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Fall 2015

**Finding the Real Decision-Makers
in Federal Contracting**

**Help Your Employees
Avoid Burnout**

Special Education Reform?

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Finding the Real Decision-Makers in Federal Contracting

By: Gloria Berthold Larkin

The federal government spends over 550 billion dollars every year buying goods and services from businesses of all sizes and types. Companies located not just in the U.S., but throughout the world, sell to the U.S. federal government and more businesses are looking to explore that market every day.

The federal marketplace is different from the private sector in many ways, one of which is the decision-making process regarding purchasing and procurement. There are existing rules

and regulations (in the Federal Acquisition Regulations or FAR) clearly identifying the decision-making process, how purchases are made, who has the authority, what constitutes fair pricing, what is considered a poor or inadequate service/product, and how contracts are managed.

However, a factor critical to success, but not widely understood, is the understanding of the multiple layers of decision-makers in the federal purchase process.

Successful companies have cracked this decision-maker code, and those that are struggling or newcomers to the market will be well served to identify and understand these layers because each one is interested in very different information and should be contacted at different times during the business development cycle. If any of these people are ignored, or given the wrong information, or approached at the wrong time, the chance of success drops dramatically.

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Small Business Representative

Every federal agency and military entity will have at least one person, if not a fully-staffed office, for the Small Business Representative (SBR). They may have titles such as the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU), The Office of Small Business (OSB), Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (SADBU) or something similar. They are the informal gatekeepers. While they buy nothing, they are always the first people a serious contractor should meet when trying to sell to a federal agency.

It is the Small Business Representative's job to help small businesses understand how to open the doors to doing business with a particular agency, the required registrations and the general purchasing processes. They are also interested in meeting with a large

business when that large business is proactively looking for small businesses with which to subcontract or team.

One of the biggest mistakes a business person who owns a small business makes when meeting with the SBR is not doing their homework before requesting a meeting. Most uninformed contractors simply show up to the meeting and expect the SBR to educate them. Successful contractors, on the other hand, will have invested time in doing their own research and be ready to discuss specific topics during the meeting.

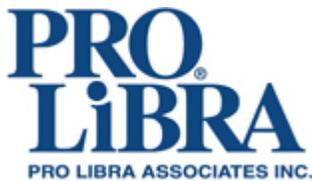
Recommended Research Before Requesting a Small Business Representative Meeting

- Review your company's listing

in the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) and make updates if needed.

- Review your company's listing in the Dynamic Small Business Search (through CCR.gov) and make updates if needed (especially in the Capabilities Narrative and Keywords sections).
- Check the agency's mission to determine if your services/products are a fit with their needs.
- Check the agency web site for the Small Business Office.
- Determine if the agency has a registration separate from the CCR and if so, complete it.
- Look for the agency's Forecast of Contracting Opportunities, and review it to see if your services/products are listed.
- Review FedBizOpps web site

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for specific upcoming opportunities and Sources Sought Notices.

- Determine if the SBR hosts Vendor Outreach Sessions or other networking events. If so, sign up to attend.

The recommended research will take a few hours, but it is time well-spent. The vendors who have done their homework and are prepared will find that they make a very good first impression. By going through this preparation, you separate your company from all of those who do not make the effort.

The SBR will appreciate your professional approach and feel confident that you are a good match for their agency's needs. However, when discussing the fit between your firm and the agency's needs, do not go into great technical detail at this meeting as the SBR is not a technical expert. Save the technical details for the right person.

The SBR is the person most interested in what socio-economic certifications your firm satisfies. For those people who have completed the above research, the SBR will be very interested in helping find or develop set-aside opportunities that may fit the small business, 8(a), women-owned, HUBzone and service disabled veteran categories.

Contracting Officer

The Contracting Officer (CO) has the legal authority to make large purchases on behalf of the federal government. The CO undergoes background checks and specialized training, and, as a job requirement, signs an oath that s/he will spend our tax dollars wisely and not take unnecessary risks. S/he also accepts the burden of keeping up with the complicated legal requirements involved in the federal purchase process. Contracting officers (COs) are usually responsible for buying many different types of products and services and therefore are not expected to be technical experts.

When planning a meeting with a CO, it is important to realize that they are interested in different types of information than the SBR. Their focus is not on whether a firm has a particular socio-economic certification, but rather, what contract vehicle will be used and the level of experience of the firm. Remember, he cannot take unnecessary risks with federal funds, so the more proof you can give him of your capabilities, the better your chances of winning a contract.

Preparation Before Requesting a Contracting Officer Meeting

- Research the agency buying habits.
- Determine if your exact services and products are purchased.
- Determine how they make purchases: credit cards, negotiated buys, competitive bids, etc.
- Determine if sole source contracts are used.
- Identify the exact purchase vehicle the CO normally uses, such as a GSA Schedule, credit cards, or a particular type of contract.
- Complete a listing of your past experience in working with their agency or your other references.
- Prepare to discuss the financial stability of your firm.

To conduct a successful meeting with a CO, a vendor will have all of the above information collected ahead of time and be prepared to use the allotted 15-20 minute meeting to discuss the fit with agency's needs, the contract vehicles used, references and the firm's financial stability.

It is usually a mistake to go into detail regarding the technical aspects of services or products with the CO as he typically is not a technical expert and would be bored or worse, irritated that a vendor did not take the time before the meeting to learn their purpose and responsibilities in the buying process.

Program Manager

Program Managers (PMs) are the people who actually use the products and services that vendors provide and the CO is responsible for buying.

These *are* the technical experts, and they are most likely to appreciate the details of why a product or service is a better choice. While the PMs may have credit cards with which they can make micro purchases (up to \$3,000 per transaction) they usually have no legal authority to make large purchases.

It is very difficult to identify the PMs through readily available sources and even more difficult to schedule meetings. However, if a vendor wants to be considered as a viable bidder for larger contracts, it is important to take the time to identify and be introduced to the PMs, build relationships and become a known and trusted entity to the PM before the proposal is advertised.

A Program Manager will often have the ability to develop the technical requirements for procurement, and may even make specific vendor

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recommendations to the CO; therefore it is well worth the time and effort to get to know PMs and have them get to know your business.

Preparation Before Requesting a Program Manager Meeting

- Determine the level of technical detail required at the meeting.
- If you are not the technical expert for your firm, make sure to include him/her.
- Research past projects run by the PM.
- Determine what associations/networking events are likely candidates for participation by the PM.
- Identify clear differentiators that your firm offers.
- Wow her with your proven expertise.

The PM meeting is the one time that you want to pull out all stops regarding the technical details of your services and

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products. These are the people with whom you do go into as much detail as time allows, especially when you can back it up with strong references.

