



Champions of Education

By Mark Tewksbury

On November 19, 2007, Mark Tewksbury was the keynote presenter at the Alberta School Board Association's Fall General Meeting 2007 in Edmonton, AB. Takeaway points from his presentation are featured here.

Trait One: Embody Values

Know yourself. Your values act as a compass, guiding your decision-making, showing people who you are.

As trustees of the Alberta School Boards across the province, you value the best interest of children, the welfare of the community, along with the legal, moral and civic obligation of nation building – creating active citizens. Your outgoing President spoke of persistence, honour and truth in her opening remarks. It doesn't matter if you are first term or an old-timer, never let outside pressure or self-interest interfere with your work. How are embodying your values?

Trait Two: Challenge Convention

Break free from the status quo. Having the courage to challenge popular ideas often leads to breakthroughs and paves the way for others to follow. The work you do as policy makers and legislators is political, perhaps not by the common definition associated with Webster's or partisan politics, but as members of a governmental unit charged with the responsibility of school affairs. Within that role you are also goal setters, planners, policy makers, communicators. You don't fit into one simple box. Celebrating 100 years neither did that first group of people who came together. They most likely made it up as they went, for they were the first. And decision by decision, they laid the foundation for the ASBA today. Imagine...where will your actions take this organization in 100 years?

Trait Three: Have Purpose

By capturing people's imagination with a clear objective, you inspire every individual to do their part in making it happen. Part of the reason you came together for the Alberta School Board Association's Fall General Meeting is to remember that at the end of the day, you all share the purpose of creating and sustaining excellence in public education. You might get caught up in issues, which is easy to do from time to time. What are you doing to bring the purpose of excellence to life in each of the 62 combined public, separate and francophone boards?

Trait Four: Act Effectively

By aligning your day-to-day actions with your objectives you ensure that what you are doing will keep you on track. Part of your role as a School Board Trustee is to provide leadership to your community through setting goals and developing policies for the educational program. Equally as important is to regularly evaluate these. Are you on track? There is only so much time, energy and resources in a day. Are you using these to meet the needs and expectations of your community? What is working? What isn't? Your ability to meet needs will ultimately lead to more effective learning happening.

Trait Five: Create Synergy

By bringing together the right people, an inexplicable energy is created that produces results much greater than any one individual's contribution. Collectively you are individuals from such a diverse background:– from business people and lawyers to stay home moms and ranchers. And then you are also part of a team that has relationships with other educational organizations, government associations, and other school board associations. You partner with parents, teachers, and superintendents to provide the best possible environment for students to learn and be active, productive citizens of the world. When every single person does their part, what kind of system can you imagine?

Trait Six: Exemplify Excellence

By inspiring with your actions, you create a platform upon which others want to uphold their own standard of excellence. You are agents of the legislature – a true reminder that government works best when placed closest to those being governed. As School Board Trustees you have a privilege and a responsibility. Igniting and inspiring excellence in public education starts by being excellent yourselves. Do you work in a spirit of harmony, encourage active cooperation, and inspire with your actions? If someone were to walk into your environment would they love to be a part of it? How are you assuming your leadership?

Trait Seven: Continually Evolve

By creating a dynamic environment where the bar is constantly being raised, excellence is fostered and great results happen. Alberta has one of the top education systems in Canada, if not the world. It is easy to think that everything is great. But the challenge you face is how you can make it even greater. Part of that is creating an environment where you can take risks and push the bar. It is not about perfection but progress. By allowing people to take risks and try new ideas, there may be mistakes but ultimately people can tap into their potential. Keeping in mind that making a mistake is acceptable, making the same mistake time and time again isn't.

Trait Eight: Make Possible

Say yes to possibility. It is the embodiment of the why not attitude that breaks through to the most amazing wins. You are all here because you have stepped up to the plate for public education. I want you to leave feeling that you are really glad that you have signed up for this job. You have a terrific education system partly because of the role you play in making it possible. Never underestimate the difference you make. You are Champions of Education. If you don't continue taking the lead in these initiatives, who will? If not you, then who? And why NOT you? YOU are Champions of Education!

I wish you continued success in the important work you do!

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