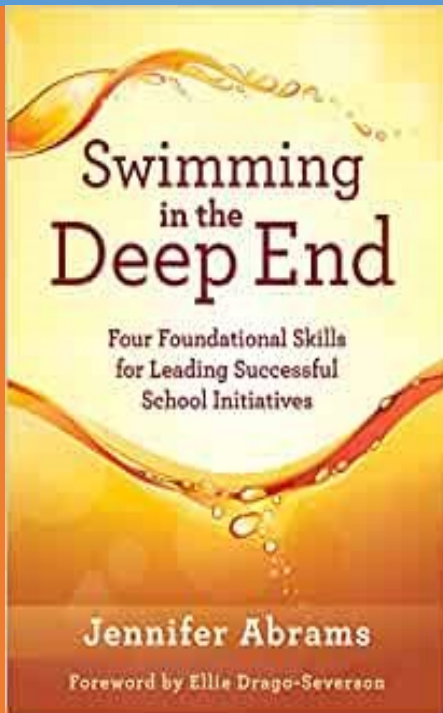


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

KITT BUCKINGHAM

EADM 826 Prof. Dr. K. Walker

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Swimming in the Deep End: Four Foundational skills for Leading Successful School Initiatives

Written by: Jennifer Abrams

INTRODUCTION



Swimming in the Deep End introduces four key skills that encourage growth within individuals as well as school initiatives: (1) thinking before you speak, (2) preempting resistance, (3) responding to resistance, and (4) managing yourself through change and resistance.

Abrams employs a thought provoking analogy that takes into consideration both the development of children and the final goal of educators. She draws a parallel between learning to swim and building the skills necessary to flourish into a well-rounded educator. Abrams depicts swimming lessons from when she was a child. How they began in the shallow end, blowing bubbles and progressed from there. The children, stand-ins for the educators within the metaphor, are not expected to know how to swim right away. Regardless of their previous experiences or capabilities, each child is afforded the same progression through the levels. Abrams explains that they were taught step by step. Abrams' words suggest a shift in attitude is necessary, and the change must come through an active desire to do so. It is important for educators to understand that they cannot jump into the deep-end overnight.

Abrams suggests the shift from one end of the pool to the other will always be an adjustment.

Thrilling, exciting, terrifying and worth it!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jennifer Abrams' passion is professional development by way of leadership and peer coaching. A large portion of her career has been dedicated to such, Abrams focus is mainly on K-12 teachers, however, she has also trained “administrators, nurses, hospital personnel, and others on new employee support, supervision,...having hard conversations and collaboration skills”. Abrams attended Tufts and Stanford University. Within her twenty-six-year tenure at Palo Alto Unified School District in California, she has been at the forefront in directing teachers and administrators alike in workshops on many topics.

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CHAPTER ONE: THINKING BEFORE YOU SPEAK— COMMUNICATION OF THE WHAT AND WHY

Consistency, communication and transparency - Abrams stresses the importance of trusting your instincts, but also having the capacity to trust others as well.

Deep-end leaders should be able to:

- ◆ Articulate and closely examine the real challenge they are trying to solve
- ◆ Understand that not all challenges can be solved but instead, must work towards a compromise
- ◆ Stay true to their own as well as the school or district's values
- ◆ Communicate to and choose objectively who should be involved in particular processes
- ◆ Understand that transparency is key
- ◆ Stop and reflect



Self-assessment and sufficiency — Building self-sufficiency helps when swimming in the deep-end, it improves cognitive, social, and psychological functions.



CHAPTER TWO: PREEMPTING RESISTANCE

- ◆ Leaders both know themselves and possess the emotional intelligence to know others, as well
- ◆ Deep-end leaders must adopt an allocentric mindset, while still remembering that resistance will occur regardless between individuals
- ◆ Deep-end leaders must recognize that resistance is inevitable, however conflict is not. Abrams sources six possible reasons for polarity within a workplace as well as between cultures:

Abrams discusses the SCARF model developed by Neuropsychologist David Rock (2008, 2009). The study focused on fight or flight reactions within an individual depending on the topic of particular conversations. The SCARF model is an initiative that can be used to coax said individuals into feeling less threatened. SCARF stands for:

- ◆ **Status** refers to one's self compared importance to others. Acknowledge an individual's roles, expertise, or dependability.
- ◆ **Certainty** refers to the ability to predict the future. Acknowledge the next steps and a course of action.
- ◆ **Autonomy** refers to self control over one's actions or environment. Acknowledge timeframes as well as uniformity.
- ◆ **Relatedness** refers to belonging. Suggest working together as a community.
- ◆ **Fairness** refers to upholding the same standard for everyone. Acknowledge potential inequality and standards.