The Federal Contracting Decision-Making Team

The full decision-making process incorporated during developing, writing and awarding government contracts will involve all three of layers of people, and each advertised Request for Proposal (RFP) will also incorporate a formal team of decision-makers including at least one CO and one PM, often with multiples of each, with additional people participating as well. Successful contractors have spent the time to identify the layers of decision-makers, meet with them to discuss the appropriate topics and build relationships with them based on trust and ability.

Now that you can identify the decision-makers, the research required before meetings and the specific topics of discussion for each type of decision-maker, you are prepared to be very successful in setting the stage to win contracts.

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Small Business Management

By: John J Matthews

Running a small, start-up business has its share of ups and downs. When I launched my company nearly nine years ago, running my own small business has been both rewarding and challenging. It has enabled me to establish greater balance in my life as I have reduced the administrative burden that corporate America places on each of its employees and replaced it with more time spent on developing content for my clients.

Given the choice, running my own small business is the best option for

me at this stage of my life. I can work out of my house, see my kid on a regular basis, focus my work effort on content, rather than administration, and yes *golf a tad*. That being said, I am asked continually by others “what is it like to be in business for yourself?” as they contemplate the leap from corporate to sole proprietorship.

While it is not for everyone, here are some of the points of consideration that one should mull over before making the jump to starting your own small business:

One Stop Shop:

One of the benefits of being a small business owner is the autonomy of “calling the shots”. You are the boss and clearly can steer your company as you see fit. Many think they relish this set-up but in reality, when it comes to being the self-motivator that is required to be successful - the “guy” to go to - lots fall short. Before you read any further, ask yourself if you are cut out to be the “go to guy”. If not, you can save yourself a lot of time and frustration. Simply stay in the corporate world.

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Develop A Business Plan:

So, why is business planning so crucial? In a word, it provides “clarity”. Investing time to develop a plan provides precise clarification of the company vision. In addition, it provides a mechanism to gauge the results of the business and provides the foundation for future growth plans. In the long haul, it enhances the company valuation through fiscal responsibility, which provides the story of opportunity to any future investor or employee. Business planning is one-part strategy and one-part tactics - but where the sausage actually gets made is in the execution. Execution comes in the hard work necessary to carry out a plan and the accountability for your activities by tracking them.

Understand Tax Burdens:

Regardless of the political rhetoric surrounding the tax code and its impact on small business, the fact of the matter is that these entities are levied with a myriad of taxes. I am shocked by how many budding entrepreneurs fail to understand the taxes that small businesses pay. My company has essentially one of the easiest business operating models that a small business can have. I invoice a few clients per month; receive a few checks a month; pay a few bills a month; and have very little inventory and/or depreciation of capital assets. Despite that, my tax return was 84 pages last year. Filing as an S-Corp, my outlay on taxes is between 25% and 39% of federal taxes; North Carolina state income taxes ranging from 6.0% to 7.5%, social security and medicare (twice as a matter of fact for employer and employee) of 15.3%, so nearly 50% of all income goes to taxes and fees.

Replicate Yourself:

Given the fact that you are a one stop shop, a small business owner needs to replicate themselves wherever possible. Tools such as social media and the acceptance of telecommuting through online collaboration have enabled small business owners to be in many places at one time. In order to be successful, small business owners need to tap these tools to maximize their exposure to potential clients as well as reaching customers outside of their immediate trade area. Prior to these tools being readily available, my business was limited to the state of Illinois (where my company was originally based). Since I have utilized these tools to replicate myself, I have had clients in thirteen different states.

Navigate Third-Party Challenges:

A small business owner wears many hats and relies on third-party entities for key alliances. When Go Daddy had their website and email server outage in September, roughly

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5.3 million small business websites and emails were knocked out. Small business owners rely on these support companies and at times, are held captive when issues arise. While my company does not conduct a lot of commerce via my website, many small operators lost online revenue due to the outage.

Be Wary Of Scams:

Lastly, where there is a small business owner, there is a criminal waiting to prey on the unsuspecting operator. In fact, this past week, I received a letter from a group claiming to represent the State of Illinois. Having been in business nearly nine years, I am keenly aware of all of the annual expenditures that my company pays. As an Illinois corporation (operating in North Carolina), I received a letter stating that I needed to send in a \$125 fee for my "Annual Minutes Records Form". I didn't recall ever doing this, and when I contacted my CPA, he shared the following press release with me:

In short, starting and running a small business may be the best decision you may ever make. Having the facts in advance of that decision are critical to ensure that you are positioned for success. Once you fully vet your decision-making for starting your small business, the rewards can be amazing...

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Help Your Employees Avoid Burnout

By: Sheila Murray

What is job burnout? The Mayo Clinic defines it as “a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term exposure to demanding work situations.” They add that job burnout is the cumulative result of stress. Constant stress can make employees feel disillusioned, helpless, and completely worn out. When you’re burned out, problems seem insurmountable, everything looks bleak, and it’s difficult to muster the energy to care about your

job. Burnout can even make employees more vulnerable to illnesses like colds and flu.

Burnout builds up over time but it can be reversed or even avoided if managers know the right steps to take.

1. Employees need to feel needed and important, so use them and help them reach their full potential by involving them in decision-

making. Increase their responsibilities and take advantage of their skills and abilities.

2. Give your employees positive feedback and recognize their achievements. Praise and encouragement are vital to job satisfaction.

3. Creativity is a powerful antidote to burnout.

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Ask employees to make safety or communication posters or to compete in some other work related or work enhancing project. Take winners to lunch or offer a small incentive.

4. Develop a supportive management style. Managers who are intimidating; overly ambitious; cold and arrogant; or demanding and unfair, create stress. Avoid having any of these adjectives associated with your management style.

5. Be fair and realistic in your promotion practices. Unfair promotion practices speak very poorly of a company's attitudes toward its employees. Have a plan for succession and encourage all of your employees to apply for more challenging positions as they open up within the company.

6. Encourage your employees to share their feelings and concerns. Talking with a member of management can help employees see the big picture and put issues in perspective.

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7. Encourage teamwork. Sharing the workload and experiences lessens feelings of isolation and helplessness.

8. Set aside time for brainstorming. Work groups that are constantly trying new ideas and taking risks seldom burn out.

9. Encourage employees to use their paid time off. A few days off serves to refresh and revitalize.

10. Monitor the company grapevine. Perception outweighs reality, but with proper communication, you can insure that perception and reality match.

The unhappiness and detachment burnout causes can affect an employee's productivity, relationships, and health. Be on the lookout for the signs of employee burnout and take the steps outlined above to combat them. Protect your employees from the hazards of burnout, and you protect your company as well.

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Improving the Quality of Care With Employee Engagement

By: Donald Bryant

The July 2014 edition of *MGMA Connection* listed the top ten challenges in healthcare today as identified by the Medical Group Manager's Association's (MGMA) annual 'Medical Practice Today' survey. The top four challenges identified are:

1. Preparing for the transition to ICD-10 diagnosis coding
2. Dealing with rising operating costs
3. Preparing for reimbursement models that place a greater share

of financial risk on the practice

4. Preparing for value-based payments

As the article pointed out, the challenges at this time seem overwhelming. The number of changes that physician providers and practices face seem to be the most intense and demanding in quite some time. The article then lists many resources that are available to MGMA members. These resources include webinars, books, and conferences.

