“Rocking the Boat” (by Debra Meyerson) - *Becoming a Tempered Radical*

In this book, the author describes a spectrum of strategies that Tempered Radicals employ as they go about the business of triggering change within organizations. I’ve been an educator in the Chicago Public School System for about 12 years and I’ve worked in three different schools during this time. After reading this book and reflecting on my experiences within these schools, I concluded that I’ve tended to move through each aspect of this continuum, from quiet resistance to organizing group actions, using strategies from each category. My decision to depart from the first two schools came as a result of Principal transitions. Within both schools, replacing the Principal triggered efforts on my part to rally teachers behind a campaign to select a strong and fair-minded person to lead the school. In both cases, in my opinion, these efforts failed.

At my current school earlier this school year, this pattern continued as our beloved Principal elected to take an administrative position at the district level. Almost hypnotically, I found myself communicating with key Local School Council delegates, as well as other teacher leaders, to encourage voting members on the council to support the best qualified candidate, based upon experience as well as educational background. At the same time, I began polishing up my resume in case I decided to seek other job opportunities. Looking back, I recognize the same conversations and justifications for my departure, discussed with current colleagues, that I also engaged in with colleagues from the other schools where I worked. I now believe that my interest in and productivity within educational institutions are directly proportional to the commitment that the Principal leader has to the evolution of innovative, technology-based, math and science instructional programs for the middle grades. This has been an amazing revelation for me!
One big goal that I have for myself for the next 12 months at this school centers around using my influence and negotiation skills to work with our new Principal and her staff to improve the mathematics performance of our 6th thru 8th grade students. My desire is that at least 70% of them achieve mastery of grade-level math skills before they graduate. I believe the 3 keys for achieving this goal will require:

✓ Changing the Administrative and Operational Paradigm For the Middle Grades From an Elementary to a High-School-Focused Mindset

✓ Obtaining an Integrated 6th thru 8th Grade Reading Curriculum (because poor reading comprehension and vocabulary skills negatively affect mathematical reasoning)

✓ Reducing the Number of Program and Technology Initiatives We Are Tasked With Implementing From Several Each Year to Just 2 or 3 (this will foster greater focus and clarity of purpose)