. Below we outline the key information you’ll find in each guide:

#### DESTINATION OVERVIEW: COMPETENCY SUMMARY

For each competency, we provide an overview of the knowledge, skills, mindsets, dispositions, and behaviors representative of the competency in action. We pair this overview with a “packing list” of specific actions drawn from the Center for Creative Leadership’s comprehensive database on research- and evidence-based leadership practices. These concrete leadership moves showcase what it looks like for a leader to have a firm grasp of the competency — to execute it with quality and consistency across settings, and to strategically deploy discrete leadership tactics across dynamic personal and professional circumstances.

#### SAMPLE ITINERARY: POSSIBLE ROUTES AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

Next, we offer guidance and illustrative examples of how leaders of color can use the competency to support our personal and professional decision-making. When we set out on a trip, we often have multiple options to choose from and will select a route based on our priorities and preferences, among other considerations. We might select the quickest path from point A to point B, prioritize fuel economy, or opt for a route that passes by a specific attraction. When we encounter construction, roadblocks, or other unexpected developments on the journey, we also typically have multiple options for how to respond. We may make different choices depending on a variety of factors — how long we’ve been traveling, the time of day, our familiarity with the immediate environment, whether we and/or our passengers are hungry, tired, or, heaven forbid, both. The same holds true for our decisions as leaders. For each competency we encourage you to consider specific steps leaders of color can take to put the competency into action in the varied scenarios we encounter in our day-to-day leadership journeys.

#### SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS: UNIQUE IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERS OF COLOR

Further, each pocket guide offers windows into how the competency plays out for leaders of color as distinct from the experiences of our white counterparts. While the competencies reflect leadership actions that can and are used by leaders of all races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds, we know that they hold special importance for leaders of color, for whom our race/ethnicity is always in play. There are real risks associated with our decisions as leaders of color.

As you review each of the pocket guides that follow, we encourage you to consider:

- **What special importance does this specific competency have for leaders of color? What distinct personal and professional risks do leaders of color need to consider when putting it into action?**
- **How can leaders of color use the actions to guide our individual decision-making in a specific scenario while accounting for our broader, collective efforts to dismantle inequitable strategies, policies, and practices that uphold the unacceptable status quo?**
- **How can each of us, regardless of our racial, ethnic, or cultural background, strategically and transparently adapt to the world we will live in today, while continuing to press for a more just and equitable future?**

### **TRAVELOGUES: STORIES OF SUCCESS, SETBACKS, AND FIERCE RESOLVE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS**

We asked. We listened. We probed. We encouraged leaders to share their stories, to lean into their personal narratives, to help bring to life the more nuanced, complicated truths we were after. We pair each competency with a vignette that brings together these real-life stories, illustrating the wide range of scenarios in which educators have relied on the competencies to help them navigate leadership dilemmas and opportunities. Of note, while each travelogue is paired with an individual competency, the stories typically showcase elements from across the resilient, representative leadership domains.

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The experiences that shaped this Guidebook — the continuous monitoring and recalibration, bouncing back from daily microaggressions and recovering from blatant acts of racism, toggling between just surviving and truly thriving — is exhausting, daunting work. Yet it is the effort that leaders of color put forth, day in and day out, so that we can do the work we love: creating classrooms, schools, and communities in which educators, children, and families feel welcome, intellectually challenged and inspired, energized about learning and expanding their horizons, and equipped to go after their dreams and highest aspirations.

It is incumbent upon every one of us to take steps to break down barriers and create greater and more sustainable opportunities for leaders of color to truly thrive. We firmly believe that with a framework of intentional support designed by leaders of color, for leaders of color, with tools for our equity-minded allies, we can ease one another's burden, build each other up, and outfit educators of color with the resources needed to navigate and flourish along their chosen career pathways.

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**That's the travel plan. Now let's review the detailed pocket guides and get ready to hit the road. The next leg of our leadership journeys awaits.**





# PROJECTS AND MAINTAINS STEADY, CONFIDENT LEADERSHIP

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POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 1

## STRATEGIC DISARMING

POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 2

## EXECUTIVE STANCE

POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 3

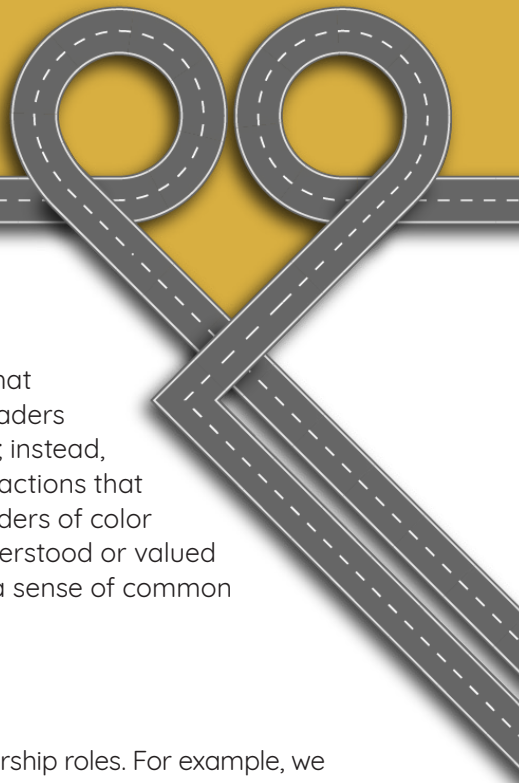
## EQUANIMITY

POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 4

## HANDLES DISEQUILIBRIUM

# 1

## POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 1 **STRATEGIC DISARMING**



### DESTINATION OVERVIEW

#### Competency Summary

Strategic disarming involves the ability to navigate situations and spaces that may feel — or have the potential to become—hostile or confrontational. Leaders who are skilled in strategic disarming don't wait for scenarios to turn tricky; instead, they proactively plan to mitigate potential tensions through language and actions that create a sense of understanding, trust, and openness from the get-go. Leaders of color often face situations where our identities and experiences are not fully understood or valued by others. In such situations, strategic disarming can support us to create a sense of common ground and facilitate productive dialogue and collaboration.

### SAMPLE ITINERARY

#### Possible Routes and Contingency Plans

Leaders of color may use strategic disarming in a variety of ways in our leadership roles. For example, we may use humor or personal anecdotes to break the ice and establish rapport with colleagues who may have different backgrounds and experiences. We may use active listening skills and affirming language to validate the perspectives of others and build trust. In addition, we may use expressly welcoming, non-threatening body language and other non-verbal cues to convey openness and approachability.

