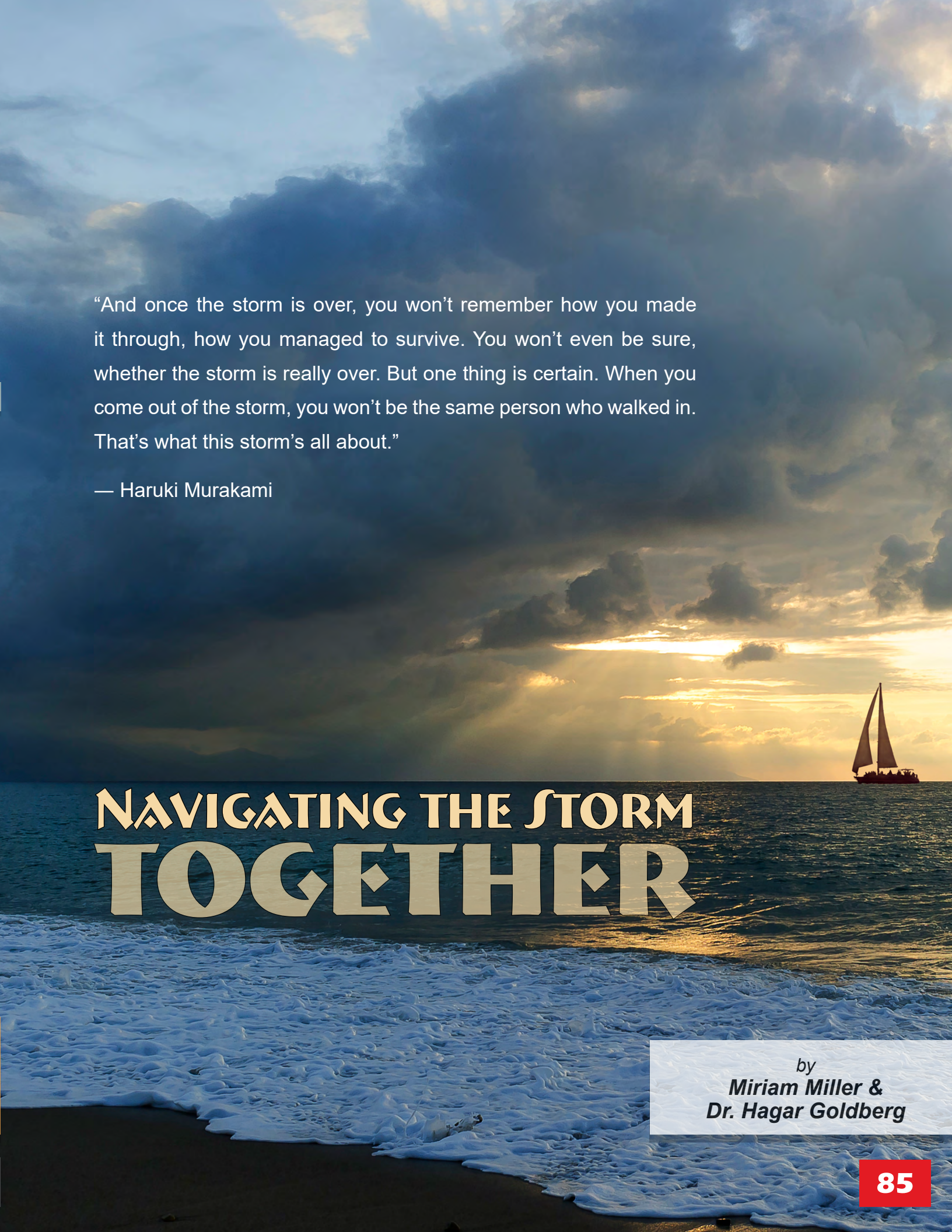




“And once the storm is over, you won’t remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won’t even be sure, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won’t be the same person who walked in. That’s what this storm’s all about.”

— Haruki Murakami

NAVIGATING THE STORM TOGETHER

by
**Miriam Miller &
Dr. Hagar Goldberg**

With great challenge comes great opportunity. It goes without saying that the last year has been one of incredible challenges, where discomfort has often overshadowed the potential for growth. Sometimes, the weight of the challenges felt too great to even raise our eyes and scan the horizon for opportunities. We were forced into a reactive mode, focused on surviving and just getting by; it was not always an option to pause and consider how we might grow stronger as we emerge from this storm.

