

Planned Change

From the onset, St. Dominic High School gave the illusion of a normal Catholic high school with certain expectations academically, spiritually and in terms of discipline. The students were dressed in uniforms, there were SmartBoards in almost every classroom, the teachers signed in and out each day, there were teachers on cafeteria duty, each classroom contained a Crucifix and statue, and liturgies were part of the calendar. All of these attributes gave the impression of a well-functioning institution. Within a couple of weeks, however, I discovered that many of these attributes were technical or illusory and there was a lack of leadership by the administrative team.

As I began to observe and get to know the stakeholders (students, faculty, parents) and look at the academics in place, I realized that there was no communication. The school was functioning day-to-day on sheer inertia. The culture bred a sense of malaise and discontent and apparently had for many years. When I suggested implementing a couple of new programs, I was asked why I wanted to cause more work for myself.

After assuming the role of Principal, I began to examine the culture more closely and began implementing change. My changes were similar to those in Frank Smith's Advocacy Design Model (ADC) and my style of leadership mirrored principles discussed in Sustainable Leadership by authors Hargreaves and Fink .

Organizational change may be planned or unplanned, anticipated or unanticipated, brought by forces internal or external to the system, desirable or undesirable. (classnotes, Taylor-Dunlop, n.d.) In the institution, change was inevitable and essential to organizational growth. It took many forms. The change was accomplished by replacing the previous principal and vice with a new team, and myself most of who already had been members of the school community. The new members had the same vision I did. Every administrative person hired or moved into position and every new teacher hired, shared my vision and mission and bought into it. When I first assumed responsibility for the school, I constructed my "Proposals for Change" which included my vision for the future. My evaluative process was similar to Smith's model in which a good school asks two questions, "Who are we?" and "How well are we doing as a school community?" (Smith, 1992) Although people had different views of what constituted a "good" school, both the pastor and I had the same view.

Smith's ADC model is a process which is community building. It is a commitment of those stakeholders who have an interest in the successes of the school as an institution. The ADC process is a tool the school stakeholders can use in their discourse and effort to construct a stronger sense of community, a new school design, and a higher performing school. (Smith, 1992) The framework set forth in Smith's ADC includes:

- A system of instruction
- A pattern of organization
- A system of governance
- A system of judging or accounting for the school's accomplishments

Upon examination of the culture and current procedures, my process of evaluation included examining each of these design elements and implementing change based on the answers (Smith, 1992).

Hargreaves and Fink outline seven principles for successful sustainable leadership.

1. Depth
2. Length
3. Breadth
4. Justice
5. Diversity
6. Resourcefulness
7. Conservation

Each of these principles addresses the various aspects of my style of leadership. Depth is leadership for learning and for caring for and among others. There was a sense of selfishness throughout the school upon my arrival. Doors were closed and when a disciplinary issue arose, the student was sent to me as dean instead of being addressed at the moment by the teacher. During my tenure, my intent is to foster an environment conducive to sustaining the leadership as long as possible. The principle of breadth involves the distribution of responsibility across the board in the school. My philosophy of leadership includes sharing responsibility with all of the stakeholders. The faculty and students are accountable for their actions. My first year my theme was "ABC's of learning; Accountability, Belief and Commitment". The "A" of my ABC's was accountability, which is part of this distribution. Justice is a fundamental principle that I live for every day. Diversity, resourcefulness and conservation are all aspects of my natural style of leadership.

Most important is having a passion and purpose for my change. My passion was my driving force coupled with a sense of urgency to survive in the Catholic school system. Before implementing change, I reflected on the past and used it as a resource to implement change. For sustainability to be practical and realistic five principles are necessary. These five were very apparent in my approach to change. The first is activism, engaging the parents and the community to get involved. Next is vigilance accomplished by monitoring the environment to assure its health and avoiding its decline? My least favorite principle is patience. For all of the hours spent I wanted to see the results instantly. It is just now, this year, after countless hours of work and sleepless nights that I am finally seeing the

results. Transparency is the MOST important to me. I cannot move forward unless I have feedback from the stakeholders and transparency was nonexistent with the last administration. Finally, design. I try very hard to put people first. I have implemented a new database for on-line report cards and attendance, both of which are user-friendly (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006)

In developing an environment that can be sustainable beyond my tenure, I am actively involving the parents and community to engage in activities and support for the students - academically, morally and socially.

After reading Hargreaves and Fink's book, I realized that there was one thing that I was not doing, and that was renewing my own energy. As much as I was delegating, I was handling too much and continued to work countless hours. So, I took their advice and delegated even more and am working less. I have learned to take time away from the school and am emotionally open about my mistakes as well as my triumphs.