



Simon T. Bailey

Author, speaker explains why, how education leaders can soar

By Julie Phillips Randles

NOT EVERYONE MAY AGREE WITH THE DEFINITION OF A CHANGE AGENT; however, best-selling author Simon T. Bailey knows how to positively transform school districts from the inside out.

Bailey is the author of the upcoming book, “Releasing Leadership Brilliance: Breaking Sound Barriers in Education,” and will be a keynote speaker in April at the 2017 CASBO Annual Conference & California School Business Expo in

Long Beach. As CEO of Simon T. Bailey International, a training and development company, he specializes in creating learning and development tools for individuals and corporations. His approach to attitude is what helps educators take wing in their careers.

As sales director and new business development director for Disney Institute at Walt Disney World Resort®, Bailey was known worldwide for developing custom training programs to help compa-

nies increase their customer experiences, employee engagement and leadership development. He has also served on the advisory council for Management and Executive Education at Rollins College’s Crummer Graduate School of Business, which is ranked in the top 25 best private graduate business schools in the U.S. He holds a master’s degree from Faith Christian University.

His accolades include the 2010 Meeting and Conventions magazine’s

favorite speakers list, serving as a contributing writer for American City Business Journals and a National Speakers Association's CPÆ Speaker Hall of Fame induction in 2015.

Unfortunately, Bailey's path wasn't paved with opportunities. He grew up in Buffalo, New York, where he attended a trade school in his freshman year. He failed many of his classes and was rejected for the football, basketball, and track and field teams. He transferred high schools and over the next three years found his niche in public speaking. His peers voted him senior class president.

After one year at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, financial difficulties forced him to drop out. Bailey landed a job at a hotel, made the best of his situation and started climbing the ladder in the hospitality industry.

His platform can be summed up in one word: brilliance – a theme that appears in many of his coaching sessions and presentations. His earlier book (he's published eight titles), "Release Your Brilliance," focuses on his interpretation of the four Cs of diamond selection:

- Clarity: understanding your reason and purpose.
- Cut: understanding how to frame past experiences.
- Color: how you think about what you want to do and how to get there.
- Carat: the size of your dream.

In his personal life, Bailey enjoys spending time with his two active teenagers. He still roots for the Buffalo Bills and is an avid movie-goer. He's also fond of analogies to help clients grasp the bigger picture in their careers.

Here's a sample of why and how he believes every educator should soar within their position:

What's the best advice you've ever received and who gave it to you?

The best advice I have received is from my board adviser Joel Novak. He said that in business and life, it's all about relationship chemistry.

If there's good chemistry and the parties have a good working relationship, you can get anything done. If the chemistry is bad, then no matter how sweet the business deal is, it won't work.

What's the latest book you read and what did you learn?

The last book I read was "The End of Average" by Todd Rose. It's one of my favorite reads and I've suggested it to a dozen people.

Rose says that we are sorted according to how we perform on standardized education curriculum designed for the average student, with rewards and opportunities doled out to those who exceed the average, while constraints and condescension are heaped upon those who lag behind. It's now time for anyone concerned about the future of their community, city or nation to stand up and lend their voice to transform education.

Prior to starting your own business, you were a sales director and new business development director for the Disney Institute at Walt Disney World Resort.® What is the greatest lesson you learned from your work with Disney?

My first exposure in rubbing shoulders with executive brass was an open-mouth-insert-foot moment. I was invited to have breakfast along with other cast members, or Disney employees, with Al Weiss, president of Walt Disney World Resort.®

The invitation said to arrive at one of the Disney resorts at 7:30 a.m. I arrived at 6:45 a.m. and noticed my name card wasn't next to the president. So, what

would you do if you were in my shoes? You guessed it. I switched the name cards so I could sit next to the most powerful man at Walt Disney World Resort.®. Was it wrong? Yes. Would I do it again? No way. I had a need to get ahead and make my name known and I wasn't willing to wait to be discovered.

As breakfast started, Al asked me how I was doing. I said fine and followed up with a question. Later, as part of the pleasantries and hollow conversation about sports and the weather that we often engage in, I asked him, "What do I have to do to get ahead here at Disney?"

