

Chalkboard

By

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So, I called her at the end of the day and said, “Write this down on your calendar- **You were right, I was wrong.**” Those of you who instantly thought I was addressing this confession to Regenia were wrong also. It would have been a good guess; Regenia has a better W-L record on things than I.

No, this attestation was directed at Shiera Wilson, Gentry’s Bus Dispatcher. What prompted this almost end of the day conversation at 5:00 p.m. was an almost beginning of the day conversation at 5:00 a.m. At that time both of us had already made a foray into the district inspecting the roads that the buses would later travel or not travel. My assessment was that it was too risky to have buses traveling about.

Both of us agreed that the country roads were okay. We both noted the road crews had done a fine job of clearing the overpass over the track and that both highways 59 and 12 seemed to be in good shape. My sticking point was the condition of the city streets and the ability of our buses to intermingle safely with other vehicular traffic.

As it often is in life, it became an issue of trust. Should I trust the judgment of the person hired to oversee the district’s transportation program, or should I rely on my own assessment? The next question, for me, became “If I do not trust her on this matter, why should I trust her on the other myriad number of decisions she makes daily?”

So, I gave in right then? Well, actually not. Trust should never be equated with blind trust in my thinking. I asked her to come drive the street where I had been practicing my sideways skids while I went and looked elsewhere. It was still early and we both still had time to gather information. She did and then we talked again through the miracle of cellular communication, the miracle being having enough signal bars from where I was calling. Here are the type questions I had for her.

How great is the risk of our buses not being able to stop? How great is the risk of other vehicles not being able to stop? Can our staff safely come to work? Can our parents who transport their children do so safely? Will students who walk to school be able to do so safely? Well, you get the idea. The questions concerned safety, they always do.

As I have noted in other themes, there are no guarantees in some matters. Ms. Wilson could offer no guarantees. However, she could weigh all the factors she had access to, process those factors through the sifter of thirty plus years of transport truck/school bus experience, and make an informed decision based on her judgment. She did and I ended the call with, “Shiera, I trust your judgment. I have to or the district needs to get someone else to direct the transportation program.”

At that point, from lovely downtown Vaughn (I made a wrong turn as usual somewhere in the dark bouncing along in my Jeep), I called the principals and others and announced school would be in session. I offered a few words of caution on this and that, things that they already knew and were going to do anyway (duty does have its dues). I went home then, woke Regenia up, and had a brief discussion about how to put the Tahoe in 4-Wheel High. She just smiled and said, “Sure I will.” (She has 30 years of experience living with me; I think it will garner her a star in her crown someday.)

Did trusting Ms. Wilson keep me from stewing until mid-day? No, it did not. Nor did it keep me from offering up some brief prayers for the safety of our students, our staff, and our parents.

What message am I trying to impart? Trust is a two-edged sword. One factor that I insist that all staff consider in making decisions that affect our students is that trust and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. I had a person remark once that if parents did not think it was safe, then they should just keep their children at home. My reply was that if parents trusted us, as we want them to do, then having school on some particular day was a sign to them that we believed it was safe to do so. Their trust of our decision would be a big factor in their own decision. I reminded the well-intentioned person that we were not hauling livestock; we were transporting the most precious cargo in existence - someone’s child.

It was easy for me to call Ms. Wilson at the end of the day and tell her that she had been right. It was a telephone call I wanted to make.