**Rick & Rebecca’s Brief Skype Interview with**

**Jason Levington,**

**Associate Professor of Educational Leadership**

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**R&R:** Jason, thanks so much for taking a moment to answer a few quick questions about your work with Graduate students enrolled in the Educational Leadership Program at the University where you work.

JL: My pleasure.

R&R: So, we contacted you because you showed an interest in our book, *Escaping the School Leader’s Dunk Tank*.

JL: I’m very interested in reading it . . . yes, absolutely.

R&R: So, what kinds of training or coursework do you currently have in place for helping school leaders to navigate the waters of adversity within their careers.

JL: Well, we talk about some scenarios a bit and they see some real life episodes or events, of course, when they do their internships and research in the field of school leadership. But, we don’t get really deep into the topic or have anything formal set up.

R&R: What do you mean by formal?

JL: We haven’t studied adversity or interpersonal relationships like the way you both have done in your book.

R&R: Do you feel that our topic is something that might help future school leaders?

JL: I’m sure it would be extremely helpful.

R&R: But, you don’t really do a whole lot now with studying adversity?

JL: No. See, it’s very difficult.

R&R: What do you mean by “difficult”?

JL: We are training leaders to stay in the field and we want more to be enticed to the field. Being a principal or superintendent is a very important career, but . . . see . . . our enrollment in the program has dropped a bit over the past few years, so . . .

R&R: And, what do you attribute this to?

JL: Lots of reasons. The political terrain. Common Core. Schools under Review. So many battle conditions. Lots of unrest in the field of education. High turnover rates, as well, for school leaders everywhere.

R&R: So, let’s get back to the word “difficult” for a quick second. We have found that many educational leadership programs across the U.S. have a limited focus on adversarial conditions and politics in education. Since you are seeing a decline in enrollment and acknowledged how you don’t emphasize adversity too much, why the change of heart on possibly setting something up that is more formal for your students?

JL: I have to admit . . . we want to keep school leaders in the program and we don’t want to scare them off.

R&R: Interesting. So, it’s the process of maybe sharing the “dirty stuff” or confronting the political elephant that may need to finally come out?

JL: Kind of. See, for years, we discussed having a balanced program in our department—one that would be practical and realistic, but one that wouldn’t shy away from the tough topics . . . but what we’ve found is that once it comes down to planning the course, we shy away from the scary stuff.

R&R: What kind of scary stuff?

JL: Revengeful board members, back-stabbing administrators, Superintendents who get raked over the coals [for doing the right things], incompetent department heads . . . stuff like that. But, it isn’t just a matter of sharing the dirty stuff, it’s more about not making the profession out to be so negative. It really is a great profession and the pros certainly outweigh the cons. I like to think that there are more successful administrators and school leaders than not.

R&R: But, it is your job to paint both pictures so that the ones who struggle might be better equipped to not have to struggle if they knew what might be waiting for them right around the corner?

JL: I guess you could say that. Proactivity really does help. That’s why I’m thinking that your book could help.

R&R: We are aware that you’ve held some high ranking positions in various public school districts in the past. Have you had some horror stories from your own past careers as a Superintendent and Principal?

JL: Oh my God, yes. You probably wouldn’t believe me.

R&R: Oh, yes, we would!

JL: I think it is time to use a different sort of practical finesse by looking at your book, but placing it within the context of how to be an even more successful school leader, rather than just read it with a “scare the crap out of them” mentality.

R&R: [laughs]. We certainly intended that from the start. We wrote it to help others “prevail,” for sure.

JL: I’m really looking forward to it . . . and . . . you know . . . I think this is just what educational leadership students are missing.

R&R: We are so excited about how our work will help school leaders everywhere. That, in itself, is the biggest royalty that we wanted to get from our book--from this whole experience. We are honored that you want to be on board with our work. One final question, though . . .

JL: Absolutely.

R&R: Do you have a song playlist idea for us regarding the Dunk Tank?

JL: [laughs]. I gotta tell you . . . “Evil Woman” by Electric Light Orchestra had me laughing so hard when I saw it on your website. Boy, I could tell you a few things about a former Superintendent and Board member that I worked under one time in my career “Evil” is an understatement and it is sometimes a harsh reality for both men and women!

R&R: You can say that again! Well, thank you so very much for your time. We really appreciate your honesty and candor.

JL: My pleasure. Improvements can be made all the time. Staying status quo has gotta go.