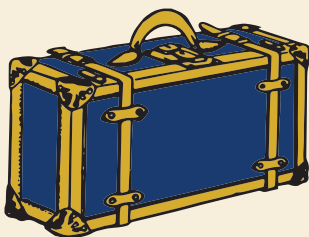
### SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

#### Unique Implications for Leaders of Color

Because of the way race, gender, and power interact in our society, strategic disarming may be used differently by leaders of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and genders. Some white leaders may use strategic disarming to cultivate a truly welcoming space for all, while others may use it to create a false sense of camaraderie or to avoid uncomfortable conversations about race and equity. Leaders of color, on the other hand, often use strategic disarming to protect ourselves from potential threats or to create a sense of safety in environments where we may be marginalized or excluded. Strategic disarming can be a survival strategy that allows leaders of color to navigate institutional and interpersonal racism while still maintaining our leadership and influence. Our application of strategic disarming strategies may look different for each of us; for example, a Black male leader and a Latina leader may use some shared strategies for navigating difficult situations, while other tactics will reflect the ways our unique identities are perceived and welcomed (or not) in a given context. Ultimately, the ability to use strategic disarming in a culturally responsive and ethical way is a critical competency for all leaders, but particularly for leaders of color who are navigating complex power dynamics in our leadership roles.

### PACKING LIST COMPETENCY DETAIL

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?



A leader skilled in **STRATEGIC DISARMING** has a clear understanding of who is in the room, and takes proactive steps to mitigate potential issues, including by displaying warmth, openness, and a sense of humor. Such a leader...

- ✓ Is aware of their affect.
- ✓ Has a sense of humor.
- ✓ Has a warm disposition.

## TRAVELOGUE

### Telling My Story to Break Down Entrenched Racist Narratives

A district we worked with had massive demographic shifts over the last five years, moving from primarily white to majority Hispanic. I was leading a session with a white co-trainer for three school leadership teams, nearly all of whom were white. I was one of just a handful of Latino/a educators in the room.

The white co-trainer described the changing demographics as, Our communities are changing. I get it. Now we have kids who can't speak the language. Now we have kids who get their electricity from an extension cord connected to their neighbor's house. Now we have kids who live with multiple families in one home. How can we expect them to do homework?

The trainees' heads nodded in agreement.

I had to intervene. But I had to figure out how to do so while keeping the group on the same team. These were the educators responsible for supporting students who indeed had sizable needs, and we had developed programming that was really going to help them improve their practices. I didn't want to lose them at the get-go.

Rather than jump in with an immediate redirect (or callout for the blatant racism and classism my co-trainer had just introduced), I decided to go with a story.

I introduced myself and told the group about my family and my upbringing. I talked about what it meant for me to grow up in a multigenerational household. How my Tío would pick me up from school and let me linger at the park on our way home, knowing my parents had given strict orders we were to come straight home. How my Abuela would make me sit down and finish my homework while she made delicious dinners from scratch (and I complained about not getting to watch TV). I shared how hard it was, at times, to be an English learner, and also what it meant for me to have teachers who helped me see my emerging bilingualism as a gift — even a superpower. I told them my family was lucky enough to usually have everything we needed for us kids to feel taken care of, but that wasn't true everywhere in our neighborhood. I reminded them how much all families, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, depend on our schools to be a community hub, to meet students' academic needs and to help connect parents and caregivers with the support they need to help their kids thrive.

I told them it was an incredible honor to be with them that day, and to be part of their professional journeys as they worked to reimagine teaching and learning in their schools to better support the students and community to whom they had already dedicated so much of their time, energy, and passion.

They were silent, maybe even contrite. We got to re-start our session on a completely different note. And I had them.



Rather than call out the blatant racism and classism my co-trainer had introduced, I went with a story. I shared how hard it was, at times, to be an English learner, and what it meant to have teachers who saw my emerging bilingualism as a gift—even a superpower. They were silent, maybe even contrite. We restarted our session on a completely different note. And I had them.

**DESTINATION OVERVIEW****Competency Summary**

Executive stance reflects the ability to navigate and thrive in environments that may be hostile or unwelcoming. Closely related to strategic disarming as well as equanimity, intrapersonal savvy, and an ability to handle disequilibrium, executive stance requires a leader to be appropriately assertive and confident while remaining authentic and true to their cultural identity. Leaders of color who have mastered this competency are often able to overcome obstacles and achieve success in their roles, regardless of any barriers they may face.

**SAMPLE ITINERARY****Possible Routes and Contingency Plans**

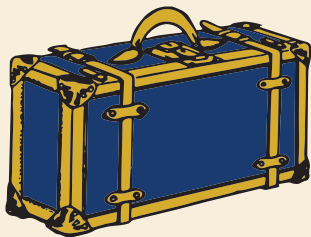
Leaders of color use their executive stance in a variety of ways, including by speaking up and advocating for ourselves and our communities. We may use our position of power to create opportunities for other people of color, mentoring and supporting them in their own leadership development. Additionally, leaders of color who possess an executive stance are often able to build bridges across diverse communities, using our cultural fluency and empathetic leadership style to promote understanding and cooperation.

**SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS****Unique Implications for Leaders of Color**

White leaders may be able to draw on their privilege and status to assert themselves and achieve their goals, while leaders of color may need to navigate more complex power dynamics and be more strategic in our approach. Leaders of color may be subject to stereotypes and biases that undermine our authority, making it even more important for us to cultivate an executive stance that conveys confidence, competence, and cultural fluency. Ultimately, the executive stance competency is essential for leaders of color, enabling us to be effective change agents and advocates for social justice in our communities and organizations.

**PACKING LIST  
COMPETENCY DETAIL**

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?

**A leader who demonstrates EXECUTIVE STANCE**

communicates confidence and steadiness during difficult times, and adapts readily to new situations. Such a leader...

- ✓ Communicates confidence and steadiness during difficult times.
- ✓ Projects confidence and poise.
- ✓ Adapts readily to new situations.
- ✓ Commands attention and respect.
- ✓ Accepts setbacks with grace.

## TRAVELOGUE

### Taking Stock and Showing Up on My Terms

Whenever I arrive at a professional setting, I scan the room to see what the racial make-up in the group is. I understand that my race enters the room before my intellect.

If I am the only Black man, which often happens, I feel a need to represent all Black men and even women. I feel a responsibility to ensure all of the Black educators are successful in our district — we have so few — and that puts a lot of pressure on me to be really intentional about my leadership and how I show up. I would do that anyway, but knowing that my presence can create or close opportunities for others ups the ante.

How do I ensure that my perspective is heard and respected? Do I have enough credentials and respect in the room, or will I have to fight for it? If I have to go to bat for myself, how will I do so in a way that showcases my confidence and competence without coming across as aggressive? How do I balance showcasing my personal leadership and style with the expectations this group has for what a leader should look and sound like?

*Whenever I arrive at a professional setting, I scan the room. I know my race enters the room before my intellect. How do I balance showcasing my personal leadership style with a group's preconceived notions for what leaders look and sound like? How can I meet them where they are and help guide them toward a more diverse and inclusive vision of outstanding leadership?*





**DESTINATION OVERVIEW****Competency Summary**

Equanimity is the ability to remain composed in the face of challenging situations, allowing leaders to maintain our focus and make sound decisions. Leaders of color often experience racial bias, discrimination, and stereotyping, which can be emotionally taxing and affects our well-being. Closely related to the ability to handle disequilibrium, we use equanimity to manage the stress and emotions that come with navigating systemic racism and workplace challenges, which enables us to be steady, confident leaders, no matter what we face.

