

Elaboration on the 14 Obligations: Points 8 and 9

Point 8. Drive out fear.

Point 9. Eliminate barriers between groups in the school system.

As we continue our examination of Dr. W. Edwards Deming's 14 Points restated as 14 Obligations for the School Board and Administration, we encounter an issue that is difficult to wrap one's arms around; i.e., fear. It strikes many people as nebulous because it can't be measured or analyzed with statistical methods; and yet it's one of the most important factors facing leaders as they try to provide a healthy environment for work, for learning and for continuous improvement. Here we will expand and elaborate on the eighth and ninth 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 8. Drive out fear.

Audette and Algozzine elaborated on this point by observing, “In most of our schools, faculty, students and parents are afraid to speak out or take risks. Fear of ‘being wrong’ or ‘rocking the boat’ has prevented many seminal ideas from being fully developed. Fear of ridicule, reprimand and retribution has kept many solutions to our problems from ever being considered. Fear is essential to supervisors’ power in the traditional school.”¹

Lee Jenkins noted that one driving force for improved student learning is one’s intrinsic desire for personal growth. In both the classroom and the workplace, this progress will be restrained by fear. “Stop using fear as a major tool to control students. [For example] if you don’t do your homework, you’ll get an F.”²

Borgers and Thompson add that the “single most fear-producing system used in schools is grades. Reduce the reliance on grades for motivating students. Successful learning occurs when the activities are intrinsically motivating.”³

As an alternative to the threats and fear so common in the traditional school, William Glasser recommended “social problem solving” when dealing with students. “The students know that all discussion is to solve problems, not to find fault or to punish. Experience in solving social problems in a non-fault-finding, non-punitive atmosphere gives children confidence in themselves as thinking, worthwhile people.”⁴

One will note that in addressing Point 8 of the obligations, these authorities made reference to Points 3, 5, 7, 9 and 12.

Point 9. Eliminate barriers between groups in the school system.

I have no more disheartening an experience in my seminars for educators than to have high school teachers come up to me and complain about the lack of skills they see in the students who come from their own districts’ elementary and middle schools. I can’t help but wonder, *Why are they talking to me?* Indeed, lack of communication and program coordination across school lines are problems we can no longer afford to tolerate.

Cross-functional project teams that include teachers and staff from elementary, middle and high schools are one means of breaking down traditional barriers between those groups in the school system. Inclusion of parents and central office personnel on the same teams will provide even greater opportunities for teamwork, cooperation, synergy and optimization.

Audette and Algozzine elaborated on Point 9 as follows: “The boundaries between regular education and special education are heavily fortified with processes that do not address the needs of children but rather categorize the children themselves. For all of its good intent and its

attempts at precision in the design of Individual Education Plans (IEP's), special education is a separate system disassociated with the (unclear) purposes, goals and outcome benefits envisioned for other children in our schools.”⁵

Finally, one can't address Point 9 in this day and age without some comment regarding the tension between the so-called religious right and so-called progressive educators. One zealous and passionate spokesman for the religious right is the Rev. Pat Robertson, who wrote:

“The classic meaning of education was to train the minds and morals of students. Education by common definition existed to impart to the young the moral and intellectual heritage of a nation, a culture or a civilization... [however] the theories of modern education can be summed up as a basic denial of the value of Western tradition and a repudiation of the role of religion in the welfare of a community. Modern educators are moved not only by a denial of the existence of God, but militant hostility to any form of Judeo-Christian theism.”⁶

Over the years, I've been amazed by the number of teachers and administrators I've met who share Rev. Robertson's concerns! But they express frustration that “the other side” is exaggerating the situation, or at least blaming the wrong people. During one of my seminars, a district superintendent offered her insights: “Some parents in our community want us to put prayer back in schools. I agree with them. From a personal point of view, I'd love to begin each school day with a prayer. But I don't sit on the Supreme Court, nor do I control Congress.”

In other words, many educators are as frustrated by the current system as the religious right and other activists. They're also frustrated when they're attacked and criticized for the crazy practices in some schools that they neither support nor adopt.

Of course, exaggeration occurs on both sides. In early March, 1993, a consultant visited a district in the Bronx. Not long before that visit, the New York City School Board had voted not to renew the contract of Superintendent of Schools Joseph Fernandez, the author of that city's Rainbow Curriculum. His curriculum had produced a storm of controversy because many people believed it placed too much emphasis on diversity, sexuality and political correctness, as opposed to academic issues.

During the meeting that week, an administrator commented on the Fernandez dismissal and added, “This is why administrators need tenure. They cut Fernandez off at the knees before he had a chance to follow through” (with the Rainbow Curriculum).

The consultant replied that it seemed that many parents of school children in the Bronx had three priorities: learn to read, learn to write and come home alive – and not necessarily in that order! Next, the consultant challenged the administrator to identify anything in the Rainbow Curriculum that adequately addressed those top three priorities. He was unable to do so.

Unfortunately, educators across the country continue to suffer the after-effects of the Rainbow Curriculum and similar programs. These efforts have become synonymous with values programming; Christian parents and others are in fear for their children's morals; and generalizations are made that all educators (to use Robertson's words) are moved by "militant hostility to any form of Judeo-Christian theism."

To close this elaboration on Point 9 and barriers between groups in the school system, below are excerpts from my correspondence with a Christian parent activist in one district with which I've had the honor of working. A letter she sent to me read, in part:

"I would like to give you the gift of sharing moments of shocked joy you gave me during your presentation to our Board. You gave the Bible credit for being an authority. Anyone with less prestige would have been shut up immediately or had everything they said past, present and future negated."

In response to her letter I wrote:

"I certainly hope that in my remarks to your Board that I did not come across as 'preachy.' My duty is not to pass judgment on people because of their beliefs (or lack thereof), but to try to help them learn a system for better management in education. I view the current battle in education between the so-called 'religious right' and so-called 'progressives' as but a symptom of a greater problem. That greater problem is a core lack of trust and communication.

"We'll not be able to eliminate that core problem until we get 'all the components of the district's engine' working better together. Many arguments between the above groups have descended into accusations and judgments passed on 'the other side.' I must wonder, Who's talking about kids?

"To keep from losing my mind, I can only reflect on a remark that Mother Theresa of Calcutta made at a National Prayer Breakfast: 'If we're busy judging people, we'll have no time left to love them.' Because of your kind feedback, I'll be able the next time I'm in [your community] to check my balance between judging and loving, between criticizing and helping."

Conclusion

I hope you're enjoying this series of blogs that is presenting a translation of Deming's 14 Points for Management into "Obligations for the School Board and Administration." Future blogs will elaborate on other points in the model. I encourage you to share this information with educators in your community.

Notes

¹R. Audette and R. Algozzine, "Free and Appropriate Education for All: Total Quality and the Transformation of Public Education," *Remedial and Special Education*, Vol. 13, No. 6, PRO-ED, Inc., Austin, TX (1992), pp. 8-18.

²L. Jenkins, *Improving Student Learning: Applying Deming's Quality Principles in Classrooms*, ASQ Quality Press, Milwaukee, WI (1997), pp. 220-221.

³W. Borgers and T. Thompson, *Implementing Continuous Improvement Management in the Schools*, Scholastic Press, New York, NY (1994), p. 218.

⁴W. Glasser, *Schools Without Failure*, Harper & Row, New York, NY (1975), p. 151.

⁵Audette and Algozzine, *op cit*.

⁶P. Robertson, *The Turning Tide: The Fall of Liberalism and the Rise of Common Sense*, Word Publishing, Dallas, TX (1993), pp. 213, 231.