



# LEADING *the* JOURNEY

AN E-NEWSLETTER ON EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

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## Leading Organizational Change NAD PRINCIPALS' HANDBOOK EXCERPT [➤](#)

One certainty in the role of school leadership is that there will be change. Many books have been written on the leadership of change, specifically school change,

and an effective principal will become knowledgeable about this subject.

### CHANGE MAY COME ABOUT AS A RESULT OF:

- » Data about student achievement that demonstrates needed changes in curriculum and/or instruction.
- » Action plans developed through the accreditation self-study process.
- » Study of best practices that enhance student achievement.
- » A board-voted comprehensive strategic plan.

When leading change, the principal will be most successful when including various stakeholder groups.

Specifically, the board should be involved and should vote support for changes when appropriate.

# Planning for Success

*Steve Pawluk* | RETIRED PROFESSOR, LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

If you don't know where you are going,  
you might wind up someplace else

# - Yogi Berra.

If time, funding, and human resources were unlimited, strategic planning wouldn't be as necessary as it is in today's world. Organizations could afford to try out virtually every proposed good idea and see which ones work. However, there are many more good ideas than there are resources to support them. So our key question should not be, "Is this a good idea?" The critical question must be, "Which good idea(s) should we pursue?"

Finding an answer requires open discussion among key stakeholders; realistic analysis of an organization's financial, human, and time resources, as well as its challenges; and a fair and transparent decision-making process. We refer to these components collectively as strategic planning.

In the past, many of us practiced an approach to strategic planning that started with a SWOT analysis, some form of global scan which attempted to forecast future trends, and a plan that outlined, in some detail, who would be responsible for doing what during the next 5+ years as well as how the chosen strategies would be evaluated.

But today's world is changing much too rapidly and this kind of planning, while suitably structured, is becoming less helpful than it once might have been. Unexpected events, serendipitous opportunities, a volatile economy (and budget), and unpredictable changes in public opinion, require updates of 5-year plans annually or even more frequently.

An alternative approach that seems promising, is the school's leadership team to address six important questions.

## **1. WHY DO WE EXIST?**

Although the answer to this question, once developed, may not change much over time, the question needs to be addressed at the beginning of the planning process. It seeks consensus on the grand and aspirational reason that the organization was established. Asking "why?" each time a potential answer is proposed will help groups identify the core purpose of this particular school.

## **2. HOW DO WE BEHAVE?**

What set of key principles or values guide our decisions, policies, and practices? Who are the school's "heroes" and who are its most worrisome members? What actions do these two groups of people have in common? Might the commonalities provide a clue to how we behave in this

organization? What are the non-negotiables for which we are even willing to be punished?

### 3. WHAT DO WE DO?

What is our business, in practical terms?

### 4. HOW WILL WE SUCCEED?

Based on the above, what will cause our organization to thrive? What are the three things that we need to do in order to be successful? What are the three things that are more important than anything else that we could do?

### 5. WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT NOW?

What one thing must everyone in the organization focus on, during the next 3 – 6 months, with laser-like intensity, to move our organization forward? What will be our (short term) rallying cry? How will this one thing be addressed by each stakeholder group (administration, faculty, staff, board, donors, committees, constituent churches, etc.) in practical, observable, ways?

### 6. WHO MUST DO WHAT?

What will be the responsibilities of each leader, i.e. the principal, lead teacher, board chair, pastor, financial officer, PTO leader, etc.?

These six, seemingly simple questions, will require an investment of time, honest discussion, deep probing, active listening, and some give-and-take before satisfactory answers are developed. But the effort will be worth it and the process will speak volumes to the organization's constituency and clients about its desire to be relevant, purposeful, efficient, and effective.

If you would like to learn more about this approach, Patrick Lencioni's book, *The advantage: Why organizational health trumps everything else in business*, first published in 2012, is an excellent resource.

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# “But Change is Hard!”

When you bring up the idea of change in your school you often get some furtive looks from your team. Even worse is uttering the phrase “strategic visioning.” The blank stares and yawns that follow

# When you bring up the word change...

*Brian Harris* | PRINCIPAL, WALLA WALLA VALLEY ACADEMY

may scare you away from the process.

The truth is that change is hard. It takes time and it most certainly is a process.

## So why do it?

It comes down to mission. What are you trying to accomplish? Is it effective? If you do not have a compelling vision your school will undoubtedly lose ground.

There are a myriad of ways to create a vision for your school. Taking the following steps have been beneficial in my experience. It's important that your team is engaged in the process and that they know you will come out of the process with an action plan for the future.

The first step is preparation. This is a process and if you don't line things up and have a clearly communicated outcome you will get bogged down. Determine what the process will look like, who will be on your design team and who are the critical stakeholders you will need to have engaged in the process.

Next, give your people a chance to review the history of your school for insights into your core values, environment and defining moments. You have to know where you've been before you can move ahead. This is a great chance to celebrate those successes and individuals who made contributions to that success.

After reviewing the past it's time to take a look at what the current realities are. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis can be a great way to structure this phase.

The next step requires a pivot to the beginning of a vision for the future. Remember that issues identified in the SWOT are key points in this phase. Your team now creates a story for the future of your school and identifies the most vital themes moving ahead.

With a narrative for the future in place it's time to dig in and create strategies on how to get there. The fledging vision needs to be tested and anchored in clear and compelling

action steps.