**SAMPLE ITINERARY****Possible Routes and Contingency Plans**

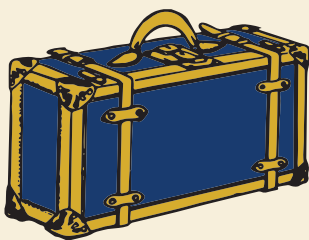
Leaders of color put equanimity into practice in a variety of ways. When we see a problem in our organization or if a project or workstream gets off track, we remain focused on finding solutions — not complaining or assigning blame. If something happens that requires an urgent response, we take quick, necessary, deliberate action while remaining steady and composed. When things get tough or go awry, we recognize that our reaction can shape what occurs next, for better or for worse. We ensure our words and actions, especially when things don't go the way we hoped, are measured and productive.

**SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS****Unique Implications for Leaders of Color**

For white leaders, equanimity may be viewed as a desirable trait, but it is not necessarily essential for their success. White leaders are not typically subjected to the same levels of bias and discrimination as leaders of color, and thus may not require the same level of emotional regulation skills. For leaders of color, however, equanimity is essential for navigating the complexities of leadership roles while managing the emotional burden of systemic racism, bias, and marginalization. Leaders of color must maintain our composure in the face of microaggressions and other forms of discrimination, remaining focused on our goals and vision for our organizations. This competency also helps leaders of color to build resilience and cope with the challenges inherent in our roles, enabling us to effectively lead our schools and enterprises. Leaders of color who lack equanimity may struggle to navigate the emotional challenges of leadership, leading to burnout or less effective leadership practice.

**PACKING LIST  
COMPETENCY DETAIL**

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?



A leader who demonstrates **EQUANIMITY** demonstrates self-control in difficult situations. Such a leader...

- ✓ Does not become hostile or moody when things are not going their way.
- ✓ Does not blame others or situations for their own mistakes.
- ✓ Contributes more to solving organizational problems than to complaining about them.
- ✓ Remains calm when crises occur.

## TRAVELOGUE

### Acknowledging Subpar Support — and Regrouping with My Team

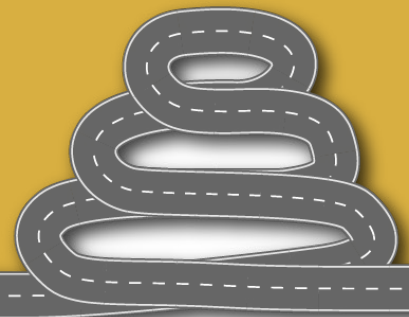
Last year, I was appointed to lead one of the so-called “failing” schools in our district. I had been very successful in my previous principalship and was energized by the opportunity to transform a struggling school. The superintendent said the turnaround schools were the priority of the district. I believed her, and I anticipated an “all hands on deck” level of support from the district office.

Early in the school year, I realized I was not getting the support I expected, the support I needed. It felt personal, like I had been a token hire who was now being left alone to fail. I purposefully carved out space for my feelings of disillusionment and disappointment. I felt abandoned. I was angry. How could I move the needle on student achievement with five teacher vacancies and little to no support with recruitment? How could I work productively with district officials moving forward when they had so badly betrayed my trust? If they didn’t have my back, then who did?

After reflecting on everything that hadn’t gone the way I hoped it would, I transitioned into deliberate action. I brought my school team together — my assistant principal and our grade-level team leaders — so we could make a plan to immediately fill vacancies with known and trusted long-term substitutes. I met with my supervisor to share my concerns and to jump-start our planning for the spring hiring season. It’s not the way I envisioned my first year at the school going, and I’m still not sure if my experience would have been different had I been part of the superintendent’s inner circle. But I knew I had to shift from assigning blame to problem-solving if I was going to make a difference for my students and school community.

*I was energized by the opportunity to transform a struggling school, but realized I was not getting the support I needed. After reflecting on what hadn't gone the way I hoped, I transitioned into deliberate action. I had to shift from assigning blame to problem-solving for my students.*



**DESTINATION OVERVIEW****Competency Summary**

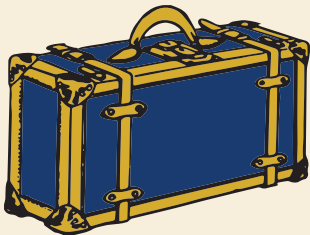
Disequilibrium refers to a state of discomfort or imbalance that occurs when a person's beliefs or expectations are challenged or disrupted. For leaders of color, systemic racism, discrimination, and bias are often the root cause of disequilibrium — for ourselves as well as our colleagues and the communities we support. By handling disequilibrium effectively, leaders of color can foster a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture, and build stronger relationships with our employees, colleagues, and other stakeholders.

**SAMPLE ITINERARY****Possible Routes and Contingency Plans**

Leaders of color deploy the competency of handling disequilibrium in a variety of ways. For example, we may be able to remain composed in the face of adversity, manage conflict and difficult conversations with grace, and adapt to changing circumstances quickly. We may also be able to acknowledge our own biases and work to overcome them, while also recognizing and addressing bias in others.

**SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS****Unique Implications for Leaders of Color**

White leaders may not face the same degree of disequilibrium as leaders of color, and may not have the same level of awareness or understanding of the challenges faced by people of color. This can make it more difficult for them to handle disequilibrium in an effective and inclusive way. Leaders of color, on the other hand, may have a deeper understanding of the experiences of all people of color, and may be better equipped to handle the unique challenges that arise as a result of systemic racism and bias. However, we may also face additional pressure and scrutiny due to our race, which can make it more challenging to handle disequilibrium in a way that is perceived as fair and equitable. Ultimately, handling disequilibrium is a critical competency for all leaders, but leaders of color need to be especially skilled in order to navigate the challenges we face and effectively lead our organizations.

**PACKING LIST  
COMPETENCY DETAIL**

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?

A leader who **HANDLES DISEQUILIBRIUM** can put stressful experiences into perspective and can handle mistakes, stress, and ambiguity with poise. Such a leader...

- ✓ Puts stressful experiences into perspective and does not dwell on them.
- ✓ Has the personal support necessary to cope with emotional overload.
- ✓ When upset, is careful not to agitate others by spreading tension and anxiety.
- ✓ Balances life in a way that allows them to maintain emotional equilibrium.
- ✓ Is comfortable depending on others over whom they have no control.
- ✓ Anticipates the kinds of situations that cause them excessive stress.
- ✓ Tolerates ambiguity or uncertainty well.
- ✓ Handles mistakes or setbacks with poise and grace.
- ✓ Maintains composure under stress.

## TRAVELOGUE

### Composure in the Face of Microaggressions

As a lecturer in a teacher education program at a state university, I stood in front of a class of 30 adult students in a course on multicultural education. The majority of students appeared to be of northern European descent — white. I am Latina. I was lecturing on the complexities of creating culturally relevant practices in the classroom using terminology from the field, including “sociological,” “interdisciplinary,” and “pedagogical” — nothing horribly intellectual.