At the root of solving the problems

and challenges are employees, managers, clinicians and consultants engaged in designing and implementing new processes, new health information technology and new programs. Often the solutions come from executives and managers, sometimes with the aid of an outside consultant. This source of solutions is sometimes necessary. For instance, it will be necessary for a team of executives to direct the overall implementation of ICD-10. For a small physician practice this could be a physician and the office manager. Larger offices will include a broader

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representation of office staff.

One strategy that is often overlooked in creating the best solutions for the challenges is the engagement of front-line employees in identifying and implementing incremental improvements. That is, staff is engaged in continuous quality improvement activities. For example, management can ask staff to improve the training process for ICD-10 coding or ask the clinical staff what population level measures would best help them in improving the quality of care.

At the heart of engaging employees is a **high performance idea system**. Such a system encourages employees to submit ideas that will meet the goals set up by management. For example, management can ask employees to focus on finding ways to engage patients more. High performance idea systems generate and implement about 12 to 20 ideas per employee per year. As long as management makes clear what the foci of ideas are, about 95% of the ideas are implemented in the best practices.

Ideas focused upon improving the quality of care are introduced by staff during regular short meetings. These meetings may be once or twice a week or more often.

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Staff that meet once a week may want to meet for one-half hour. Not only are ideas for incremental changes introduced in these meetings, they are also adopted in the meetings. As long as a solution to a problem involves only those on the team, there is no need to seek higher approval for a solution. Rather the team leader gets the team members to modify and improve the suggested improvement if needed and then adopt it as part of each team member's work. Such a strategy for adopting incremental changes suggested by front-line employees allows an organization to implement a great number of ideas each year from each employee. Implementation of ideas of improvement of care and work is not bogged down waiting for managerial approval.

Another key principle of using front line staff to continuously improve the quality of care and work in incremental steps is holding staff and management accountable for following through with the solutions. It is necessary for team leaders to see to it that new processes and solutions are adopted by affected staff. In order to do this, leaders will need to observe team members at work and also collect relevant data about the success of the solutions. Not all implemented ideas will lead to success.

Adopting this strategy to help a provider meet its

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challenges can be very difficult. Most of the time, the strategy of using front-line employees in a high performance idea system to implement solutions requires a dramatic culture change. Most healthcare providers, indeed most businesses, use management driven improvement. Management simply does not trust front-line staff to create and implement changes on their own without significant supervision.

Another inadequacy in using only management to create solutions besides their lack of trust in using staff is their limited point of view. Managers often are not engaged in the work of their staff; thus they are removed from the day-to-day work routines of their staff. This removal means that they will not be able to generate as many solutions to problems as the staff or to generate as effective as solutions, generally. Keep in mind, though, that management is responsible for directing the focus of creating solutions.

At one hospital where I was helping management and staff find a solution to problems associated with patient admissions, staff had been creating work around solutions to the problems they were facing in recording the number of empty beds available. Management had a software-based solution for this process. It simply was inaccurate. Admissions could never be sure exactly how many beds were available, often creating wait times for admissions of patients. I worked with staff and their managers to create a solution that was effective, accurate and simple to implement. Better yet, it was a very low cost solution.

Using staff to create solutions to difficult challenges is part of a lean healthcare program. This approach to providing the best care at lower cost has been adopted by the University of Michigan Healthcare System. In fact, they offer lean training conferences to other providers in Ann Arbor. (I attended one of these week long offerings and was greatly impressed; providers from all over the world attended the conference). The adoption of this approach has helped the University Healthcare System become recognized by Becker's Hospital Review as one of the 100 best hospital systems in the United States in 2014.

I am sure that the challenges that you as a provider face seem overwhelming. The challenges listed in the MGMA survey are just a few of the many. Some of the challenges may be unique to your practice site. Engaging staff in providing solutions has been shown to be an effective tool in overcoming the challenges if the process of engaging the staff uses the principles set forth in lean programs and as I have discussed.

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EMR Companies Help Provide Extensive Patient History When Required

By: T Rue

There are many reasons that people will benefit from allowing each one of their doctors to view past medical treatments, medications and much more from doctors in the same network. EMR companies are able to allow this to happen by linking the patient's records together. This will ensure that each one of the doctors will have the information to treat the patient right.

There are a lot of different types of things that everybody will need to think about because of this though. There is information that people will

often forget about when they are giving a doctor their past medical history. This may not seem like very important information to the patient, but it could be something that could affect their future treatment procedures.

The medications that they are prescribed are also important for the doctor to know. They need to make sure that they are not prescribing medications that are going to react with other ones. This is something that could be fatal to the patient.

Every doctor wants to know the patient's past because there are many things that could explain symptoms that they are having. There are a lot of different things that everybody will need to figure out when they are feeling sick or not feeling right. If they are having pain, it can be caused from certain diseases too.

Their past can affect their future. The medications that they have taken in the past can affect them differently also. If they had a reaction to a certain medication, they may not

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remember what the name of it was either. This could cause a doctor to prescribe that medication again.

Every patient is going to have a different past medical history too. Each record is going to be unique. The vital signs are going to be different for everyone too. It is important to know what is normal for all of the patients too.

Every doctor is going to be able to see what other doctors have observed as well. This is something that is going to be very helpful. Everybody has something different about their past medical records that they may not realize how important it is. Every doctor will want to know different information also.

Choosing what someone should have for treatment can be difficult. It can make it even more difficult if they have not responded well to a certain type of treatment before. An EMR is going to help other doctors see what happened with their treatments and much more.

There are a lot of things that could affect their treatment, but knowing what they need to have for treatment is going to be important. They have many different things that will be frustrating to both the doctor and the patient, but it is actually helpful in getting the best treatment plan. Physicians have a job to do and have to ensure that their patients are safe with the treatment plan that they decide.

People may try to hide things from their doctor, but it is not something that is going to be smart for them. This is something that is often prevented also. Doctors will be able to see past treatments and diagnosis for different symptoms that they have experienced. They can also see how many times that they have had a particular diagnosis as well.

EMR companies have a big responsibility to keep these records confidential as well. Patients have the right to obtain their medical records when they need them as well. Some companies will have to charge a fee for this, but not all of them will require this.

Physicians have many responsibilities that are going to be very important to patients as well as people who work in the different types of medical offices. Medical transcription services as well as record management is something that needs to be taken care of. Skywriter MD will do all of this, including coordinating prescription refills and responding to messages. They can also relay instructions to the staff in certain situations. There are many services that are going to be provided by them.

