

Elaboration on the 14 Obligations: Points 1 and 2

Point 1. Create constancy of purpose toward the improvement of the entire school system and its services.

Point 2. Adopt the new philosophy.

Even though most of his followers will be found in business and manufacturing organizations, Dr. W. Edwards Deming's teaching and principles apply to any enterprise. This is the second in a series of blogs that present Deming's 14 Points for Management as "Obligations of the School Board and Administration."¹ Earlier we introduced the obligations as a model of a healthy environment for work, learning and continuous improvement in a K-12 education setting. Here we will expand and elaborate on the first 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 1: Create constancy of purpose toward the improvement of the entire school system and its services.

Dr. Deming taught that organizations face two sets of problems: problems of today and problems of the future. “It is easy to stay bound up in the tangled knot of the problems of today, becoming more and more efficient in them... [however] problems of the future command first and foremost constancy of purpose and dedication to improvement.”²

The core essence and theme of this first of the 14 obligations addresses the need for long-term constancy of purpose of long-term thinking and behavior. Long-term thinking helps pull the school board and administration above the fray of today’s concerns to put more energy into planning for the future of the district and its services. Robert Audette once shared with me his insight regarding constancy of purpose by posing the question, “What is the purpose of the school district?” Without an aim, there is no system. By the same token, without clear purpose, there can be no constancy of purpose!

Audette and Algozzine stressed the need for effective leadership (Point 7) to clearly define long-term goals relative to child development needs, due to the current “lack of clarity or constancy of purpose for children. As educators we behave as though our purposes for children are clear and shared. This is a false assumption.”³ More specifically, what are the desired characteristics of a district’s high school graduates? What do we want our graduates to have relative to...

- Cognitive skills and abilities?
- Mastered communication skills?
- Critical thinking processes and strategies?
- Work habits?
- Attitude and value placed on continued learning?
- Choices for future direction and occupation?

Long-Term Thinking: What will our Kindergarten students need by the time they graduate from high school?

Years ago, the U.S. Department of Labor produced an important resource for school districts interested in clarifying purpose for long-term learning and child development. Though this report concentrated on needs for workplace know-how, one would be hard-pressed to find that the same qualities are not important for high-school graduates who proceed directly to college. Known as the SCANS Report, the document listed the competencies, skills and personal qualities that are needed for solid job performance.⁴

COMPETENCIES – Effective workers can productively use:

- Resources – allocating time, money, materials, space and staff;

- Interpersonal skills – working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- Information – acquiring and evaluating data, organizing and maintaining files, interpreting and communicating, and using computers to process information;
- Systems – understanding social, organizational and technological systems, monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems;
- Technology – selecting equipment and tools, applying technology to specific tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies.

THE FOUNDATION – Competence requires:

- Basic Skills – reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking and listening;
- Thinking Skills – thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind’s eye, knowing how to learn and reasoning;
- Personal Qualities – individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management and integrity.

There is a great need for leadership (Point 7) and breaking down barriers between groups in the local school system (Point 9) in order to engage various constituencies in the delineation of these long-term desired characteristics. Once they are clarified and agreed upon, work can be undertaken to design pre-K through 12 teaching and learning processes that work well together to develop those characteristics over the 13 or 14 years children invest as students in the district. Policies and practices must then be aligned to support that purpose and to contribute to the long-term development of children.

Many organizations find the development of a solid mission statement to be important for defining long-term purpose and direction. By mission statement I do not mean the two-sentence, Mom-and-apple-pie slogans that too many organizations are publishing. Rather, I am referring to a solid, detailed, well-thought-out statement of mission, aims, purpose and guiding principles. Here’s a good example:⁵

Sample School Mission Statement

The mission of [school] is to teach a *strong academic program* using *varied instructional strategies* to address *the needs of all students*. We will strive to empower all of our students in their pursuit of *academic excellence*, a sense of civic and social *responsibility*, high *self-esteem* and emotional and *physical well-being*. *High standards* will be set and maintained to encourage *all students, staff, parents* and other groups to work to their *full potential*.

Guiding Principles

In support of the above mission, the leadership and staff of [school] will strive to:

- Assure *equal access* to and opportunity for *all students*, involving them in a *balanced educational process* that is *integrated* across disciplines and grade levels.
- *Treat all students as gifted*, all students as gifts, thereby promoting *positive self-esteem* and *development of all children*.
- Provide a curriculum that develops *strong basic educational skills* as well as understanding, *creativity* and *responsibility* for *all students*, and that helps *all students* fulfill their individual potential.
- Assure a *continuously-improving curriculum* through a strong connection among the *school, parents, community* and the *secondary school system*.
- Promote a *positive atmosphere* that is based on *mutual respect* and *trust* for *teamwork* and a *cooperative spirit* among the *Board of Education, parents, teachers and staff*.
- *Include parents as an integral part* of their children's learning and development in *partnership* with our teachers.
- *Remove barriers* between groups in our school system.
- Develop and *continuously improve* a *creative work environment* in which *excellence is valued*, a *cooperative spirit* prevails and all school employees can experience pride and *joy* in their work.
- Provide an *encouraging, productive learning environment* that puts *children first and foremost* and in which *all students* experience *creative growth*, a feeling of *safety* and well-being and *joy in learning*.

