



SCHOOLS ARE NO ISLANDS

The death, late in 2005, of Peter Drucker the 95 year old modern management guru who first saw that successful organizations are dependent on the collective contribution of individual employees, is a timely opportunity to reflect on how organizationally friendly schools are. For a long time 'business' has been viewed by schools and the education sector, generally, as cut throat and too money focused, whereas schools are viewed as more people oriented!

This attitudinal dichotomy is fortunately disappearing from the educational sector, but nonetheless still persists in some quarters. Those in education who are open to learning from organizations outside of their own know very well that they can gain much from the best practice the business sector demonstrates.

The pivotal learning that can occur centres around a successful business's emphasis on customer satisfaction and follow up. Customer surveys, focus group activities, serious attention to complaints, the "money back guarantee" concept, compensation for when things go wrong, apologies when warranted, welcoming and greeting strangers and basically treating people fairly and with respect are all part of successful business practice. Schools could profit by regularly reviewing their attention to these, or similar, practices.

Many business organizations, whether small or very large, whether they sell services or products, deliver all of the above and make no excuses for not delivering them. In education the debate often is, who is the customer? Is it the Board of Trustees, the parents, the students, the Government or other stakeholders? While this debate will always be lively, there is no doubt that parents/ caregivers and students are the number one customers for principals, teachers and boards of trustees.

A school that actively builds a culture which motivates all its staff to create an environment which helps deliver its strategic plan outcomes, will be successful. This culture is ultimately defined by the adults in the school who in turn influence the students.

Therefore, staff professional development that focuses on building a powerful cultural identity is fundamental. A powerful identity attracts staff who are inspirational and attracts students and parents. This is how a school differentiates itself in the market place, as it needs to.

Underneath all of this is a process whereby a school's leadership works with its staff to determine its philosophy, vision and values, so everybody is 'singing from the same song sheet'. Once this is done there is a strong likelihood of emulating the best of business good practice.

Improvement in an educational institution, as in business, normally comes incrementally. Not very often are 'discoveries' made by individuals any more. Improvement now occurs when teams of people with diverse and interdisciplinary backgrounds come together and share their information and insights. Peter Drucker's genius was the recognition of this. The staff of an organization whether they recognize it or not, all contribute to creating the organization's image and brand.

Therefore, the more an educational organization is committed to rigorous, continuous, improvement, and puts in place sound systems to ensure this happens, the more it will reflect the best of customer- friendly, business practice. In this fast moving world no organization worth its salt can not afford to look around and learn from every relevant source, including the business world.

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