A white male student raised his hand and in an irritated tone stated, “Can you stop using multisyllabic words so we can understand what you’re saying?” I was caught off guard by the abrupt request. My body instinctively reacted to what I felt was surely a slight against my credentials, against my very self. Would the same comment have been made if I were an older white male professor? Why didn’t the other students — the women, the people of color — raise objections to my presentation? Was this student sharing authentic feedback on my communication or was it, as I suspected, something else? How many other students shared his perspective? And would I do them a disservice by acquiescing to what I felt was an unhelpful (at best) response to my carefully planned lecture?

I paused. I took a breath. I recalibrated — quickly. And then I explained that in order for the students to access course materials, from theory to research and practical instructional planning resources, they needed to have a basic grasp of commonly used vocabulary from the academic literature. I committed to explaining new terminology when I introduced it, and I encouraged them to note and ask questions about specific terms that were unclear.

And then I moved on.



*A white male student interrupted me to question the value of my academic vocabulary. I paused. I took a breath. I doubted he would have raised this issue if I were an older white professor rather than a young Latina. I needed to recalibrate—quickly. I committed to explaining new terminology when I introduced it, and I encouraged them to inquire about unclear terms. And then I moved on.*



# EFFECTIVELY NAVIGATES ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS AND RELATIONSHIPS

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POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 5  
**ACTS SYSTEMATICALLY**

POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 6  
**INTERPERSONAL SAVVY**

POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 7  
**RECOGNIZES TRADE-OFFS**

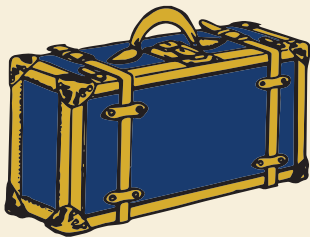


**DESTINATION OVERVIEW****Competency Summary**

Leaders who act systematically have a clear understanding of both the “why” and the “how” of their work. As equity-minded advocates for communities of color and other marginalized stakeholders, leaders of color may need to be especially adept at developing strategies based on data, community insights, and clearly defined opportunities to advance shared goals, always cognizant of how discrete decisions affect the broader system. We must be able to identify and analyze the underlying structures and patterns that perpetuate inequality, and develop strategies, programs, and initiatives to challenge and dismantle inequitable policies and practices. Recognizing that systemic change requires political awareness in navigating trade-offs and managing entrenched interests, leaders of color who act systematically must be skilled in building partnerships and coalitions with other organizations and communities who share our commitment to equity and inclusion.

**SAMPLE ITINERARY****Possible Routes and Contingency Plans**

Leaders of color must navigate complex systems and structures that are often designed to exclude or marginalize us, and our efforts to act systematically often reflect the ever-present challenges of systemic racism and discrimination. For example, we may gather robust qualitative and quantitative data from stakeholders underrepresented in traditional decision-making structures in order to illustrate and bolster the case for needed change. We may strategically seek out the counsel of key decision-makers or influencers to get their buy-in and support for our ideas — and even convince them to take on a leadership role in our efforts. We may tap our white allies to help us overcome barriers to policy changes that include shifting resources away from white communities and toward students and families with greater need who are routinely denied essential resources and support.

**PACKING LIST  
COMPETENCY DETAIL**

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?

A leader who **ACTS SYSTEMATICALLY** understands the political nature of the organization and works appropriately within it, including by establishing collaborative relationships and alliances throughout the organization. Such a leader...

- ✓ Understands the political nature of the organization and works appropriately within it.
- ✓ Considers the impact of their actions on the entire system.
- ✓ Establishes strong collaborative relationships.
- ✓ Deals effectively with contradictory requirements or inconsistencies in the organization.
- ✓ Effectively creates alliances throughout the organization.



SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

## Unique Implications for Leaders of Color

For white leaders, acting systematically may involve challenging and dismantling the very systems that have privileged them, which can be uncomfortable and challenging. Leaders of color, on the other hand, may have to work even harder to overcome the systemic barriers that limit our opportunities and can hinder our success. Thus, acting systematically is not only an important competency for leaders of color, but it is also a necessary tool for creating a more just and equitable society.

TRAVELOGUE

### RESPONDING TO A QUESTIONABLE SITUATION WITH CAMARADERIE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

I was called to a meeting for schools that were on the state’s “watch list” for failing to meet certain annual performance targets. I looked around the room and quickly noticed that all of the principals were Black or Hispanic. I experienced that familiar sinking feeling that we were being singled out — tapped for our experience and commitment, recruited to the schools with greatest unmet needs, and then inevitably sacked when we didn’t meet the impossibly high standard of immediate transformation.

I know some white principals who “mail it in” on a daily basis, yet they were not in the room. Because they were serving communities whose overall performance masked inequitable outcomes. Because their schools had the resources to at least chip away at opportunity gaps. Because they were white.

I also saw that all of the supervisors in the room were white. I didn’t know any of them well, and I suspected they might not respond well to questions about whether the composition of the room was a coincidence or whether it reflected a larger conspiracy against leaders of color.

Rather than dwell on the possibility that our district was waiting for us to fail, whether inadvertently or by design, I decided to tap into the unparalleled resource in which I found myself: a network of leaders of color tackling similar challenges and who shared a deep commitment to transforming our schools — and our entire school system — into vehicles for equity and opportunity.

After the meeting, we stayed late talking and swapping stories. We decided to meet up again the following week to help one another out with the next steps coming out of that state-led meeting. We got a text chain going, and started sharing tips and resources. And the occasional gripe.

During the first couple of meetings, we organized and talked through our data. We compared notes on local mandates, and strategized on how to check all of the boxes while keeping our eyes on the most important work. We started making other connections, too: inviting teams from other schools to see an outstanding educator in action, pooling resources for joint professional development sessions, and making referrals to great community partners.

We didn’t just want to improve our own schools. We wanted all of us to succeed. At some point, I realized that right alongside all of my strategizing and planning for my school community were the needs of these other leaders and their schools.

*Rather than dwell on the possibility that our district was waiting for us to fail, I decided to tap into the unparalleled resource in which I found myself: a network of leaders of color tackling similar challenges and who shared a deep commitment to transforming our schools. That was the day we got together, got organized, and really got to work for all of us.*



## DESTINATION OVERVIEW

**Competency Summary**

Interpersonal savvy refers to the set of skills that enable a leader to build productive working relationships. Often called simply “people skills,” interpersonal savvy is a crucial competency for all leaders, but it holds particular significance for leaders of color. We often face unique challenges in our roles due to our racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, which are often underrepresented in the leadership ranks and overall culture of our organizations. Closely related to the self-reflective work outlined in acknowledging mirror moments, leaders with strong interpersonal savvy are aware of our impact on situations, understand what motivates others, and can accurately sense when to give and take during negotiations. Interpersonal savvy enables leaders of color to energize individuals and teams, and to get results while maintaining strong, positive relationships.