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Failure Is the Tuition You Pay for Success

By: Bud Bilaanich

Commitment to taking personal responsibility for your success is one of the keys to career and life success.

If you want to succeed, you must commit to three things. First, you must take personal responsibility for your success. Only you can make you a success. You need to be willing to do the things necessary to succeed. Second, you must set high goals — and then do whatever it takes to achieve them. Third, stuff happens; as you go through life you will encounter many problems and setbacks. You need to react positively to the negative stuff and

move forward toward your goals.

I am traveling quite a bit as we get to the end of the year. When I travel, I try to take care of myself by ordering dinner in. Most often, I order hot and sour soup from a local Chinese restaurant. I always read my fortunes because I often find wisdom in them. Sure enough, the other day, I got this fortune...

“Failure is the tuition you pay for success.”

I like that metaphor — failure as tuition for success.

People who commit to taking personal responsibility for their success, choose to react positively to the problems, setbacks and failures they encounter along the way. Thinking of problems, setbacks and failures as the tuition you need to pay to learn the lessons necessary for creating the successful life and career you want and deserve is a great idea. It also makes it easier for you to choose to react positively.

Failure is never pleasant. However it is a fact of life. Most successful people will tell you that they were failures before they were successes. They succeeded because they chose to

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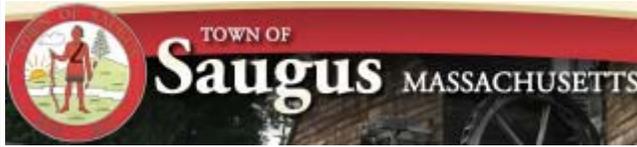


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react positively to their failures — and this is really important — to learn from them.

The next time things don't work out as you would like, look for the reason why you failed, and the lesson behind it. There is a lesson to be learned in every failure. Successful people find the learning in their failures and then apply it in their lives and careers. They change their behavior. They do things differently.

I always tell my coaching clients that if you do something right the first time and then do it another 1,000 times, the value of that experience is negligible. You might get a little better or faster at it, but you're not likely to make a quantum leap forward. On the other hand, when you do something and things go really bad, you can take this negative experience and use it to your advantage — but only if you're paying attention and you're willing to learn from your mistakes; or treat them as the tuition you need to pay to succeed.

The common sense point here is simple. Successful people commit to taking personal responsibility for their lives, careers and success. Treating your setbacks and failures as the tuition you need to pay to succeed, is a great way to demonstrate your commit to taking personal responsibility. When you fail, choose to react positively and learn something. Then use what you've learned to create the successful life and career you want and deserve.

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Building the “Right” Culture is Key to Retention

By: Rick Johnson

Almost every Human Resource expert will tell you that employees must enjoy their work to be effective doing it. Enjoying work is not limited to the task itself. What this really means is simply “enjoying work is exceptionally dependent upon the culture which the works resides in.” In other words, the company must build a culture that the employees embrace. One that encourages self development, empowerment, social interaction, accountability and recognition. If your employees don’t enjoy working for you and at your

place of business, retention will become an issue.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a common trait used by most effective leaders. The rewards of empowering your employees are far greater than the risk. Give them some independence in choosing their work schedules or other factors that won’t affect overall objectives. Employees must take ownership in the success of the organization. This means they must become part of the strategy employed

by the company. Acknowledge their presence and contributions, and praise them at every opportunity. Empowering employees allows them to use their own initiative and creativity to accomplish things you never imagined they could. It is a baseline for building the right culture.

Allow room for a few Mavericks to exist in your organization. Empower your employees so they will take calculated risks. The worst thing you can have happen in your organization is for all your employees to do exactly what they are told to do - exactly how

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they are told to do it. Release the initiative and creativity in your employees by empowering them.

Management at all Levels Must Lead

Building the right culture is a primary responsibility of leadership at all levels in the organization. This includes front line supervisors and all managers up to and including the CEO of the company. The reality is so simplistic that we often overlook it.

“Employees can not maximize their effectiveness if they don’t feel comfortable. Employees won’t thrive if they don’t feel like their work environment makes them feel at home, confident, secure and appreciated.

The culture of your company is under rated when it comes to success drivers. It has tremendous weight on virtually every decision that is made within the organization itself

Test Your Management Teams View on Your Culture

Don’t make assumptions strictly based on your personal values, your personal views and your personal opinions. Call a meeting with your management team to discuss your culture. Don’t impose your views. In fact it may be beneficial to have an outside facilitator treat this exercise as a fact finding focus group event. This will allow you to either validate how effective your culture is and how it contributes to the company’s success or it can provide you with areas that need improvement with ideas and action plans that will help you create a culture that improves company retention and contributes to recruitment success. Often times a Management Team Retreat or workshop can provide tremendous dividends by energizing the group to such an extent that they not only identify key issues but they recognize the need to create and embrace change within the organization.

Challenge the team to address the following questions:

1. Describe what you believe our current culture to be in four words or less.

This question accomplishes several goals. First, it’s creative. Hopefully it will spur spontaneous thought that often is more honest than long drawn out analysis. Second, it challenges each manager to boil down the essence of their workplace in only a few words. Look for consistency

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between actions and words to get the true description of the culture.

2. If we were to give tours to the local college for recruitment purposes outline what you believe to be our key points of interest to attract new employees.

This is a creative question to challenge your management team. The answers to this question should represent the “greatest advantages” of the company’s culture. This delivers invaluable insight into what they perceive as the leading attributes of the company. Chances are no manager would focus on any attribute that didn’t symbolize a core component of the company’s culture, right?

3. If you were asked to write a 750 word article about our company culture, what would be impossible not to include?

This should be creative, challenging and counterintuitive. This challenges your management team to put the company in the best light. The secret is, by suggesting an article it reveals the parts of the company’s culture that you would want the public to know about. However, transparency is key; So you might also want to ask them to write at least one paragraph detailing a minimum of one negative about the company culture as they view it.

4. What are the most common complaints employees make about our company culture?

Although you want to keep this exercise as positive as possible, our objective is to improve the company culture for retention and recruitment purposes. This should be an unexpected question open for honest discussion and debate. Discovering any negative aspects of the company

culture is critical to establishing action plans for improvement. This should not be a “Hall Mark” moment and honest opinions should be encouraged.

5. Explore any past issues that are not directly related to employee confidentiality that can become a learning exercise.

Every manager may not be aware of specific cultural issues that have been apparent in the past. Reviewing some of the more prominent ones will help to stimulate thought, ideas and discussion.

Set Your EGO aside

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What Students Need to Know to Thrive in College

By: Kari Miller

Personal qualities that support academic success

Students who have the following personal qualities are much more likely to thrive in college.

