

In Gusty Winds: How School Leaders Stay Steady and Lead Forward

Block the Wind



Create Stable Conditions
Create buffers—structure, connection, consistency

- Audit meeting structures, rituals, and routines. Keep what creates steadiness & efficiency (e.g., shared norms, instructional focus), & eliminate what adds noise or confusion.
 - Design grounding rituals, e.g., weekly 5-minute check-ins or a consistent opening protocol for team meetings to reinforce connection/clarity.
- “Predictable structures build the trust needed for growth.”
(Bryk et al., 2010)

Read the Wind

Lead with Flexibility
Scan environment to lead with intention—not reaction.



- Review key challenges (e.g., sudden staff changes, behavior spikes, family concerns). Identify which could have been anticipated earlier/set early warning indicators for each.
- Build a draft “flex plan” for one key area (e.g., PL, coverage, behavior systems). Ask: What’s my plan if we need to pivot quickly?

“Get on the balcony to see the bigger picture.”
(Heifetz et al., 2009)

Catch the Wind



Design for Lift
Use disruption as opportunity for innovation

- Host a “wind mapping” with staff or leadership team: What did last year’s gusts blow over—what might that be telling us? Id one outdated structure/routine you’ll choose *not* to rebuild.
 - Choose one persistent challenge (e.g., staff collaboration, student engagement). Convene a design group to explore fresh solutions. Use a “what if...” frame to drive creative thinking.
- “Re-culturing, not restructuring, is the path to real change.”
(Fullan, 2019)

Find the Eye

Protect the Calm
Create spaces for staff to keep going



- Review your calendar for last year & identify energy drains/burnout patterns—seasonal events, time-consuming rituals, routines, or systems that offered little return. Replace 1.
- Preload your calendar with protected blocks for visibility & presence through classroom visits, reflection, & staff connection—and hold them sacred.

“Short-term wins create energy and forward momentum.”
(Kotter & Cohen, 2021)