We already know administrators are strong, resilient folks who are often faced with difficult situations – they manage budget cuts, staffing shortages, job transfers and workplace safety (not to mention they are the ones who are called to clean up more than just ‘spills’ in the classroom). The pandemic brought about seemingly impossible odds, requiring educational leaders to dig deep and find the assuredness to weather the storm. For many, our emotional resources became depleted and emotional exhaustion was the result. So, how can we find further strength to weather the storm together while maintaining hope for optimal outcomes?

BE ANCHORED IN YOUR ‘WHY’

Leading a school is deeply personal work. During challenging times, it can be easy to lose sight of the values that guide us. But who we are and how we feel, think and behave shapes our leadership and influences our teams. We need to practice self-awareness to be attuned to and clear about our values, beliefs, biases, strengths and limitations. Research indicates that self-awareness and social and emotional intelligence are key to effective leadership, especially in times of crises. Effective leaders leverage their social and emotional skills and continue to develop areas of growth; they model healthy communication skills and coping strategies in challenging and stressful situations. Leaders with robust social and emotional skills contribute to a safe

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and supportive school climate and directly influence teachers' motivation, performance and experience at school.

In the day-to-day shuffle of school-life – pandemic aside – we sometimes forget why we are in this work, and why we do what we do. Having a clear sense of purpose is a critical aspect of resilient leadership. Elena Aguilar reminds us that we need to “get clear on [our] why and use it as anchor.” We can do this by checking in and asking ourselves, “What brings me joy and motivates me in this work? What do I imagine my legacy to be? What difference do I want to make?” When we know and remind ourselves of our core values and beliefs, we are better able to align our decisions and policies accordingly. When we know our purpose, we are better able to handle challenging situations.

SUPPORT YOUR CREW

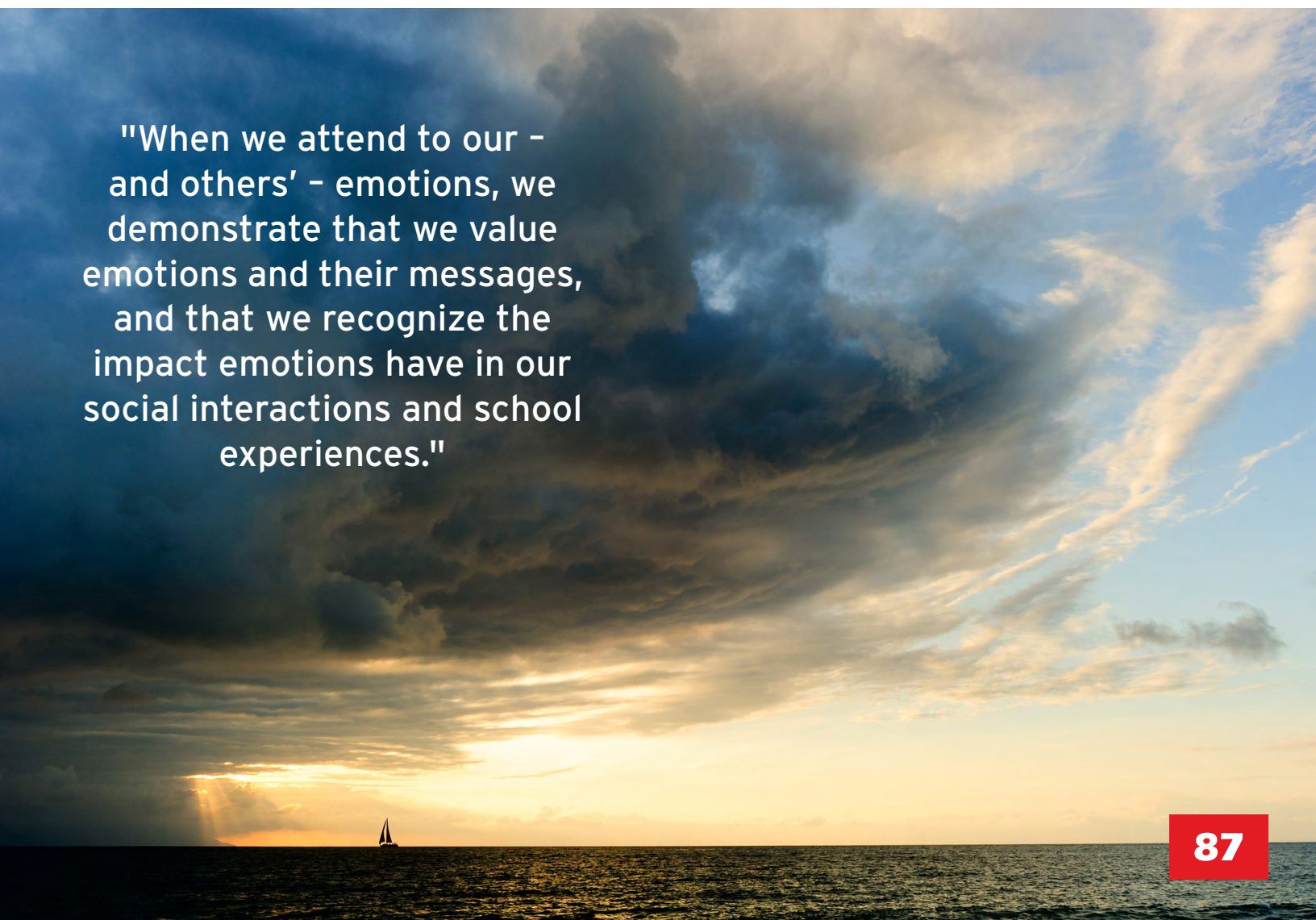
If part of our ‘why’ is to meet the needs of our students so that they might thrive, we need to support our crew, the very educators working directly with students. To do this, we must provide our teachers with resources to face and overcome the challenges they experience so that they might be able to step into their role as compassionate, committed educators (Aguilar, 2018). Principals are uniquely positioned to leverage their role (and responsibility) to shift structures and innovate systems to create the social conditions that promote teacher well-being and support their social-emotional development (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2011).