Now the real work begins with implementing the changes needed to drive the vision. Your strategies need to be concrete with resources and action steps identified. How do you make these changes part of the fabric of your school culture? First, talk about it every chance you get to your students, parents, board and constituency. Secondly, your mission should show up in very tangible ways. It should guide your faculty meetings, your board meetings and your constituency meetings. Next, it should be visible in your school. When a visitor walks in it should be very evident what your vision and mission is to them. Your students should be able to tell a visitor what the “pillars” of your mission are.

Finally, it’s time to live your vision. This is all about finding avenues and ways to make your vision a reality every day on campus. And don’t forget this last part. Celebrate! Celebrate when you reach milestones and way points. Celebrate your mission with your community. Plan events to celebrate, calendarize it so you don’t forget. It’s very important to celebrate because you must keep the conversation alive and be prepared to begin the process again when the time arises.

Happy visioning!

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# The Challenge of Change

*Matthew Jakobsons* | PRINCIPAL, SACRAMENTO ADVENTIST ACADEMY

**I**f few things challenge principals more than leading their schools through the difficult process of change. What makes this broad and generally accepted statement so ironic is that change is a natural and sought-after component for successful schools. During the early years of my career, I was challenged by a mentor to view all instances of change as opportunities for personal growth. From the moment I received that advice, I have re-defined the word “change” to mean “growth” and I regularly use the words interchangeably.

With the understanding that the word “change” means “growth”, consider the first sentence of this article. Few things challenge principals more than leading their schools through the difficult process of growth. It is incredible that the statement takes on a completely different tone and meaning! Gone are the negative thoughts of budget shortfalls, enrollment numbers, and personnel turnover. In their absence, the word growth now brings to mind the concepts of possibility, goals, and achievement! The challenge for principals is that we sometimes initiate change rather than working toward growth.

Over the past four years, Sacramento Adventist Academy has undergone an incredible transformation. We have turned a strategic corner and our future is brighter than ever. More specifically, we have eliminated mountains of debt, grown our enrollment by 35%, and re-engaged our community. Aided by many during this process, the following five steps have helped me as a principal/leader strategically grow. Before going on, it is important to highlight that when initiating change, leaders should do so in conjunction with others.

**1. Learn Your Community and Adapt to Them** – Few would argue with the following statement - it is the responsibility of leaders to understand who they are leading – and yet many resist it and attempt to impose their own will or vision for a school. Strategically speaking, leaders must cultivate a deep understanding of their communities and combine their visions accordingly. This is done most effectively by spending time with all levels of the community from fellow leaders to teachers to generations of families. When a leader gains an accurate sense of their community, they can begin to shape a corresponding vision that will take root and grow.

**2. Invest in Your Team** – An important component to learning a community is learning what your team needs. Leaders should engage their staff and teachers and ask for their input. And, when they receive feedback, they must respond to it. The process of engaging your team will result in a leader being able to accurately identify strengths and weaknesses. This information will prove invaluable in providing resources and support to the team as individuals and to the team as a collective unit.

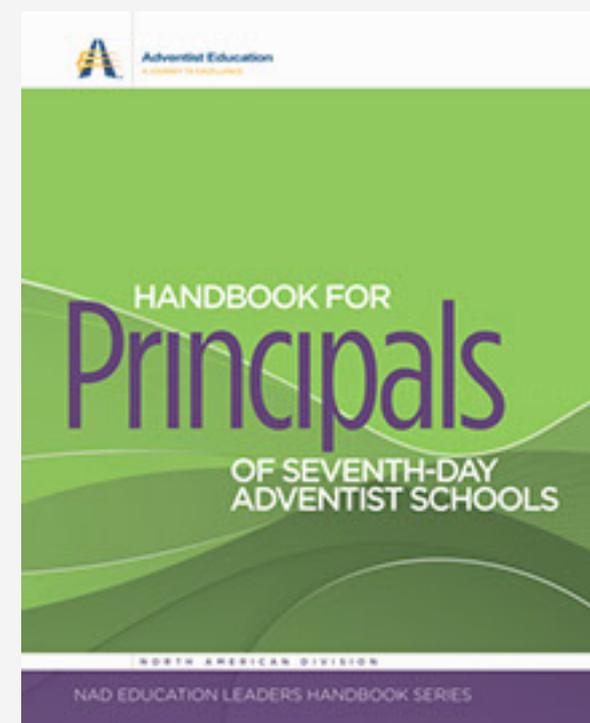
**3. Embrace Opportunities** – Simply put, say “yes” more than you say “no” when presented with a new idea. Leaders should allow students, parents, staff, and teachers to see them try. In these attempts, leaders will grow community engagement, grow a culture of confidence, and establish trust while also refining their vision for the program.

**4. Accept Responsibility for the Success of Others** – In a world in which leaders regularly receive blame when someone or something fails, this can be difficult to do. However, when a leader embraces this responsibility they are modeling a higher calling and strategically, the leader is elevating the status of everyone by actively working toward their successes. Accepting responsibility for the success of others is an understanding on the part of a leader that when students, parents, staff, and teachers achieve success, the organization has achieved success.

**5. Set and Communicate Goals with Your Community** – When a leader has successfully completed the first four steps on this list, they are finally in a position to move forward with action steps. Unfortunately, this is where most leaders begin their strategic process of responding to challenges and initiating change. When this is done first, followers feel blindsided by change and may immediately resist it. When this is the last step, followers feel engaged and are willing to carry out action steps while working toward the accomplishment of a larger vision.

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