## SAMPLE ITINERARY

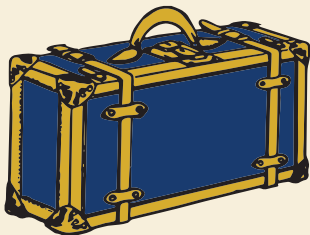
**Possible Routes and Contingency Plans**

Leaders of color use our interpersonal savvy to build and maintain relationships with our colleagues, employees, and stakeholders. We are aware of our own biases and how they may affect our interactions. We listen carefully to different perspectives, communicate effectively, and adapt our communication style to fit the needs of others. By doing so, we foster trust and respect, which are essential for building a supportive team and achieving shared goals.

## SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

**Unique Implications for Leaders of Color**

White leaders may not have the same level of awareness about the impact of their race on their interactions with others. They may have a blind spot to the experiences of people of color and may inadvertently perpetuate systemic inequities through their words and actions. Leaders of color, on the other hand, have a heightened awareness of our racial identities and the impact it has on our leadership. We may have to work harder to build relationships with people who hold different views or biases, which can be taxing but can also help us become much more effective relationship- and coalition-builders over time. Because we often find ourselves in unwelcoming spaces, we may be more adept at “reading the room” and more comfortable flexing our communication style to address the dynamic needs of stakeholders, which can fuel stronger and more productive collaboration.

**PACKING LIST  
COMPETENCY DETAIL**

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?

A leader who has **INTERPERSONAL SAVVY** understands their own impact on situations and people, and accurately senses when to give and take when negotiating. Such a leader...

- ✓ Tailors communication based on other’s needs, motivations, and agendas.
- ✓ Understands own impact on situations and people.
- ✓ Knows when and with whom to build alliances.
- ✓ Wins concessions from others without harming relationships.
- ✓ Adjusts leadership style according to the demands of the situation.
- ✓ Accurately senses when to give and take when negotiating.
- ✓ Influences others without using formal authority.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AS LEADERSHIP ACT NUMBER ONE

When I started in my first superintendent position, my first order of business was getting to know my senior leadership team and our district's school principals. I scheduled regular check-ins with each of my direct reports, and I prioritized meeting with every school leader in the district as soon as possible along with members of their faculty. Relationship-building made up most of my 30-, 60-, and 90-day plans.

My goal was to introduce myself and to learn more about the experiences of various staff members across the district. What was working? What were their priorities for improvement? How could we best support them and their school communities? What other feedback did they have for me and my senior leadership team? I had big plans and big ideas for our district, but during these conversations I made sure it was clear that my only agenda was to listen and to learn.

I was stepping into a novel situation as a first-time superintendent in a new district where I knew some educators were not excited about my appointment. But I knew how to start building great relationships from day one. As a result, I was wildly successful in getting staff to open up and share their stories. Those teachers and principals told me just about everything — the good and the bad, the amazing highs and the devastating lows. They offered ideas on major changes we should think about, and small adjustments that could really make a difference in their day to day work with students. They affirmed much of what my leadership team had shared, and offered new reflections and insights on our school system.

I learned a lot about the diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and personalities of our staff, and I took note of the personal stories they shared, too. I asked about their children and families, and I shared more about my own. Our kids have a way of bridging divides like no amount of diplomacy can. We talked about our hobbies, where to get the best burger nearby, and anything else that was on their minds. I answered their questions fully and honestly, but made sure to keep my responses focused so they knew the conversation was about them — not my agenda.

I credit the success of these meetings to the explicit training and coaching I had received regarding the importance of presenting myself in a really intentional and welcoming way. I'm a Black male leader. I'm a people person — people like me! Yet I know that my warmth can be overshadowed by my directness in some situations. I looked the part of superintendent in those meetings — suit and tie and everything — but I made sure my smile was the first thing that walked in those rooms. We met in teachers' lounges and school libraries, rather than offices with a desk, so we could comfortably sit in circles and at the same level.

While we covered some tough topics, the discussions themselves were not tough. That would come later. And when it did, the hard things would go a lot easier since we had gotten off on the right foot.

*I made sure I looked the part of superintendent in those early meetings—suit and tie and everything—but I also ensured my smile was the first thing that walked into those rooms. We met in teachers' lounges and school libraries, so we could sit comfortably at the same level. When the hard conversations came later, they went a lot better because we had gotten off on the right foot.*







## POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 7 **RECOGNIZES TRADE-OFFS**

### DESTINATION OVERVIEW

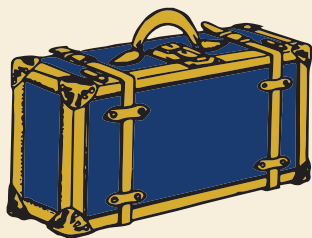
#### Competency Summary

Recognizing trade-offs entails the ability to acknowledge and clearly forecast the varying impact decisions can have on different stakeholders. Leaders of color must often navigate complex and nuanced social, political, and cultural systems that were not typically designed for us or the marginalized students, families, and other stakeholders we serve. We must regularly work to address multiple and competing demands for time, attention, and resources, including the needs of our communities, the expectations of those in power, and our own personal and professional aspirations. We must be adept at recognizing trade-offs so that we can make sound choices that balance competing priorities and advance equity.

### SAMPLE ITINERARY

#### Possible Routes and Contingency Plans

Leaders of color use the competency of recognizing trade-offs in a variety of ways in our leadership roles. For example, in balancing the needs of different communities within our organizations, such as teachers and students or employees and clients, we may share how we've analyzed the priorities of various stakeholders, where they overlap and where they may diverge, before moving toward a final decision. We may carefully navigate complex power dynamics with those in positions of authority by, for example, tying what's in the best interests of our communities with their priorities. At times, we may temporarily slow an initiative down and prioritize relationship-building in order to garner the political support necessary to enact desperately needed systemic change. In addition, we may engage in critical self-reflection regarding our own identities and experiences so that we can make unbiased, strategic decisions that are grounded in our values and principles, while also addressing the complex realities of our organizational contexts.



#### PACKING LIST COMPETENCY DETAIL

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?

A leader skilled in **RECOGNIZING TRADE-OFFS** understands that every decision has conflicting interests and constituencies and balances short-term pay-offs with long-term improvement. Such a leader...

- ✓ Recognizes that every decision has conflicting interests and constituencies.
- ✓ Recognizes ethical dilemmas when they occur.
- ✓ Balances what will pay off in the short run with what will provide long-term improvements.
- ✓ Is aware of their own deeply held beliefs when dealing with others.
- ✓ Knows when to hold fast to personal values and when to consider others' values.
- ✓ Makes conscious choices.
- ✓ Effectively surfaces their and others' deeply held assumptions, values, or beliefs before making important decisions.



## SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

### Unique Implications for Leaders of Color

White leaders may have more privilege and power within their organizations and may not face the same systemic barriers that leaders of color do. As a result, white leaders may be able to make decisions without the same level of complexity and nuance that leaders of color must consider. Leaders of color, on the other hand, may face additional challenges related to stereotypes and biases that can impact how our decisions are perceived and received. Therefore, recognizing trade-offs is even more critical for leaders of color, as it enables us to navigate these challenges and make decisions that are grounded in our values and the needs of our communities.

## TRAVELOGUE

### When the “Safe Bet” is the Wrong Move

When I was an assistant principal, I applied for a principal role with a nearby middle school and didn't get it. I reached out afterward to request feedback, and was informed that the school, which had been historically very high-performing, was experiencing dips in achievement. They were impressed with me, but were looking for someone with previous experience leading a similar school in a similar situation. Having fully prepared myself for the interview process, I was aware of the school's circumstances. I didn't have that specific experience, but I had gone through a new, best-in-class leadership training program offered by the district in partnership with renowned national experts. I knew I could do the job. And I thought it would be really fulfilling to get a top-performing school that served mostly students of color back on track.

Later, I found out that the position had been offered to a veteran white female principal. She had no experience at the secondary level and had spent most of her career at the same school with a pretty consistent staff and pretty consistent student outcomes. I knew her to be a solid leader, but the nebulous explanation I had received regarding my candidacy clearly wasn't the real rationale for their decision. Despite the racial/ethnic makeup of the student body, I didn't match their profile of a leader for a well-performing school.

The woman they hired quit less than a year into the job. It had been a long time since she had done visioning with a new staff, and her process didn't go well at the new school. She was accustomed to a certain management style, which she had honed over the course of many years with her prior team. When she tried to impose it on the new faculty they revolted. Right at the moment when that school needed steady, determined leadership, they found themselves in the midst of further upheaval.

Along with several leaders of color in our district, I was ultimately tapped to lead a turnaround. My skills and experience enabled me to truly transform teaching and learning in my school. It was a different context, to be sure, but I can now say with conviction that my leadership skills are transferable and, paired with my background and collaborative approach to decision-making, I could have been a real asset to that other school.

I wonder if white officials appreciate that when they select the “safe bet” or the path of least resistance, that comes with its own set of considerable tradeoffs and risks, too.



*Despite my qualifications, I was not hired for a principal role at a well-performing school. Like other leaders of color, I was tapped to lead a turnaround. My skills and experience enabled me to truly transform teaching and learning in my school. I could have moved that other school from good to great. Our superintendent sees that now.*



## KNOWS ONESELF AND LIVES CORE VALUES

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POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 8

### ACKNOWLEDGES MIRROR MOMENTS

POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 9

### CREDIBILITY

POCKET GUIDE FOR ESSENTIAL COMPETENCY 10

### WORK/LIFE HARMONY

## ACKNOWLEDGES MIRROR MOMENTS

### DESTINATION OVERVIEW

#### Competency Summary

Acknowledges “mirror moments” refers to situations in which a leader recognizes and engages in deep self-reflection on their personal experiences, especially with regard to race/ethnicity, biases, and cultural values, in order to gain a better understanding of themselves and their leadership style. Leaders of color face unique challenges that require us to be exceptionally self-aware and reflective, from navigating complex social and cultural dynamics to recognizing and addressing our own feelings of isolation and marginalization that can arise during our work in predominantly white spaces. By acknowledging mirror moments, leaders of color can validate our experiences, build resilience, and develop cultural competence and emotional intelligence — essential skills in a multicultural workplace. With a deeper understanding of our experiences as well as our strengths and growth areas, we can make better decisions and become more effective leaders for everyone in our organizations.

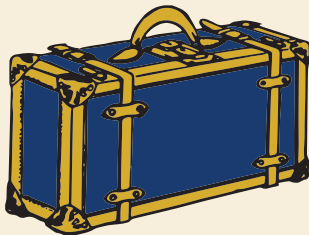
### SAMPLE ITINERARY

#### Possible Routes and Contingency Plans

Leaders of color use this competency by regularly looking inward to assess how our experiences and results are affected by our own thinking and actions. At times, we may use these honest, sometimes difficult “conversations” with ourselves to overcome “imposter syndrome” and fully recognize our own value and contributions to the success of our schools and other ventures. Other times, we may confront our own mistakes and missteps as we continuously reflect, learn, and improve our leadership practice. Outwardly, this competency shows up in our work to build trusting relationships, create spaces for open and honest dialogue, and promote a culture of inclusivity in which all members feel seen and heard. We may also use mirror moments as a way to connect with our staff and colleagues, reflecting aloud on our experiences and soliciting feedback in order to foster authentic relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

#### PACKING LIST COMPETENCY DETAIL

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?



A leader who **ACKNOWLEDGES MIRROR MOMENTS** has an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses and is willing to improve. Such a leader...

- ✓ Admits personal mistakes, learns from them, and moves on to correct the situation.
- ✓ Does an honest self-assessment.
- ✓ Seeks corrective feedback to improve themselves.
- ✓ Sorts out their strengths and weaknesses fairly accurately (i.e., knows themselves).

## SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

### Unique Implications for Leaders of Color

This competency may require different types of self-reflection for white leaders and leaders of color. White leaders may have fewer opportunities to reflect on their biases and cultural values due to their position of privilege. They may resist confronting their own implicit biases, their role in upholding systemic barriers that prevent people of color from achieving their full potential, and other uncomfortable truths, which they ultimately must do in order to actively cultivate more inclusive spaces. Leaders of color, on the other hand, may face immense pressure to “represent our race,” which can quickly become unsustainable and counterproductive. For us, acknowledging mirror moments can help us to challenge stereotypes and our own biases, validate our identities and perspectives, and embrace our vulnerability and full humanity — ultimately becoming more reflective, adept leaders of diverse workplaces.

#### TRAVELOGUE:

### Self-Reflection Can Illuminate a Path Forward through a Murky Situation

Last year I was hired as the first African-American superintendent in our district. I knew our school board was proud to have selected me, and they were excited about the experience, perspective, and leadership I would bring to our system. They were eager for students to see themselves at the highest levels of leadership and they were confident in my ability to make positive changes. I was eager to prove them right.

As my first order of business, I prioritized meeting with principals to listen and learn. I asked questions about their school communities — what was going well, their priorities for improvement, and the support they needed. I inquired about their results to date, committed to showing them I understood where they were coming from and that I could stand shoulder to shoulder, colleague to colleague, “in the weeds.” I wanted to be a great boss and, to me, that meant pairing my sense of urgency to enact needed improvements with a strong level of support. I was present, readily available, mutually accountable, and I knew from personal experience how much that meant.

A couple of months into the role, I got a phone call from a member of our board who was an especially enthusiastic supporter of mine. She relayed that several white female principals had reached out to her (also a white woman) and said they were being “harassed” by me. They told her I had



*To connect with a group of principals who criticized my leadership, I decided right then and there to put extra thought and care into my communication. Phew—it was exhausting and emotionally hard (but, unfortunately, not a new experience) for me to feel like I had to police myself with my own team. But, ultimately, I got results.*

yelled at them and that they felt threatened. This board member was in my corner and she pushed back against the accusations. But she also knew I would want to address the situation head on, in my own way, so she reached out to let me know what was going on.