- Self-awareness and self-acceptance
- Proactivity as opposed to reactivity
- Perseverance
- Skill in setting short and long-range goals
- Use of effective support systems

- Strong emotional coping strategies

Understanding a student's rights in college

Individuals with special learning needs are guaranteed special supports in elementary and high school by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. However, in college, no such guaranteed protections exist. Therefore, students need to work congenially with

colleges to obtain reasonable accommodations that will facilitate their success.

It is best to have psychological and/or educational testing that was completed less than 3 years before applying to college because colleges usually demand recent testing to support a petition for accommodations.

Students will need to inform the college of their educational needs by registering with the office on campus that is in charge of reviewing and

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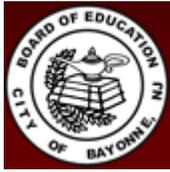


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granting accommodations. This office goes by names such as Disabled Student Support Services or Office of Special Services.

Typical “reasonable accommodations” that colleges may decide to grant include:

- Extra time to take tests
- Providing a note taker
- Taking tests in a separate room
- Test read orally to the student and/or the student’s answers transcribed or typed
- Use of tape recorder to record lectures
- Tutoring services (some colleges have tutoring geared for students with special needs, however, most colleges have tutoring available to all students-check both sources)
- Taking a reduced class load
- Requesting “full-time” status for purposes of qualifying for health insurance when taking a reduced course load

Instructors and professors have the power to make decisions that can help students be more successful. The following are some modifications a student may be able to negotiate on a case-by-case basis:

- Obtaining the instructor’s permission to modify an assignment or getting extra time to complete the assignment
- Asking for advice about selecting classes or instructors
- Asking the instructor to award an incomplete rather than an “F”-but be aware of the college policy in regard to “clearing” the “I”

Action steps a student should take to build a solid college support network:

- Think through what kind of support you’d like to have from your parents and friends and express your needs before you go to college
- Think about the kind of academic support you’ll need (for example, will you need tutoring) and make plans to set this up
- Don’t suffer in silence-speak out, reach out when you need to
- Get professional, trained help when you need it: tutors, doctors, etc.

Self-advocacy steps

Successful students understand themselves well. They know their strengths and they have developed ways to minimize the effects of their weaknesses. They also have a clear idea of their short-range and long-term goals, and are committed to meeting these goals.

These self-advocacy steps will help students obtain the supports they need, not only from others but from themselves as well!

- Have a clear plan to graduate in a certain time frame and set your schedule to realistically accomplish this plan
- Logically plan the kind of support you need to give to yourself!
- Meet with your teachers

regularly

- Don't wait until things get bad to see you need a different approach; if it isn't working-try another approach
- Pause, think and reflect before diving in-avoid the "Opps! and regret"
- Remember: resistance and avoidance stunt maturity; meet challenges head on and don't be afraid to make mistakes
- Evaluate and think through setbacks-they are the teachers of success!
- Success is a consistent mindset that says "I can do this, I will do this!"
- Everything goes better when

you get enough sleep and eat more healthy foods

- Plan ahead on how to manage stress, loneliness, and change
- Seek balance in all things-academics, relationships, pursuit of interests, career development, spiritual growth
- Seek out stabilizing forces (people, classes, work experiences, living arrangements, etc.)
- As soon as you identify a problem surfacing in a class, figure out how to remove it from your path
- Make better time estimates; after you figure out how long you think it will take you to do

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what you need to do, multiply that by as least 150%

- Keep your long-term, personal goals front and center in your mind, guiding you through the tough times!
- Reward yourself for meeting your deadlines and achieving your goals!

Study Skills

Students who master study skills and use their strengths to learn succeed in college. Try these tips:

- Set up a realistic study schedule and keep to it!!!! Don't let spontaneity ruin your completion of college
- Frequently review and critique your study approaches to find what is working and emphasize that
- Don't put off the "boring" or unpleasant tasks; doing so will leave you unprepared and can destroy your grade; find a way to see the value it brings to you as a person or as a professional
- Take frequent, short breaks when your attention fades
- Keep a calendar and an assignment book; record all due dates, test and quiz dates, etc. and schedule study/work sessions by backward planning
- Work with classmates who are strong students and stay on track
- While reading, stop frequently to retell the main idea and details in your own words
- As you read, take notes, jot down questions and related ideas, and make mental pictures of the material to increase your comprehension and retention
- Read the material before you go to the lecture; bring notes or an outline and fill in added material as you listen
- Ask for clarification in class if you miss details; increase your concentration during difficult listening situations

College Planning:

4 Topics to Discuss With Your High School Student During Winter Break

By: Susie Watts

Winter break is a great time for students to catch up on their sleep, spend some quality time with friends and family, see some good movies, and yes, even do some college planning. While most students consider this a time for total rest and relaxation, winter break should also be a time when parents have a heart-to-heart talk with their high school students. High school juniors, in particular, will be returning to school

for one of their most important semesters. If they do not plan for the future, there could be some disappointments ahead.

Winter break is a good time to discuss 4 topics with your high school student: High school courses, test prep and registration for the SAT and ACT test, extracurricular activities, and time management.

High School Courses

Students need to make sure they are choosing high school courses that are required by many colleges. You don't need to load yourself up with so many AP and honors classes that you make it difficult on yourself to do well. Keep balance in mind. Do not put yourself in a position to fail. Take the most challenging courses in the subjects that you enjoy and come more naturally to you, but don't feel

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you need to challenge yourself in a subject where you might already struggle. Making good grades is important, but don't take on more than you realistically can handle.

Colleges are concerned with the academic strength of your high school curriculum. This is always one of the most important factors in the college admission process. College admission officers want to make sure you have had a good educational foundation in pre-college level work. This assures them that you should be a successful candidate for college courses.

Test Prep for the SAT and ACT

College planning needs to include test prep and registering to take both the SAT and ACT. It is recommended that high school juniors take both tests their junior year and then decide if one test is more suited to their learning style. Every college in the U.S. will take either test for college admissions. Some students who are extremely motivated may be able to discipline themselves enough to do test prep on their own. Most, however, will benefit from a course that offers 12-15 hours of instruction. Look at local companies because they are usually both affordable and effective.

There are also two prep books you might want to purchase: The Real ACT Prep Guide and the Official SAT Guide. These books are published by the companies that produce the SAT and ACT tests. They will give students an opportunity to practice on something that is as close to the actual tests as possible. The more practice a student gets, the better.

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities will help to make your college applications unique and memorable. When you are beginning your college planning, students need to consider what they would like to do outside of school or in the community.

Colleges are interested in what you have done and leadership roles you took on in your activities or clubs. Extracurricular activities include high school athletics, theater, choir, debate or any other area to which you have dedicated time and commitment. Maybe you organized or

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participated in an annual event in the community where you contributed your time and talent.

Extracurricular activities can also demonstrate to a college some things that are important to you. Maybe you have dedicated weekly time to a tutoring program for disadvantaged students or coached a kindergarten soccer team for the last two years. Extracurricular activities give students a chance to utilize their social, physical, political, and creative skills.

