

Elaboration on the 14 Obligations: Point 7

Institute leadership (management of people).

I've always taught that there are three key elements of the process for transforming America's schools: adopting a systems perspective, applying statistical methods and providing leadership to create, provide and maintain a healthy environment for work, for learning and for continuous improvement. Deming's 14 Points, translated into the 14 Obligations for the School Board and Administration, can be viewed as a model of the healthy work environment. Putting teachers and staff through seminars on statistical methods isn't difficult. The hard part is leadership. Here we will expand and elaborate on the hard part; i.e., Point 7 of the following 14 Obligations.

Obligations of the School Board and Administration

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of the entire school system and its services.
2. Adopt the new philosophy. We are in a new economic age.
3. Cease dependence on tests and grades to measure quality.
4. Cease dependence on price alone when selecting the curriculum, texts, equipment and supplies for the system.
5. Improve constantly and forever every process for planning, teaching, learning and service.
6. Institute more thorough, better job-related training.
7. Institute leadership (i.e., management of people).
8. Drive out fear.
9. Break down barriers between groups in the school system.
10. Eliminate the use of goals, targets and slogans to encourage performance.
11. Closely examine the impact of teaching standards and the system of grading student performance.
12. Remove barriers that rob staff and administrators of pride of workmanship and that rob students of the joy of learning. This means, *inter alia*, abolish staff ranking and the system of grading student performance.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement for everyone in the system.
14. Plan and take action to accomplish the transformation.

Point 7. Institute leadership (management of people).

The overall transformation must be guided by the system of profound knowledge. (For an introduction to Deming's system of profound knowledge, see the October 29, 2012, blog posted on www.jimleonardpi.com.) As people in positions of leadership learn and apply that system, they exhibit certain behaviors that truly lead people and organizations toward continuous improvement of processes for teaching, learning and service (Points 1 and 5). As it relates to managing people, those leadership behaviors are guided by appreciation for a system, rational theories of variation and knowledge, and an understanding of intrinsic motivation (psychology).

Unfortunately, traditional views of leadership behavior are rooted in our individualistic society, as opposed to an appropriate systemic view. In this regard, Peter Senge wrote:

“Especially in the West, leaders are heroes – great men (and occasionally women) who ‘rise to the fore’ in times of crisis. Our prevailing leadership myths are still captured by the image of the captain of the cavalry leading the charge to rescue the settlers.... So long as such myths prevail, they reinforce a focus on short-term events rather than on systemic forces.”¹

Thus, the prevailing style of leadership in most American organizations carries with it inherent barriers to long-term constancy of purpose (Point 1), as well as the creation of heroes through short-term crisis management instead of continuous improvement (Point 5). Roger Launsby revealed his frustration with such a “leader” when he reported the following situation:

“In 2006, I had a long talk with an organization regarding firefighting. Their VP was a huge proponent of firefighting and I spent a very long time debating the inherent risks of this with him. I emphasized that having employees attend 8D [8 Discipline Problem-Solving] training, which only takes about one hour to complete, would provide them with the tools to avoid being placed in the firefighting mode. The VP insisted he would continue to firefight because, in his words, ‘Taking all the extra time to train my people in 8D would be a waste. And besides, I enjoy firefighting. It adds an element of fun to my job.’ That was back in 2006 when the economy was great and almost all companies were booming. Since our conversation, I have watched that company’s stock drop from \$20 a share to 15 cents a share. I can’t help but believe that had this company embraced [continuous improvement] instead of firefighting, it could have remained competitive.”²

Attributes of a Leader

Leaders guided by the system of profound knowledge, on the other hand, exhibit very different behaviors than the firefighting VP described by Launsby. In his seminars, Dr. Deming used a slide titled, “Attributes of a Leader.” Let’s continue our elaboration on Point 7 by briefly examining those attributes of leadership.

1. *The leader understands how the work of his or her group fits into the overall aims of the organization.* We're making an assumption here that people in top management have done their jobs. They have clearly defined and communicated organization purpose, aims and priorities so leaders at all levels can figure out how they and their groups fit in. (See Point 1 of the obligations.)
2. *The leader focuses on the customer, both internal and external.*
3. *The leader is coach and counsel, not a judge.* (See points 3, 6 and 12.) District leaders must examine their current systems for coaching and developing staff members. What systems and practices currently exist that help supervisors coach, counsel and develop members of their staffs? What systems and practices currently exist that require those supervisors to pass judgment? Any of the latter will interfere with the former. Trying to do both sends mixed and confusing signals to staff members (and to students in the classroom).
4. *The leader removes barriers to joy in work.* (See Points 8 and 12 of the obligations.) Deming long insisted that the most important measures facing American managers are unknown and unknowable. In a business context, he used to pose the following questions:
 - a. How much business does a happy customer bring in to you? Nobody knows. What is the value of the satisfied customer? Nobody knows.
 - b. What is the cost of the dissatisfied customer? Nobody knows. How much business does the dissatisfied customer drive away? (He does his best to protect his friends.) Nobody knows.