I'll be honest: my immediate, gut reaction was defensive — what the heck? I had asked these principals regularly about their data, to be sure, but harassment? I also consistently reiterated my personal commitment to holding myself and my leadership team accountable for getting them the support they needed to get results. We were in it together. Or so I thought.

I was frustrated. I thought I had found a place that was ready and excited for my leadership. More than that, I had been really intentional in my communication — energetic, smiling, and over-the-top supportive. But, I reflected, with this group of leaders, my mere presence was enough to transform my upbeat, high-energy persona into something that felt aggressive, threatening. It wasn't fair or right, but there I was. Not accepting that reality meant not making progress.

To connect with these principals, to get them bought into my vision and the vision of our board, to convince them to flex into new ways of collaborating and using data to inform decision-making and continuous improvement, I decided right then and there to put extra thought and care into my communication with them. I switched to all in-person meetings, recognizing that I needed to be able to see principals' facial expressions and body language, so I could know what was going on with them and adapt my communication style, my tone, in real time. Phew — it was exhausting and emotionally hard (but, unfortunately, not a new experience) for me to feel like I had to police myself with my own team.

I also paused and spent time reflecting on the heart of the issue. To be sure, there were racist undertones to the way these principals described our interactions, which were seriously not okay. It was also clear that they were feeling really insecure with my new expectations around data-driven instructional leadership. I spoke with each principal one on one to learn more about what was most challenging, and got really specific insights on their priority learning needs. I acknowledged their need for more space and support to transition to new ways of operating, and committed to providing both. I made sure their coaches were aware of our conversations, and we created more opportunities for principals to share data strategies with one another during our monthly sessions.

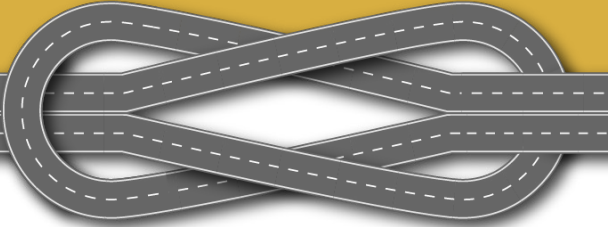
I am grateful to have the strong support of a board member who had my back and felt comfortable enough in our relationship to alert me to the issue early on, so I could take action to fix the situation before it had become too unwieldy. I didn't solve racism, but I did successfully address the root cause of a problem that was in my locus of control.







# CREDIBILITY



## DESTINATION OVERVIEW

### Competency Summary

Credibility refers to a leader's trustworthiness and reliability. Credibility is in many ways a reflection of how well a leader has mastered the other essential competencies, as their ability to establish legitimacy within their communities is largely dependent on their track record in building trusting relationships, demonstrating sound judgment, and successfully navigating complex situations. Leaders of color often face unique challenges in the workplace due to bias, which can complicate our efforts to both establish and retain our credibility as competent leaders. It may take more work and more time, and our credibility may be more endangered if we make a mistake or take a calculated risk. It is of utmost importance for us to be authentic, transparent, and consistent in our actions and decisions, so we can earn and maintain the respect and trust of our stakeholders, which is essential for effective leadership.

## SAMPLE ITINERARY

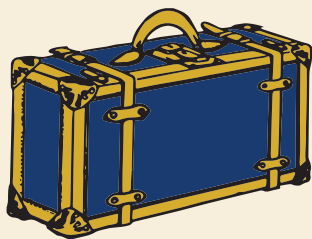
### Possible Routes and Contingency Plans

Leaders of color build credibility in a variety of ways in our leadership roles. For example, we may use our personal experiences and cultural background to connect with our constituencies and build rapport. We may challenge traditional power structures and advocate for social justice and equity, building our credibility with marginalized communities and allies. Once established, we may use our credibility to press for needed change, and to inspire and motivate our followers to take up the cause, especially those who may have experienced discrimination or marginalization.

## SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

### Unique Implications for Leaders of Color

White leaders may have an easier time building credibility due to their societal privilege and the implicit biases that favor them. However, they must be careful not to rely solely on their privilege and instead work to build trust and establish their legitimacy through their actions and decisions. Leaders of color, on the other hand, may have to work harder to build credibility due to the systemic barriers and stereotypes that we face. However, we can also leverage our cultural background and personal experiences to connect with followers and build trust.



## PACKING LIST COMPETENCY DETAIL

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?

A leader who shows **CREDIBILITY** acts in accordance with stated values, follows through on promises, and uses ethical considerations to guide decisions and actions. Such a leader..

- ✓ Uses ethical considerations to guide decisions.
- ✓ Through words and deeds encourages honesty throughout the organization.
- ✓ Speaks candidly about tough issues facing the organization.
- ✓ Tells the truth, not just what important constituents want to hear.
- ✓ Can be trusted to maintain confidentiality.
- ✓ Places ethical behavior above personal gain.
- ✓ Follows through on promises.
- ✓ Acts in accordance with their stated values.

## TRAVELOGUE

### Compassion and Clear Expectations Can Enhance Credibility

Early in my superintendency, I learned about a change that had occurred shortly before I joined the district that was making school leaders' jobs harder. Previously, all principals had access to a credit card through which they could directly purchase supplies and pay for school activities that met specific requirements. The parameters around those accounts were pretty strict, but they enabled principals to avoid the onerous district procurement process that was required for larger purchases. It was a way to be fiscally responsible and have strong oversight of school expenditures, while providing school leaders with practical balanced autonomy for day-to-day purchases.

The year before, one principal had screwed up. Plain and simple. They had made purchases that were out of compliance, and it was a real headache for the finance and legal teams to sort through. In response, the district withdrew the cards from all school leaders.

During our next senior leadership team meeting, I shared more about what I had heard from educators across the district and invited reflections from my team. The conversation was going well. Then I shared feedback on the credit card situation. I asked questions: What had happened? Who responded? How did it go? Lots of "understanding the situation" type questions. At some point, one of my senior leaders — a white woman — started to cry. Whoa. I stopped and checked in with her. Was she okay? What was going on? I really leaned into my compassion, but I was flummoxed. She explained that she was the one who had made the call to rescind the school credit cards, and she was feeling really bad — "attacked" — because I was questioning her authority in front of the whole team.

Deep breath. I knew I could not let what was happening on my inside show up on the outside. Honestly, I wondered whether this leader was weaponizing her tears, casting blame on my inquiry, on the tone of a Black leader, when perhaps she was realizing that she had made a bad call and wasn't ready to come to terms with it. I was still gathering information and didn't know yet either way. I did know that revealing my true feelings at that time wouldn't be productive. I had a visibly upset employee in front of me, and a group of her colleagues waiting to see how I would respond.