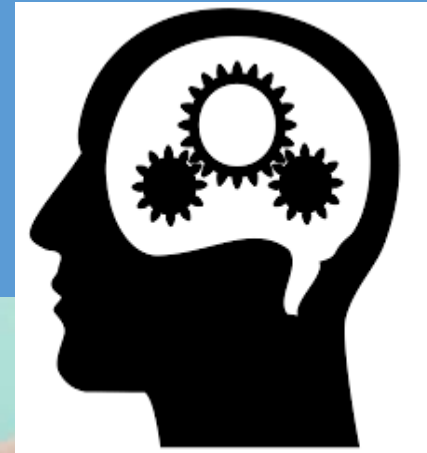


1. Power Distance
2. Individualism and Collectivism
3. Masculine and Feminine
4. Uncertainty-Avoidance
5. Long-Term Orientation Vs Short-Term Normative Orientation
6. Indulgence Versus Restraint

CHAPTER THREE: RESPONDING TO RESISTANCE

“Deep-end leaders need to understand that others will be triggered and, in response, they need to *respond, not react.*” *Leaders must be able to:*

- ◆ Deal with difficult issues head on and remember not to place blame
- ◆ Take negative feedback and listen, but do not internalize it
- ◆ Separate themselves from the workplace or conflict
- ◆ Maintain tact and not react with defensiveness



Abrams suggests a few of her own strategies for responding to resistance:

- Watch your language — understand that words like “must” should be softened to ease the pressure the work may bring. Abrams warns against “...sugarcoating your language with false diplomacy”, instead, try suggesting and recommending.



- Get Rid of the Word Can't
- Set Yourself Up Linguistically for Success — begin phrasing things more positive than negative.
- Change Your Words, Change Your Mindset



CHAPTER FOUR: MANAGING YOURSELF THROUGH CHANGE — THE ROLE OF RESILIENCE

“Breathe deeply and no that who you are can withstand the experience of conflict that living requires.”

-Mark Nepo

As suggested in chapter one, self-assessment provides an active shift in oneself. Deep-end leaders must have a complex physical, psychological, and emotional understanding of themselves, and others. Abrams implores readers to quite literally deep dive into yourself, knowing how we tick and are triggered to certain things can help in the development of emotional intelligence towards individuals outside of oneself.



CONCLUSION

Each of you is perfect the way you are....and you can use a little improvement."

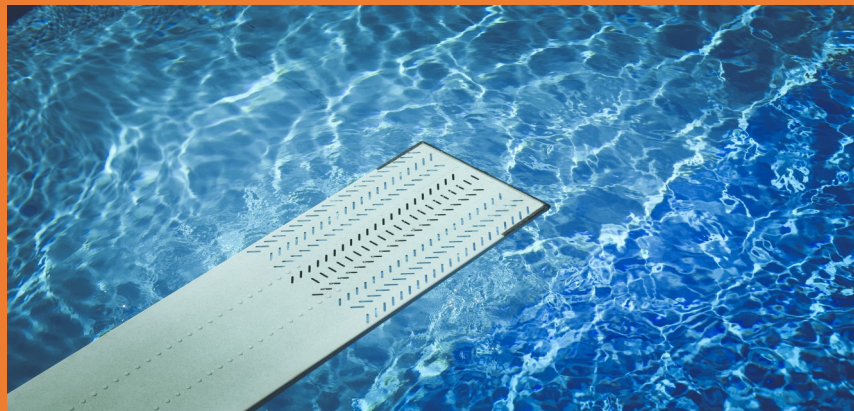
- Shunryu Suzuki (Suzuki Roshi)



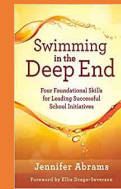
Jennifer Abrams challenges educational leaders to prosper and through reflective questioning, further empowers them to continuously flourish. She explores self-reflection and self-acceptance, but also embraces the desire for endless self-improvement.

Deep-end leaders should have:

- ◆ Structures and supports to help one manage challenges
- ◆ Techniques to help one relax and calm the body and mind
- ◆ An awareness of the concept of growth. A leader is not born, but cultivated
- ◆ The ability for a positive self-talk, or be in touch with someone who is
- ◆ Compassion, optimism, and positivity



CRITICAL EVALUATION



The book guides readers on a roadmap through the process of self-assessment. The four foundational skills acknowledge that in order to become the best that you can be, you must delve deeper into yourself, using the reflective questions provided throughout the book. Abrams uses swimming metaphors to demonstrate the perpetual need for self-reflection and growth. In order to succeed, a school leader must develop a sense of renewed buoyancy and keep their heads above water at all times. This is not a quick fix book, the questions offered act as a guide through your leadership journey. The reflective thought and dialogue though at times general, serve to support you onward to self-improvement as an educational leader. I believe the book poses questions that leaders should already be thinking, but takes the time to choreograph and present them.



Abrams, J. (2019). *Swimming in the deep end: four foundational skills for leading successful school initiatives*. Solution Tree Press.