The K-3 elementary school that developed this Mission Statement once had a pull-out “talented and gifted (TAG)” program. They no longer have that program, because it would be inconsistent with their second guiding principle above. A mission statement should help leaders at all levels figure out how they and their groups fit into the overall aims of the organization. In other words, that document should serve as the definition of *purpose* in the phrase, “constancy of purpose.”

Once clear purpose is defined, constancy of purpose will be impeded by numerical goals and standards (Points 10 and 11) that put people into short-term, reactive modes. Other barriers will exist if grading and ranking (Points 3 and 12) continue, based on past or short-term test results. Besides, Dr. Deming once pointed out how leadership (Point 7) toward long-term objectives requires prediction and influence of the future – not merely knowing the score. As a second-

grade teacher, how could I predict that Emma will be a success in life (A+ student), mediocre (C) or a failure (F)? *How could I possibly know?*

Please note that in this brief elaboration on the first of the 14 Obligations, reference was made to *six* of the remaining 13 points. As noted in an earlier blog, the 14 Obligations are not a cafeteria plan. They are intimately, intricately interwoven in a complex fabric of a healthy environment for work, for learning and for continuous improvement.

Point 2: Adopt the new philosophy.

Relative to the second of his 14 Points, Dr. Deming noted, “We are in a new economic age” and “transformation is required.”⁶ In other words, our schools don’t need reform or restructuring. “Transformation is required,” and transformation implies a complete change in state. For example, if our vocational education system is water, but tomorrow’s high-technology workplace will require ice, we cannot become ice and remain in liquid state. There’s no use trying to improve or reform the viscosity of the water!

If our elementary schools are caterpillars, but today’s child – faced with an increasingly complex society, provided a fractured family structure – requires a butterfly, we cannot become a butterfly and remain a caterpillar. Yet, to date, many of our alleged school reform efforts seem geared to flogging the caterpillar to get it to crawl faster!

For example, a school district in northeastern Connecticut went through a very long, involved strategic planning process. Focus groups of parents, teachers, administrators, business partners and numerous community members worked for months to develop and agree upon five long-range goals. All five goals called for higher scores on the Connecticut Mastery Test (the state’s standardized test for elementary and middle school students).

One might wonder, “You mean this district hasn’t been trying to raise test scores in the past?” Have they been working to *lower* test scores? This is not an example of transformation. This is an example of using new ways (strategic planning instrument and focus groups) to work on the same thing (higher test scores). The means may be different, but the end is not.

Transformation, on the other hand, requires a complete change in state. Organizations truly working on transformation no longer have the same priorities, the same concerns, the same problems. For this reason, the second of the 14 Obligations really requires little elaboration, since the whole theme of Deming’s message is transformation. In this context, Audette and Algozzine wrote:

“Embracing the new philosophy will necessitate radically changing the way we think about school. For example, 70% is generally viewed as a measure of acceptable performance in our schools. Does 70% represent quality? Does 90% represent quality? Does any such percentage

provide a useful way to consider quality? It certainly does not in most other areas of endeavor (competitive sports are the exception).”⁷

Borgers and Thompson elaborated on this point by noting that the organization’s management style must be transformed.

“Cooperation rather than competition among students, and between students and teachers, is the goal. The teacher must accept the new philosophy and teach it to the students. Teachers should ask students to define quality in their own terms... What is a quality assignment? Why? What is quality work? Why? Students should also be encouraged to display what they consider [to be] quality work.”⁸

Conclusion

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Deming for the suggestions he provided during my early attempts to draft the 14 Obligations of the School Board and Administration. Future blogs will elaborate on the rest of the obligations. I hope you’ll share this and the future material with your local educators and encourage them to learn more about Deming’s roadmap.

Notes

¹J.F. Leonard, *The New Philosophy for K-12 Education: A Deming Framework for Transforming America’s Schools*, ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, WI (1996), pp. 192–216.

²W.E. Deming, *Out of the Crisis*, MIT Center for Advanced Educational Services, Cambridge, MA (1986), pp. 23-25.

³R. Audette and R. Algozzine, “Free and Appropriate Education for All Students: Total Quality and the Transformation of Public Education,” *Remedial and Special Education*, Nov. 1982, PRO-ED, Inc., Dallas, TX.

⁴L. Martin et al., *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000*, Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), U.S. Department of Labor, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC (1991), p. vii.

⁵J.F. Leonard, *Transformation 101: A Seminar for Educators Interested in Transforming the Quality of Teaching, Learning and Administrative Processes*, Seminar Workbook, Jim Leonard Process Improvement, Woodstock, CT (2013), p. 7.6.

⁶Deming, *op cit.*, pp. 26 and 28.

⁷Audette and Algozzine, *op cit.*

⁸W. Borgers and T. Thompson, *Implementing Continuous Improvement Management in Schools*, Scholastic Press, New York, NY (1994), p. 215.

© 2013 James F. Leonard. All rights reserved. www.jfleonardpi.com.