

# 4 Common Ground, Common Purpose. Relationships in School Boards

Back when she was chief executive officer of EDS Canada Inc., Sheelagh Whittaker was asked by a new boss at head office in Dallas to discuss her thinking on leadership. In advance of that meeting, Ms. Whittaker – now a director of Imperial Oil Ltd and Standard Life PLC – prepared this series of provocative thoughts.

## **My Convictions about Leadership**

by Sheelagh Whittaker

“A leader with vision and passion can transform a division, a corporation or a nation.”

“No one person who is so brilliant that his or her ideas cannot be improved by trading thoughts with another smart person.”

“Decisiveness is not the same as being certain. I am often decisive; I am seldom certain.”

“Reading fiction and biography in quantity can help you think about how to live your own life.”

“It is important to remember that people's behavior toward you is not necessarily about you.”

“Bitterness is a destructive emotion, jealousy is demeaning, cynicism is a form of laziness and equity a complex goal.”

“Those who violate your trust are the losers. An appropriate response is not to cease to trust, but to place your trust elsewhere.”

“Readers' Digest had it right: Laughter is the best medicine.”

“Unless you are sometimes prepared to change everything, you may end up with nothing.”



**My Convictions about Leadership** by Sheelagh Whittaker (continued)

“Making criticisms constructive is worth the extra effort.”

“You should stare fear of loss in the face, so that fear of loss loses its power to compromise your integrity.”

“Pay a lot of attention to issues or people when their time has come.”

“It is important to choose which battles to fight.”

“Integrity is a source of both relief and freedom.”

“Business and the public management of the economy are elaborate monopoly games developed for adults to play. Neither business nor the economy is based on absolute truths.”

“You can get a lot more done with a few good people than you can get done with those same people hindered by some additional unmotivated, misdirected or plain lazy colleagues.”

“Good judgement is the most vital determinant of success. Judgment can be improved by determinedly learning more about an issue.”

“If you have to force a decision, the decision probably should not yet be made.”

“With children and with employees, never say ‘maybe’ when you mean ‘no.’ ”

“Some ideas, ideals and people deserve loyalty, even sacrifice, especially in the face of challenge or threat.”

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