Each of us has a leadership platform, either explicitly stated or implicitly held. It consists of our own statements of values and beliefs about education and educational leadership. A platform serves as a touchstone, a reminder of what we think is valuable and important to know and remember. It is an ethical compass of sorts, suggesting directions we might take and not regret later. We could also look at it as a bottom line for each of us, the ultimate values and assumptions to which we pledge allegiance. For some superintendents, the bottom line might be fiscal responsibility, and for others it might be student achievement. For still others, it might be expanding opportunities for students, creating a stable society, or treating associates decently; it could even be maintaining a promising career trajectory or seeking accolades for our work. Part of the leadership platform as well is considering how we should go about pursuing the bottom line. What are we willing to do and how much are we willing to do it? Finally, part of our platform is our list of assumptions about why certain actions will be effective or ineffective. What do we believe “works,” and why do we believe that?

We have argued that leaders should seek and heed various perspectives. But those various perspectives will often contradict one another. Theories may offer a guide for decisions, but there are too many to be certain. Then what? What do you do when many opinions matter and seem right? What touchstone or guiding light can you use to navigate your way through? Have you ever heard a leader say, “At the end of the day, I knew I had to go home with myself”? Knowing your own
values and visions for education can help you decide what action to take. In the previous chapter, we offered the metaphor of the sailor in stormy seas. A person moving into a leadership position without knowing what he or she believes as a leader is like a ship sailing without a rudder and perhaps without stars for guidance. Your leadership platform can serve as your rudder and your stars.

We propose that your leadership platform will assist you in navigating decisions. We acknowledge that we are presenting you with one of your most basic leadership quandaries by asking you to know when to heed alternate viewpoints and when to follow your own. While negotiating the swirl of contending perspectives around you, keep in mind your beliefs and values—what you want to do for students, teachers, principals, and communities. Your leadership platform will keep your feet on the ground so you can step forward.

One of the quandaries of leadership we have presented is deciding between being committed to your own values and beliefs versus being open to alternative perspectives. Both stances can be good ones for leaders; the puzzle is how to maintain both of them. We have put together this book of quandaries partly to help you learn about alternative perspectives. But we want you to begin by encapsulating as well as you can your own most basic values and beliefs about education, leadership, and organizations. So, let us walk through two exercises: (1) developing your educational platform and (2) composing your cultural autobiography.

**Your Leadership Platform**

Get a notebook or walk over to your computer keyboard. For the first exercise, jot down your own personal answers to the following eight items. Provide the most thoughtful answers you can, but do not self-monitor. That is, do not write what you think are the most socially acceptable answers. Write what you, in your heart of hearts, believe.

1. What is the purpose of education?
2. Since you probably will not be able to accomplish everything you want to in your career, what would you most like to accomplish? What do you want people to remember about you as an educator?
3. Make a list of reasons why students succeed or fail in school. Which reasons seem to you most compelling? Which seem to you to be most readily ameliorated by good leadership?
4. What conditions make adults effective in organizations? Which of those conditions can good leadership help bring about?