Besides modeling effective social and emotional competencies and well-being, Principals can also provide frequent opportunities to their teams to practice and apply their competencies (CASEL: Strengthening Adult SEL). This can be through simple, embedded practices like taking a moment to check in with staff and ask them how they are feeling. We can provide spaces (even in the first few minutes of a staff meeting) to notice and name emotions as a way of validating and normalizing our individual and collective experiences. Emotions contain data that communicate important messages about what people need or want. When we attend to our – and others' – emotions, we demonstrate that we value emotions and their messages, and that we recognize the impact emotions have in our social interactions and school experiences. This creates spaces where our teams feel seen and heard, and helps to prevent further burnout.

FIND (ASSEMBLE) YOUR FLEET

Being a school leader – the captain of the ship – is a great honour and privilege, but also an isolating position. When carried alone, the weight of the enormous responsibility can be crushing at times.

Relationships provide a buffer to adversity; without them, isolation and loneliness are bound to occur, and to contribute to burnout. Meaningful relationships are protective, and key in building resilience and job satisfaction. Principals need to be connected with each other, as very few others understand the unique challenges and opportunities their professional position brings. Imagine a ship facing a storm in the middle of the ocean. Now imagine the worried, brave captain shifting their gaze from the towering, stormy waves to meet the eyes of another captain – and another one – as they are not alone, but part of a

A full-page background image showing a sunset over the ocean. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, with a bright glow from the setting sun breaking through near the horizon. A small sailboat is visible on the water in the distance.

"When we attend to our – and others' – emotions, we demonstrate that we value emotions and their messages, and that we recognize the impact emotions have in our social interactions and school experiences."

"Resilient leaders continually work to maintain and nurture relationships. "

fleet that is navigating the storm together. Our vision is for BC school leaders to not face the storm alone, but to navigate as a fleet.

NAVIGATING THE STORM TOGETHER

We invite BC educational leaders to join us on a learning journey for transformative leadership by leveraging – and practicing – social and emotional skills and harnessing the power of peer groups.

In this upcoming hands-on series for educational leaders, we will explore and practice research-based tools, to build connection and resilience in our school teams and in our professional peer group. Our goal is to create a safe haven for educational leaders to explore, share, reflect, try new things and receive feedback. The weight of being your ship's captain can be substantial when carried alone. Let's share the weight and push forward together.



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Miriam Miller is a learner, researcher, teacher-educator, and storyteller, committed to working alongside educational communities to embed social and emotional learning (SEL) and well-being into their ecosystems.

Dr. Hagar Goldberg is a neuroscientist, educational and leadership consultant. She believes that cultivating social and emotional intelligence in our education systems is key to growth and thrive (as individuals and as communities).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How have your values and beliefs acted as a compass point to guide you through a storm?

What have you let go of this year, that allowed for new growth?

What new opportunities have emerged as a result?

What personal and professional lessons have you learned from this past year?

How will you apply them moving forward?

Where have you gathered strength and fostered resilience for yourself and your team?

How will you continue to do this?

Are you interested in being part of a community that continues to learn about social and emotional competencies and well-being for leadership?

Stay tuned for a Spring/Summer series in partnership with the BCPVPA:
**Navigating the Storm Together –
Leading for Connection**