*To make good decisions, my team had to be able to speak directly and ask tough questions. I see a really important distinction between asking questions and questioning. This was new for my team, and I made sure we had time to talk it through and develop a shared understanding of what it meant for us to collaborate effectively together.*

First things first, I apologized. I apologized because I genuinely had not meant to upset anyone. I owned the impact of my communication style, and made sure she knew she was valued. I focused on relaxing my shoulders, softening my facial expressions, doing everything in my power to retain a compassionate tone, and I waited for her to let us know when she was ready to keep moving. She needed to know she had been heard, that she was respected. I needed to make sure this meeting didn't derail our entire team dynamic.

I kept my body and tone in that same supportive place when we turned to the next part of the conversation. I thanked that colleague for sharing such direct feedback on her experience. And I clarified my position: to make good decisions, to be great leaders for our schools and students, we had to be able to speak directly and ask critical and sometimes tough questions of one another. I needed *and expected* them to ask me questions, to push me on my thinking. I wanted to make sure we could get to a place where we could *all* feel comfortable asking for the information we needed to fully understand an issue or opportunity before moving forward. I explained that I see a really important distinction between asking questions and questioning, and that as a next step I would make sure we had time as a team to talk this through and develop a shared vision and understanding of what it meant for us to collaborate effectively together.

It was a tough meeting. Truthfully, I didn't win over that colleague who was so upset. But I did earn deeper trust and respect from everyone else in that room for my honesty, care, and commitment to living my values.





**DESTINATION OVERVIEW**

**Competency Summary**

Work/life harmony refers to strategies leaders deploy to support our mental, physical, and social-emotional well-being while balancing work and personal life. Leaders of color face unique challenges due to systemic racism, discrimination, and marginalization, which can make us disproportionately at risk for chronic stress, burnout, and associated mental and physical health issues. Therefore, we must be especially adept at managing our responsibilities at work and at home (including appropriately caring for our own needs as well as those of our colleagues, families, and friends) to both prevent exhaustion and promote optimal health. Maintaining work/life harmony enables us to be the best leaders we can be, today and into the future, and it enables us to cultivate conditions in which our teams can establish and sustain work/life harmony, too.

**SAMPLE ITINERARY**

**Possible Routes and Contingency Plans**

Leaders of color use the work/life harmony competency to establish clear boundaries and foster alignment between our work and personal lives, to prioritize self-care, and to maintain a positive and supportive work environment for ourselves and our teams. We adopt and advocate for more effective and equitable approaches to address physical, mental, and social-emotional health issues in our organizations and communities. For example, we may implement policies that provide flexible working hours, paid time off, and mental health resources to our employees. We may use our positional or relational authority to press for more supportive conditions across our school systems and the larger educational ecosystem. Critically, we also live our values, modeling work/life harmony for our teams by making explicit and visible our own actions to care for ourselves, protect our family time, and otherwise be present for and fully engaged in personal endeavors and non-work obligations.

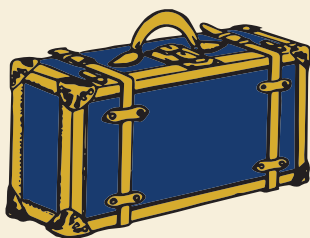
**SPECIAL TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS**

**Unique Implications for Leaders of Color**

The implications of the work/life harmony competency are different for white leaders and leaders of color. Through a phenomenon known as “weathering,” the daily stressors faced by people of color and other systematically marginalized communities accumulate and can take a heavy toll. This concept is closely related to “John Henryism,” which describes the high-effort coping strategies so often employed by Black Americans in the face of persistent discrimination and socioeconomic stressors. As such, while serious medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease can affect all of us, they

**PACKING LIST  
COMPETENCY DETAIL**

What does it look like for leaders of color to demonstrate a firm grasp of this competency across a range of leadership scenarios and dilemmas?



A leader who demonstrates **WORK/LIFE HARMONY** balances work priorities with personal life. Such a leader...

- ✓ Acts as if there is more to life than just having a career.
- ✓ Has activities and interests outside of career.
- ✓ Does not take career so seriously that their personal life suffers.



are more pervasive in communities of color. Further, as leaders of color who have found success, we are often asked — and are highly motivated to provide — more of our time and energy to help others get ahead. These added opportunities are often a source of joy, yet they can become a source of stress, too, when they inhibit work/life harmony. Because of our insight into the significant impact a lack of work/life harmony can have on the mental, physical, and social-emotional wellness of ourselves, our families, and our communities, leaders of color may be especially well-positioned to use this competency to promote racial equity and to advocate for social and economic changes that benefit all leaders and workers.

#### TRAVELOGUE

### Caring for Ourselves is Risky — and Absolutely Essential

People see me as the “quota.” I’m a “diversity hire.” I hear their whispers. They say that the only reason I was promoted was because I’m Hispanic. When I was first appointed to this job, I worked extra hard with my principals to make sure they saw I belonged in this role. I pushed myself to over-deliver on everything. I worked nights and weekends, was always available, always “on.” I wanted people to see me as a go-getter, a hustler, someone who had earned, who deserved, leadership.

The truth was that I felt like everyone was watching me and looking for reasons to put a negative spin on the job I was doing. I was always looking in my rearview mirror, constantly checking my blindspots, making sure I never got caught off guard by someone trying to undermine me and my work. I was motivated by fear just as much as I was motivated to make a difference for our educators and students. Sometimes it felt like the fear was running the show.

Honestly, I still feel that pull sometimes. But I also know it’s simply not sustainable for me to operate that way. In fact, it’s counterproductive. If I’m always on, always going, always doing more, even if more doesn’t really help anyone get better results, eventually it’s going to catch up with me. I’d get tired. I’d lose focus. Eventually, over-delivering, never allowing myself to switch off, would lead to an avoidable mistake. That fear-driven mindset wasn’t good for me, and it didn’t help anyone else in my life — professionally or personally.

I know I’m good at my job. And I know that the best way to keep doing my job well is to find balance. It’s hard. I never “achieve” work/life harmony, but I’m always working toward it and recalibrating. It’s not as simple as “never work late,” because sometimes that’s what I need to do to make space for the other things in my life that matter. But I do have to check myself to make sure I’m taking care of myself and being there for my family. The pendulum can move, but never too far in one direction. My kids are the best. They give me real feedback! They let me know if I’m dropping any balls at home.

Yet I’m mindful that prioritizing my own self-care is risky when I know there are still people out there who doubt my qualifications. I get together with a group of guys every other week or so who help me keep perspective. The fear hasn’t gone away, but I can manage it a whole lot better with other leaders of color who get what I’m going through, who know the struggles, and who can call me out if I ever start becoming a workaholic again.

*If I’m always on, always going, always doing more, eventually it’s going to catch up with me. Eventually, over-delivering, never allowing myself to switch off, would lead to an avoidable mistake. That fear-driven mindset wasn’t good for me, and it didn’t help anyone else in my life—professionally or personally.*