Time Management Skills

Students have to juggle many things which can be stressful and sometimes overwhelming. High school is an important time for students to understand the need to balance their school work with the other activities in which they participate. Most students find that a day planner can make a real difference in helping them schedule school assignments, jobs, and other activities. Personal scheduling software now exists that allows students to synchronize scheduling information between their cell phone and computer.

Studying when you have a break between classes can free up time for other activities. Students must learn to prioritize and set attainable goals. When your college planning really begins, you will need time to do your college search, applications and essays, and everything else that goes into the college admissions process. That is when time management skills will be utilized the most.

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Students: Ten Steps To Succeed In School

By: Raymond Gerson

I have been teaching college success courses for many years to both at-risk students who are taking developmental courses and to students who are beyond the need for developmental or remedial courses. There are some basics or fundamentals which enhance success in high school and college. Here is my list of ten important steps to avoid failure and to achieve success in school:

1. Be in class. Being on time and maintaining good

attendance are important. If you are not in class then you are not learning what is being taught, will not be able to take notes and will not see what subject matter your teacher or professor thinks is important. Obviously it is also important to pay attention when you are in class.

2. Take notes. You cannot review the information that is being taught without class notes. Unless you review your notes several times most of the information is unlikely to get into your long-term

memory and will be forgotten. It is best to learn and use a note-taking system such as Cornell, think link, outline or another system.

3. Turn work in on time. Start early on assignments and break them into smaller chunks. This is how to make the difficult easy. Use a planner/calendar to record upcoming assignments so that you can keep up with the work load.

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4. Take pride in yourself and your work. Do quality work. If something is worth doing it is worth doing well.
5. Set educational and other goals. This will give you a purpose for going to school and this provides self-motivation. Remind yourself why you want a good education and what you want to achieve in school.
6. Set aside enough time to study. To excel in college you need to study at least two hours for every hour you are in class. Do important assignments first. Then reward yourself with play and you will have a stress free mind because you know the important school work is done. Study with concentration for short periods of approximately 30 minutes followed by short breaks in between. Say no to friends who want to play when your school work needs to be done and schedule another and better time with them.
7. Explain lessons to yourself. This is self-teaching. Read a paragraph in your text and then explain what you learned out loud in your own words. Read it again if you did not understand it. Do not go to the next paragraph until you think you understood the preceding one.
8. Create practice quizzes and tests. Self-testing is powerful. Go through your class notes and textbook. Write down every question you think could be on the test. Then give yourself your own quiz and grade it before you take the one in class.
9. Focus your attention. Do not multi-task and divide your attention in class or while reading your textbooks. These are the times when your full concentration and focus are important.
10. Take care of your brain. Getting enough sleep, exercise, water and good nutrition are important for optimum brain functioning. Avoid using recreational drugs and drinking much alcohol because they can impair your brain's ability to function well.

There are many more strategies for succeeding in school, but without these ten basic steps your success is less likely. You can start following these ten steps now for better grades and enhanced learning.

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Staying Sane in the Muddle of Cultural Multiplicity

By: Sarah Anne Shope, PhD

I recently read an article by an Ivy League professor who teaches a culture course as I do, and she mentioned becoming depressed partway through her course. At first I was surprised at her confession, and then I felt validated because I have similar feelings once my class zips through the components and characteristics of culture and then into the origins and effects of stereotyping, prejudice, and racism.

My classes are made up of prospective teachers who are of

diverse cultural, linguistic, and experience backgrounds, of varying ages and levels of education; and once the group gels they get along beautifully. Yet we cannot ignore the cultural conflicts that arise in the general public and those that could easily erupt in our group. We put emphasis on pride in culture and language, and our goal is to help our future students do the same. We admire that we are all special in our individualities and ethnicities. Nevertheless, the question lingers over us: At what point does pride

become arrogance, ethnicity become exclusivity, and the left-out folks become radicalized?

The goal is to examine chunks of knowledge related to culture and language. Yet much more happens in the sessions than the simple process of distributing terminology and concepts. Not only do we begin to look at one another with a bit of scrutiny, we begin to dissect ourselves. The study begins with a focus on the components and characteristics of culture, which on

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many levels seem all shiny, exotic or intriguing. We hint and sometimes joke at the fact it is those fascinating differences that often do put us at odds with one another. We bring up the “us and them” attitude that “those other people” take on, though we cannot avoid evidence that the “us and them” is the very concept that supports our own ethnic identity.

We study the differences in the communication, organization and intellectual styles of various cultures, the ways in which we use language and participate in communication; the ways that we relate to space, time, and social relations; and the ways in which we think about things. The style in which we communicate can be better understood by studying the characteristics of our culture in relation to the degree of high or low context within a particular society. That reveals the manner in which we convey meaning.

Stereotyping, Prejudice and Racism within All

Imagine the problems that arise in communication between individual of the opposite styles of communication. Components and characteristics of culture often do put us

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at odds, and that's just part of the challenge. Now we move on to the issues of stereotyping, prejudice and racism, and the realization that ethnic identity is often supported by an "us and them" attitude. Do we admit it or do we bury those feelings that might be described as racist or xenophobic so that no one will get a hint that we are human. What is at the heart of stereotyping, prejudice and racism?

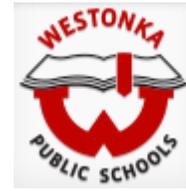
Some students approach me with something such as: "I'm not a racist and I have friends of all colors." I tried to imagine those multi-colored people-not that I'm insensitive to what my students are hoping to convey-but I want to say to them that I've never accuse them of any such thing. Nevertheless I am aware that the simple act of focusing on the concepts of stereotyping, prejudice and racism bring up sensitivities within all of us.

A Natural Brain Maneuver

The human brain is incredibly overwhelmed with information. All it can do is categorized and sort in order to handle everything. We begin to do that when we are children. We see a small four-legged furry animal and someone calls it a puppy. When we see another small four-legged furry animal we categorize it. "Look Mommy, a puppy!" As we grown up, our brains continue to use the same sorting strategy, an innocent approach to handling all of the entities that life brings. That is a necessary brain maneuver. We see a snake and we are scared nearly to death, though many snakes are harmless. We have an image of what a doctor looks like and somehow that becomes the image of what a doctor should look like. Of course we manage to correct our narrow thinking as we meet a variety of doctors, but that old image idles in the background.

When does that categorizing and sorting process become stereotyping? It happens we make subconscious decisions about things or people based on images that have gotten stuck in our brains for one reason or another. How does stereotyping become prejudice? It is a process of making judgments based on superficial categorizing: a strange-looking person is thought to be suspicious; a large black male is an athlete not a doctor. And of course, all ethnicities and races are strange to others, until they become familiar. We are all prejudice toward things and people with which we are familiar, and we are often prejudice against the unfamiliar. But when does prejudice become a harmful habit?