How many readers have heard the old saying, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." I heard that mantra again and again throughout my graduate business school studies. I continue to hear it from Lean Six Sigma Black Belts and from consultants (Deming called them "hacks") who promote statistical process control (SPC). The hacks teach, "After all, we need control charts to effectively manage our processes; but before you can build a control chart you must measure something. Therefore, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it."

Welcome to the age of mythology. Despite what they teach in business school, the most important measures facing leaders in education are indeed unknown and unknowable. They can't be measured – but they must be managed!

Many district leaders claim that they're concerned about costs and budgets. What, then, is the cost to the district of the untrained staff member, working in fear? What is the cost of the negative effects on students' learning and development caused by the burned-out,

ineffective teacher? Let's agree that these costs are staggering; but they're unknown and unknowable. They can't be measured, but they must be managed.

As soon as one starts talking about "joy in work" or "joy in learning," some people may fear that they're getting into the touchy-feely swamp of the behavioral sciences or into affective, values-oriented areas that parents may feel have nothing to do with academics. However, this fourth attribute of a leader deals with a very real, very concrete factor in any work environment, and it's based on a very simple premise: It is a joy to work with people who enjoy their work.

Readers can think about their own experience at work. Have you ever worked with someone who really enjoyed their work? What was it like? (Great, energizing, fun, uplifting, contagious.) Have you ever worked with anyone who didn't enjoy their work? What was it like? (Draining, stressful, not fun, infectious.)

If a company's workers suffer barriers to their right to joy in work, it is lowering the productivity and efficiency of that organization; and it doesn't have a thing to do with labor utilization versus internal standard; and it doesn't have a thing to do with capital equipment utilization versus internal standard; and it doesn't have a thing to do with production efficiencies versus internal standard. But if workers are suffering barriers to their right to joy in work, the company will suffer productivity and efficiency losses every minute of every work day.

This is one of the few areas where I see a significant difference in terms of impact when applying Deming's principles to schools as opposed to businesses. After all, in our schools the stakes are much higher than lost productivity, efficiency or machine hours. In schools we're dealing with fragile, raw human potential.

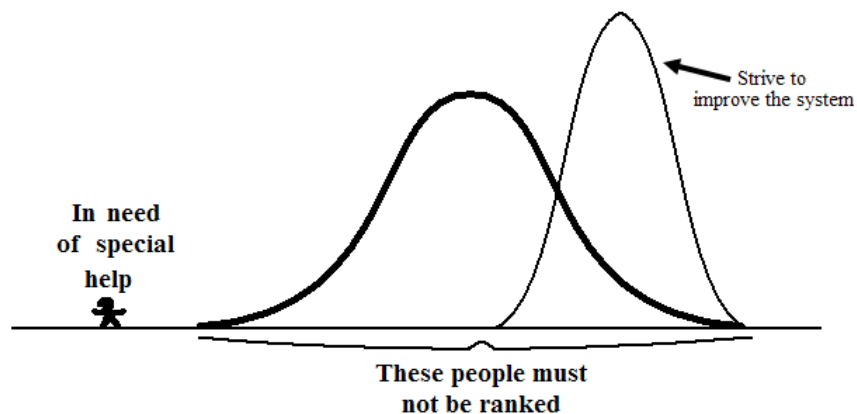
Readers also may reflect on their experience as students in the classroom. Did you ever have a teacher who really enjoyed teaching? What was it like? (Great, fun, energizing, uplifting, learned a lot.) Did you ever have a teacher who did not enjoy teaching? What was it like? (Thought the bell would never ring, boring, endless, didn't learn very much.)

