

Chalkboard

By

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For many years I have been expressing to the staff that no role at the school is more important than any other. From time to time, I have received some looks that seemed to say, “Yeah, right.” On one occasion I believe someone even queried, “Well, if that’s the case, why don’t they all pay the same?”

This year, after reading Jim Collins’ book, Good to Great, I made an attempt to further delineate that above concept, which I hold as a core belief. Mr. Collin’s book is not about education per se, but rather expresses the outcome of his research into what makes good companies great ones in terms of production, return on investments, market share, value and so forth. I was exposed to the book this last summer in a leadership seminar hosted by the Arkansas Leadership Academy.

Reading his work caused a few tumblers in my mind to spin then click together. It also leads me to be able to better clarify what I mean by “no role at the school is more important than any other.”

The issue can best be viewed as a matter of *function*. Function deals with whether the role, and the person who has that role, serves the organization or whether the role supports the mission of the organization. In my estimate, only one role in Gentry’s school system, or any other school, supports the mission of the school district and that role is that of classroom teacher. Every other position serves to support the organization itself.

If you buy into this line of thinking you have already made the small leap to understanding that the organization only exists to serve the needs of its clients and that in the case of a public school, the clients are the students being served. If you buy into that thinking it also becomes clear why teachers, who have front line exposure to and with the clients, have the responsibility, or function, of accomplishing the mission of the organization.

Some readers might be thinking that it is the parents who are the clients and that the students are merely the commodities being produced. While a fair argument can be made in that area, I think not. Education is a service industry and it is the child, not the parent, who is receiving the value-added service. If you are a parent reading this, do not be offended. Your

role in your child's life, including his or her education, is the most important role. Without debate, it is more critical than the role of any employee at anyone's school. Today's article just deals only with the different roles of school staff.

Okay, let us refocus. Teachers serve the mission of the organization. All others serve the organization itself. That means that the respective roles of bus drivers, lunchroom cooks, custodians, maintenance workers, clerks, secretaries, bookkeepers, supervisors, coordinators, technicians, various paraprofessionals, administrators, the school superintendent, and the school board exist so that the organization functions in a manner which allows the classroom teacher to carry out the mission of the organization.

Simple, is it not. For an organization to have a mission, it must first exist. My pastor, Bro. Robin Cowin, has noted that a church is not a building but rather the people within that building. In the same light the school organization is not the facilities but rather the staff. While I am proud, as I hope you are, of the facilities in which our students are being served, no school building ever taught a child how to write his name in cursive. No building has ever served a hot lunch. No building has self-cleaning restrooms. No building has ever written a payroll to pay those who are accomplishing a purpose regardless of role. School buildings are only place markers- a fixed system in which teachers teach students. It is this fixed system, this school organization, that all paid employees who are "non-teachers" maintain, support, and "keep functioning" on a daily basis so that teachers may teach the organization's clients- our students.

This entire article revolves around the twin concepts of organization and mission. At first glance it would be easy to say that one cannot function without the other. But is that really the case? Next week's *Chalkboard* delves into "the mission of the organization".