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Prejudice is found between peoples of divergent cultures, and prejudice goes quickly to differences in race. The reasons and ramification of racism run deep and are difficult to unravel. All humans categorize by physical differences; people of all races do it. Then how do some groups of people get dubbed racists and others are thought of as victims of racism? The primary differences lies in the effect of prejudice and how harmful it is to those affected. That has much to do with power-political, economic and social power, which are all in many ways connected. Stereotyping, prejudice and racism not only harm the targeted individual, they endorse and promote negative cycles with the community? People are severely harmed by those negative cycles.

It's a Small Thing.

Yes, it is depressing, and when we think of the harm people inadvertently do to one another we could all go insane. Yet if we don't confront the issues, we are apt to perpetuate it. And as educators, that is the absolute worst thing we could do.

So, in our group we confront one small thing and then another and another until we've covered a lot of issues of cultural differences, stereotyping, prejudice and racism; and then at some point we can stand back to see that it is one huge thing that we are beginning to tackle within ourselves. Changes begin with each of us individually as we come to understand how cultures develop, how the characteristics of our culture become a part of our fiber, and how that leads to differences in communication. We learn about how stereotyping, prejudice, and racism develop in the human brain and then sometimes manifest in terribly damaging way for both victims and perpetrators. Then we recognize that our group is one microcosm of the world and we are potentially the victims and the perpetrators of all possible misunderstandings coming from our differences. Our goal is to help ourselves and our students maintain unique identities and still remain appreciative and respectful to other identities.

On through the course my disheartened feelings begin to lift. Eventually we realize that we are the same in so many ways and it is in that sameness that we are human. Our human characteristics are sometimes great and sometimes horrible, but we are human. We realize it in a small thing here and a small thing there, and then another small thing and then another... That builds extraordinarily hope.

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Students With College Potential Need Active Parenting

By: Bob Roth

I have been hearing things from College Leaders, Career Services Professionals, College Professors and Adjunct Instructors that should concern you. Those comments have to do with college students and the way they think and operate. They make me wonder if recent high school graduates can survive in college and in the real world.

Parents are responsible for teaching, guiding and coaching their children, while giving them a broad range of opportunities and experiences. The

best parents help their children learn and grow, so they can function effectively and succeed in their adult lives.

Areas of concern include:

Short Attention Span - Do your children quickly lose interest in most things, lack concentration and move too quickly from one thing to another? To operate effectively in college and in the work world, many assignments

require students to pay close attention for long periods of time.

Electronic Devices - Are your children only interested in their electronic devices and ignore opportunities for physical, cooperative or interpersonal activities with friends? Team efforts and face to face communication are still required at most colleges and in most organizations.

Printed Material - Are your children unwilling to read stories and books,

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even short ones? In college and in the work world papers, reports, manuals, proposals and books still exist. Libraries exist too. Are you helping your children learn to utilize all of the resources that are available?

Correct English - In this day of electronic devices, symbols, emoticons and abbreviations have taken over. However, correct spelling, grammar, punctuation and a good vocabulary are still necessary in college and beyond. Are you helping your children learn to write and speak properly?

Communication - All students will need to communicate effectively. People with good communication skills will generally do better in college and in their careers than people with poor communication skills. Since verbal, writing and listening skills are learned at an early age, parents should be aware of the role they play.

Social Skills - Students today spend so much time on their electronic devices, some are losing the ability to interact with and build relationships or friendships with the people around them. That is not good. People with poor social skills are often left behind.

Entertainment & Fun - If your child must be constantly entertained and things must be made fun before they will participate or contribute, that may become a problem. Few colleges and employers go out of their way to entertain students or make the work fun and exciting. Students are generally treated as adults and expected to get things done, no matter what.

Perseverance - Do your children give up easily and avoid things that are long, difficult or complex? Colleges expect students to handle the complex assignments that are required in their coursework. Additionally, employers need people who will stick with the difficult challenges, overcome the obstacles and find ways to get the work done well.

Work Ethic - Is your child determined to succeed, dependable, on time and willing to work hard, in order to take care of his/her responsibilities? Who will hire a student who doesn't care whether he/she succeeds, is not dependable, is frequently late and will not stick with it to get the job done?

Immediate Gratification - Do your children expect some kind of appreciation, encouragement, recognition or reward for every little thing they do, even halfhearted efforts or mediocre results? If no reward is given what

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happens? Have they been successful with any difficult or complex long-term goals? Colleges and employers expect people to pursue and accomplish long-term goals with little immediate recognition and few short-term rewards.

Sensitivity - Are your children considered to be fragile, sensitive and easily offended? Can they handle criticism, disappointment and being corrected? These things are all part of college and employment life.

Flexibility - Are your children willing to consider alternatives, opposing views and willing to compromise or are they stubborn and inflexible, even in the face of solid arguments and evidence? In a learning environment, students and employees are expected to be flexible, accept new ideas and continuous change, work with a diverse group of people and constantly look for new ways to do things better.

Self-confidence - Are your children able to stand up for themselves, speak out, take action with self-confidence, go against the thinking of their peers and take a few calculated risks, when necessary? On the other hand, do they frequently get bulldozed by stronger personalities?

Anger - Are your children quick to anger, often intolerant, demanding of others or take irrational actions? Do they lack self-restraint and empathy and always expect others to adjust to them? That behavior will not get students very far in college.

Personality - Are your children friendly, positive and outgoing? Students with great personalities make friends easily and are well-liked. That is important both in college and after graduation.

Clear Thinking - Do other people see your children as being illogical and unrealistic or clear thinking and right on target? Fuzzy thinkers do not do well in college or in the work environment.

See The Future - Do your children understand what it takes to be successful in college and in their careers? Are they thinking about and preparing for their futures? Successful students can see what will be needed and take steps to get prepared.

As parents, your job is to shape the way your children think and behave. To do that, you will need to give your children opportunities to experience, learn, perform and make mistakes in a wide variety of situations. Along the way, you should be the ones to coach and guide them. That is called active parenting.

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Special Education Reform?

By: Daniel Blanchard

I remember 20 plus years ago when I was getting my graduate degree in Special Education and a buddy of mine getting his degree in elementary education told me that his father, a school principal, said that I probably shouldn't waste my time getting a masters in Special Education. He said that Special Education would be eventually fading out of public education. I was almost done with my masters at this point so I figured I would have to take my chances with it, besides

what other choice did I have anyways at that point?

I got a Special Education job and taught for about 10 year. There were a lot of ups and downs over those 10 years, and eventually I decided that I wanted a change so I got certified and switched over to high school history. At this point in my career I remembered what my friend had said a decade ago and wondered if I was ahead of the curve on schools no longer needing special education

teachers, even though it was 10 years later. I wondered if my job was now safe in my new-found home in the history department.