He said that I needed to know who I was and why I was here. Well, I just gave him the computer screen stare. In the back of my mind, I was saying, "Seriously? Is that it?" I was waiting for some profound Mufasa wisdom, something to help both Simba and myself. Needless to say, I nodded and said, "Thank you."

It took almost 10 years to comprehend what he was really saying. His statement to me simply meant the greatest disappointment in life is not death. The greatest disappointment is being alive and not knowing why. Here I was at the fourteenth most recognized brand in the world according to Interbrand, and I didn't have a clue as to why. That day is when I quit doing my normal job and started doing a little more. I had to listen, learn and lean in. When I left Disney to venture out on my own, I realized that I wasn't doing it just to make money but to find the next chapter of meaning.

What's the biggest takeaway from your upcoming book, "Releasing Leadership Brilliance: Breaking Sound Barriers in Education"?

The biggest takeaway is that there are four cornerstones for educators: Personal Brilliance, Collaborative Brilliance, Team

Brilliance and Student Brilliance. To succeed, you should create a professional presence that enables educators to break the sound barriers of outdated structures and processes within our current educational system.

The cornerstones, along with the Breaking Ranks® model, give educators a compass and tools to use along the pathway toward transformation. Here's what each of the cornerstones looks like:

Personal Brilliance. Knowing yourself gives you "weight" for flight.

- Be a leader with a vision.
- Culture change starts with looking in the mirror before you try to change the system.
- Who you are is more important than what you do.
- Listen loudly.
- Lead with your strengths.
- Develop others.

Collaborative Brilliance. Broadening the vision gives you "lift."

- Seek deeper connection.
- Go beyond what's considered the norm in order to connect with the community.
- Listen loudly.
- Create a shared vision.
- Don't blame inertia on others.

Team Brilliance. Building capacity to collaborate gives you "thrust."

- Be a leader with a vision rather than a boss with an agenda.
- Move from me to we.
- Look for the positives in others.
- Upgrade the skill and infuse the will to develop commitment within staff.
- Teaming is the emotional glue of school culture.
- Focus, focus, focus on student success.

Student Brilliance. Brilliance soars when you "reduce drag."

- Infuse hope and encourage students to dream.
- Cut through barriers that keep students from reaching their brilliance.
- Be student-centered rather than teacher-directed.
- Give students voice. Students are eight times more likely to be motivated to learn when *they* think they can be successful and believe the teacher thinks they can be successful.
- Create meaning and student engagement.

While doing research for your book, you found that some urban school leaders had identified ways to break through mediocrity to give students the kind of experiences students in suburban schools were having. What are some of the things urban school leaders did to break through?

Sheila Harrity is an educational leader who has no fear. She believes in finding a work-around to solve complex problems and refuses to coast along. She won't accept, "No there's no money for that idea." Instead, she has learned how to raise money in the trenches to fulfill the dream of lifting kids out of poverty through education.

She implemented honors courses and joined Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) to help her tap into local resources to find tutors willing to come to the school to help students. She wrote a state grant to offer Advanced Placement (AP) and honor courses in this urban setting.

But there was push-back by some not willing to offer this type of rigor since vocational schools are often perceived as

a dumping ground for kids not cutting it at the comprehensive high schools. The perception was to send them to the vocational schools so that they could be good with their hands.

She and her teachers made it a priority to connect students with real-world examples. Before, students came to school feeling like they just had to memorize and regurgitate irrelevant information for a test and then they could forget it. But in this vocational setting, the "Why learn this?" question was being answered as students built a robot in tech ed class, worked with mathematical equations in culinary class to determine amounts of ingredients to use in a recipe or learned the chemistry of how dyes and chemicals work in cosmetology.

Their state tests scores started going up, the graduation rate was increasing and the dropout rate was going down. Pride was rising, but they didn't stop there. The staff realized that they needed to kick it into a higher gear.

Sheila and her team noticed that two weeks before students would sit for the AP exam, or state exam, or make a career decision, they would begin to sabotage themselves because they lacked the self-confidence to make it to the graduation finish line. Many students just weren't used to being successful.

Reflecting on her sports experience, she and her administrative team decided they needed a motivational coach that could give the kids a pre-exam talk, similar to a pre-game talk before players take the field. Once again Sheila talked up this idea to visitors to the school, and sure enough, a donor stepped up to underwrite this motivational experience.