I realize that bringing up "joy of learning" and "joy in work" sounds touchy-feely. I used to feel the same way. However, we are talking here about a very real, very concrete factor that affects our children and their futures. If teachers in your local district suffer barriers to their right to joy in work, it is retarding the learning and development of children throughout your community; and it doesn't have a thing to do with the latest round of standardized test scores; and it doesn't have a thing to do with the district's ranking on the last state audit; and it doesn't have a thing to do with any other numbers school board members look at out of concern for child development and learning. But if teachers are experiencing barriers to their right to joy in work, it is retarding your children.

The cost is staggering, though unknown and unknowable. Leaders who understand and behaviorally exhibit this fourth attribute of a leader do not always need numbers to manage; they have profound knowledge; they understand psychology and intrinsic motivation.

5. *The leader understands variation.* (See Points 10, 11 and 12 of the obligations.) The leader understands that if I were to take any 10 people out into the parking lot to run a 40-yard dash, five of those people will come out equal to or above average, and five of those people will come out equal to or below average. There's nothing I can do about it. There's nothing they can do about it. That's normal.

The leader also understands how to use systems thinking, statistical thinking and statistical calculation to determine who (if anyone) is outside the system in need of special help. In such a case, the leader provides special help to those who need it. If, after providing the special help, that person cannot move into the group that constitutes a system, the leader must find a less demanding or more appropriate placement for that person.



Some knowledge of the theory of variation helps the leader to differentiate between that which is different and that which is *significantly* different. Therefore, the leader does not rank people in a group that constitutes a system. Their levels of performance or achievement may be different, but they're not significantly different.

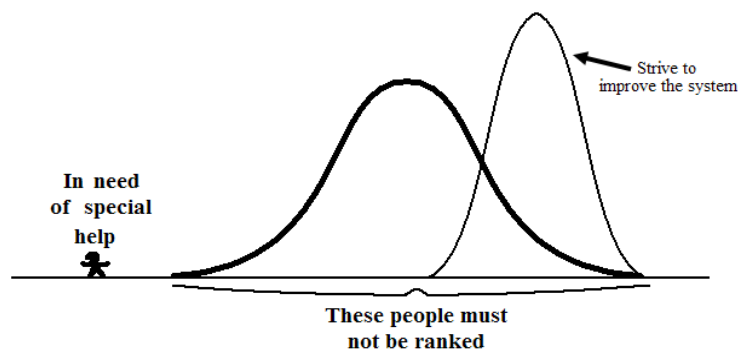
6. *The leader works to improve the system in which he or she and their people work.* (See Point 5 of the obligation.)
7. *The leader creates trust.* (See Points 8 and 9.)

8. *The leader forgives a mistake.* (See Point 8.)
9. *The leader listens and learns.* (See Point 13.)

Attributes of the Effective Leader/Teacher

Here is one area where the principles of Dr. Deming transfer smoothly from a business setting to education. He wrote, “Much supervision could be described as supervision by ordinal numbers and percentages.”³ (What teacher doesn’t keep a grade book?) Supervisors in all of our major institutions must learn to supervise differently; they must learn and practice new behaviors and attributes of leadership. Below are Deming’s observations on leadership restated as “Attributes of the Effective Leader/Teacher.”

1. Understands how the work of his or her class fits into the overall aims and curriculum of the school.
2. Focuses on the customer, both internal (eg., teachers of the next grade level) and external (eg., parents).
3. Is coach, counsel and teacher, not a judge.
4. Removes obstacles to joy in learning.
5. Understands variation. Uses systems thinking, statistical thinking and statistical calculation to discover who, if anyone, is outside the system, in need of special help.



6. Works to improve the teaching and learning process in which he or she and his or her students work.
7. Creates trust.
8. Forgives a mistake.
9. Listens and learns.

Conclusion

In our expansion and elaboration of the seventh Obligation of the School Board and Administration, we made reference to *eight* other obligations. In other words, we cannot talk about Point 7 without at the same time talking about eight of the remaining 13 Points. Perhaps more than any other of the obligations, Point 7 clearly illustrates that the 14 Points are not a cafeteria plan. They are indeed intricately, intimately interwoven into a complex model of a healthy environment for work, for learning and for continuous improvement. Future blogs will elaborate on Points 8-14 in the model. I hope you will enjoy this series and share the information with educators in your community.

Notes

¹P. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday/Currency, New York, NY (1990), p. 340.

²R. Launsby, “8D (Eight Disciplines) Problem Solving,” www.launsby.com/stepsproblemsolving.asp, Launsby Consulting (2009).

³W.E. Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, MIT Center for Advanced Educational Services, Cambridge, MA (1986), p. 56.

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