Well, I loved teaching history, but life has its own funny ways that aren't aligned to us and what we want, so after a decade of teaching history I personally got a first class education on budget cuts and my job was eliminated. Thankfully, I landed on my feet back in Special Education, believe it or not.

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It had been more than two decades since my old graduate school buddy told me that the need for special education teachers was disappearing. During the previous two decades my friend had gone from graduate school to elementary school teacher to assistant principal to principal, just like his father had done. I had gone from graduate school to special education teacher to history teacher to back to special education teacher, like nobody else that I know had done. And believe it or not there was still a bunch of special education jobs available when I landed there for a second time. As a matter of fact, there was actually plenty of jobs there because there is a shortage of special education teachers in 49 out of our 50 states. Imagine that... Two decades after I was told that Special Education was going away, and I find that they still can't seem to get enough special education teachers.

Fast-forward a few more years to today and there is a new and interesting twist affecting Special Education called full inclusion. Now inclusion isn't a new thing to our schools. As a matter of fact inclusion has a long interesting history in our schools.

Six decades ago there was the Supreme Court Case of Brown v. Board of Education. In 1954 the new law of the

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land became integrated schools for all races. Four decades ago the ground-breaking law of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) began to take effect and help ensure that more than six million students with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate education, which means they too get to be included in with the general education population.

To help this happen schools create a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) that meet and discuss a student's Individual Education Program (IEP) and then place the student in the appropriate educational setting based on the student's needs and the law. The placement also needs to be the least restrictive environment (LRE). I can still remember my college professor describing the least restrictive environment in a short story that one would not bring a machine gun to take care of a fly. Rather, one would just bring a fly-swatter to take care of a fly. In other words, if a kid's disability can be dealt with in the neighborhood school, then the kid doesn't have to be sent across town or even to another town's special school.

Today, many schools are trying to improve on this inclusion model and least restrictive environment by

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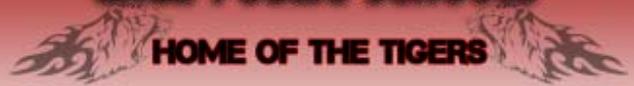
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going from a partial to a full-inclusion model. Schools in the Los Angeles School District have moved a vast majority of their students out of their special education centers within the last three years and into neighborhood schools where they are fully integrated into elective classes like physical education, gardening and cooking. They are also integrated into regular main stream academic classes as well, but it's usually not to the same degree as electives.

Michigan schools say that want to break down the walls between general education and Special Education creating a system in which students will get more help when they need it, and that support doesn't need to be in a separate special education classroom.

Some school districts in Portland,

Oregon are a little further along than the Los Angeles schools that are just bringing special education students back from special schools and Michigan schools that are just beginning to try full integration of its students and eliminating most of the special education classrooms.

Being a little further along in the process Portland makes an interesting case study. Many of the parents who initially supported the idea of integrating special education students into regular education classrooms in Portland are now worried about how the Portland Public School System is doing it. Portland is aiming for full-inclusion by the year 2020. However, some of the teachers in Portland are saying, "Obviously the special education students are going to fail and they are going to act out because we are not meeting their needs... If there's not the right support there,

that's not acceptable, not only for the child, but for the general education teacher as well."

A Portland parent said, "I would rather have my child feel successful than for them to be 'college-ready'." She further states, "I want my children to be good, well-rounded human beings that make the world a better place. I don't think they necessarily need to go to college to do that. I think that children are individuals, and when we stop treating them as individuals, there's a problem." Sadly, many parents and teachers have left the Portland School District, and many more are fantasizing about it because they feel the full-inclusion model isn't working there how they pictured it would.

How much should schools integrate the special education students is the burning question of the hour. In my

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personal experience some integration is not only possible, but it's a must. With some support many of the special education students can be in the regular education classrooms.

A few years ago I even had a non-speaking paraplegic boy in a wheel chair who was on a breathing respirator sitting in my regular education social studies class. Every day his para professional and his nurse rolled him into and sat with him. He always smiled at the tales I told of Alexander the Great marching across 11,000 miles of territory and conquering much of the known world at that time. By the way, Alexander the Great also practiced his own model of inclusion by encouraging kindness to the conquered and encouraging his soldiers to marry the captured territory's women in order to create a lasting peace.

Other important factors to consider in special education inclusion is the much needed socialization and the saving of money integration offers. Kids learn from other kids and money not spent on Special Education could be spent on general education, right? Hmm...

If you noticed, I said a little bit earlier that *many* special education students could be integrated, but I did not

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say *all* or even *most* should be integrated. There are just some students that are going to take away too much of the teacher's time and attention from other students, such as, in the case of students with severe behavior problems. When we put severe behavior problems in regular education classes it's just outright unfair to all of the other children in there. Similar cases could be made for other severe disabilities too that demand too much of the main stream teacher's individual time and attention.

Hey, I'm not saying to never try out a kid with a severe disability in a general education setting. But what I am saying is that schools need to have a better system of monitoring these placements and be able to *quickly* remove students that aren't working out, and are taking precious learning time away from other students. Furthermore, schools need to do this without shaming the teacher because the teacher complained that the student wasn't a good fit and was disrupting the educational learning process of the other students. Leaving a kid in an inappropriate placement isn't good for any of the parties involved. Period.

Over the last two decades I have worked with more special education students than I can remember as a special

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education teacher and a regular education teacher teaching inclusion classes. I have learned to become extremely flexible and patient and thus have had some of the toughest and most needy kids placed in my classes. I have worked miracles with these kids over the years and I know that I am not the only teacher out there doing this. There are many more out there just like me. But, what I worry about is that because teachers are so dedicated and pulling off daily miracles in the classroom, districts, community leaders, and politician may be pushing too hard for the full-inclusion model thinking that the teachers will just have to figure it out. Setting up teachers and students for failure is never a good idea.

Furthermore, I hope it's just not the money that they are trying to save while pushing this full-inclusion model forward because what we should really be trying to save is our children. As Fredrick Douglas said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

Regardless of how the financial educational pie is sliced, the bottom line is that the pie is just too small and our special education teachers and our special education students shouldn't be made to pay for this.

In addition, I have been a teacher for too long to not be at least a little skeptical when I hear the bosses say that the reason they are pushing for the full-inclusion model is because socialization is so important. I know it's important. But, I also know that too many people are hanging their hats on that socialization excuse rather than education our special needs students and providing them what they really need. I have seen special education students whose abilities only let them draw pictures sitting in honors classes. There is no real socialization taking place here. It just doesn't make sense.

Well, finally coming full circle. It will be interesting to see where this full inclusion thing goes. The wise ones won't let their special education teachers go, or get rid of their classrooms. And for the school districts that do, I imagine that it won't take long before they realize the mistake they made and start hiring special education teachers back. To my friend and his now ex-principal father from all those years ago who thought special education was going away, well, we're not there yet, and to tell you the truth, I don't think we ever will be.

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