Two weeks prior to exam time, Worcester Technical High School put 1,400 students and 150 staff members on 44 buses and took them to a rented

theater. Most people thought that Sheila and her team were crazy for letting 1,400 kids loose in the city. But the students didn't disappear downtown. Sheila believed that kids rise to the occasion based on the expectation – and all of them did!

They listened to Liz Murray whose life story became a tv film, "Homeless to Harvard." She shared with the students how she overcame obstacles and succeeded. The following day, the students were already asking who Sheila would bring as speaker for the next year. The boost was a success and the same donor who said "yes" the first time has not stopped saying "yes" for the last seven years.

She continually asks herself, "How do we align the partnerships in the com-

munity to impact the workforce pipeline and have an impact in North Central Massachusetts?" She is strengthening business partnerships by having a full-service bank connect to their business tech program. Now kids can do a co-op program with bank tellers at 17 area banks. And her newest vision is to develop a 5,000-square-foot veterinary clinic to serve the area. She has already raised the \$2 million dollars to do it and built in six college credits for kids to work alongside a veterinarian from Decker College.

You've said, "Leadership is an activity, not a position." What do you mean by that?

As I look back over my seven amazing years with Disney, I realize that distance

gives perspective. As I reflect, I now realize that leadership is the right activity at the right time for the right reason and has nothing to do with achieving a position.

I believe that as an educational leader, one can become intoxicated with the vertical ascension of one's career and lose sight by daily executing important tasks on a horizontal level.

I realize that in my formative years with Disney, I was preoccupied with impressing people in authority instead of producing work that left an indelible imprint. I wish I had a leadership whisperer 20 years ago that could've opened my head and inserted the micro-chip on how to release my personal brilliance.

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You encourage leaders to see “failure as feedback,” rather than a final blow. Educators often encourage students to fail forward. What does failure as feedback look like for school leaders?

For school leaders, feedback is an opportunity to enter into a meaningful conversation that challenges one to grow. Feedback is a personal invitation to leaders who aren’t afraid to embrace the truth about themselves and make necessary course corrections in their journey.

Feedback is a gift if implemented immediately. The ultimate benefactor of this candid communication is the leader, their educational peers, students, parents and everyone connected to them.

You had an epiphany that led you to reframe your thinking about your role at Disney from “just doing a job” to crystallizing the value and purpose in that job. For those who are burned out or struggling with the meaning of their work, how can they be reinvigorated?

I want to invite you to quit your job and go to work. Obviously, I mean that figuratively and not literally. When a person shows up to a job and struggles to get through the day, there are two things to do immediately:

Recall your happiest moment in life or within the school system. Close your eyes for one minute and relive that moment. Imagine on the movie screen of your mind that happy time. Take a deep breath and begin to re-imagine as if it were happening in real time. In this state, as you open your eyes and say the first word or phrase that comes to mind, you’ve shifted your state of being.

Take a piece of paper and set a stopwatch to 30 seconds. Start the watch and write down everything that is right about you. Step back and look at it. Are

you surprised by what you rediscovered about yourself? Don’t be, it’s all true. Make sure to review it for at least 21 days before you go to bed and when you wake up in morning.

Some leaders have a difficult time unleashing the full potential of their staff. How can school leaders create an empowering and productive environment where staff can thrive?

Your words matter. Language is the software of the mind. Every word you say creates an outcome. Choose your words wisely because they carry power. Love and respect have no color.

Every day, educators have the ability to use their words to say, “I love you and believe in you,” by how they think, speak and treat everyone.

Management guru Peter Drucker once said that leadership is not “magnetic personality” – that can just as well be a glib tongue. It’s not “making friends and influencing people” – that’s flattery. Leadership is lifting a person’s vision to higher sights, the raising of a person’s performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond normal limitations.

What can we expect from your keynote at the CASBO Annual Conference in April?

Attendees will be introduced to a framework on why and how to break sound barriers in the educational system.

They’ll evaluate how they are showing up as leaders and learn to inspire the type of environment they want to create. They’ll learn to look for self-limiting beliefs and build consensus around meaningful goals that tap into the strengths of individuals within the community. And they’ll gather ways to improve communication styles with the colleagues that they are looking to influence in order to produce greater achievement among students. ■■■

Julie Phillips Randles is a freelance writer based in Roseville, California.