

## “THE 110% TRAP”

Balancing Personal  
and Professional



### WICKENBURG CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

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**Van Lunen Fellow 2017-2018**

The Disney-Pixar Movie, “Cars,” opens with rookie racer Lightning McQueen getting himself psyched up for the biggest race of his life. His whole career has lead up to this moment, and he is visualizing himself racing around the track. “Speed. I AM SPEED!!,” McQueen tells himself. I can relate... sort of. Only I’m sitting at my desk visualizing the myriad of potential projects racing around in my head!

When I first applied for the Van Lunen program, my proposed project was a continuation of the culminating project that I submitted for my Masters of Christian School Administration, through Regent University in Virginia Beach. After all, the project was relevant to the needs of our school, and there was plenty of work yet to be done to when considering how a Christian school could collaborate with home school families to better meet the needs of our community. However, after day one of the first July session in Grand Rapids, there were at least 14 OTHER viable options competing for consideration. Topics ranged from from advancement efforts to professional development plans, Board training to curriculum mapping, accreditation to organizational structure and servant leadership. And of course, there was considerable discussion about the vital importance of a strategic plan. While our Board and staff had done considerable work on developing a strategic plan, it was far from being complete. It became

apparent that any project, idea, or initiative would be grossly out of place unless it was carefully aligned with the vision, mission and values of the school by way of a collaborative process intended to develop buy-in and ownership of the program, resulting in dynamic strategic plan. As a result, I was granted permission to change my VL project to focus on further developing and finalizing a “publishable and actionable” version of the school’s strategic plan that was already in the works.

Fast forward to the January session in Scottsdale. With the school year just half over, I found myself overwhelmed and exhausted, looking forward to the peace afforded by a Franciscan retreat center! Throughout the various chapels, discussions and presentations of that week, we were repeatedly challenged to evaluate the level of our “self-care.” Yvonne’s challenge from a chapel from July echoed in my head: “you have to take care of yourself if God is going to be able to use you to lead a school.” Ruth Haley Barton’s book, “Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership,” resonated with me, but I was reluctant to put myself in the shoes/sandals of Moses. Still, there were lessons to be learned. When Moses was at the end of his rope, burned out and frustrated, he berated God for causing all the stress he carried as Judge. The Lord responded through Jethro’s exhortation: “What you are doing is not good.” In modern leadership terms, we might say he restructured the organization by directing Moses to delegate some of his responsibilities to other emerging leaders, so he could focus on accomplishing Israel’s mission.

After some discussion with organizational guru Henry Contant, and my dynamic team leader, Mychal Thom, I concluded that finding balance between my personal life and my professional responsibilities superseded the importance of refining the Strategic Plan.

## **The Project:**

Finding balance between personal life and professional responsibilities is an ongoing pursuit. But this year I was faced with a “gut level urgency” described by Dr. Henry Cloud in his book, “Necessary Endings.” In reality, I had been close to this point at the end of the previous school year, but I managed to decompress enough over the summer to go at it again in the Fall. Now, I was back to an all-too-familiar sense of “something’s gotta change.” Really. Or our Board would likely be faced with a search for a new Head of School.

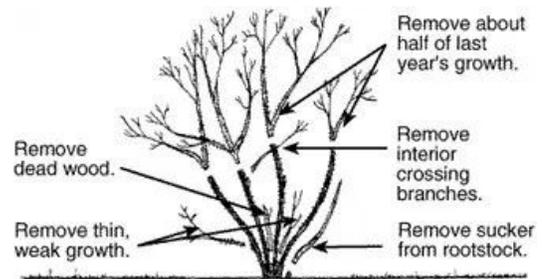
It was time to take the bitter medicine offered by Jim Collins “to confront the brutal facts,” not only in the strategic, programming, or business sense, but on a personal level. Clearly, one or more necessary endings were eminent, and I was convinced my tenure was not one of them. I have always prided myself in being an “all-in” kind of guy... the one people ask to do things because they know it will get done. “Above and beyond” has been my M.O. and G.E.M.O. (good enough, move on) is difficult for me to swallow.

However, there is a price to pay for giving 110% to your work, even if it is a noble cause of ministry. The extra 10% has to come from somewhere: health, family, relationships, etc. Barton’s study of Moses and Jethro presents a list of nine symptoms that might manifest themselves when we become dangerously depleted. (I scored 8 out of 9...) I can also relate to pastor Wayne Cordeiro’s experience with burnout, as described in his book “Leading on Empty.” “I couldn’t sustain the pace much longer. I had to restructure. My RPMs were at deadline, but I didn’t know how to shift gears!” It is not enough to survive. In fact, God has called each of us to function as a part of the Body of Christ, according to our gifting, and he needs each of us to thrive for the Body to be healthy and effective. (Eph. 4:11) My project, by default, has become rebalancing my personal life and my professional responsibilities.

## Lessons Learned?

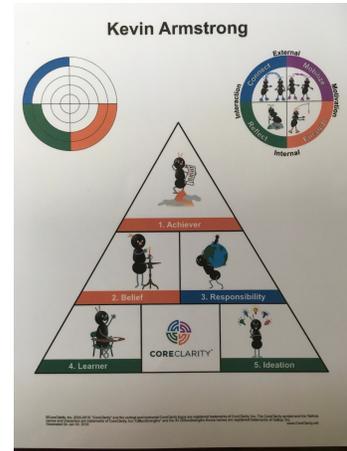
The list of lessons learned and tools gained over the course of the year is long. There is no magic sauce or silver bullet, but the items below represent a few of the key takeaways related to the ongoing challenge of balancing personal health and professional responsibilities.

- Balance is achieved by establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries.
- Acknowledging a problem/imbalance is the first step toward a solution.
- No one can/will “fix it” for me. I have to own the process.
- Start with physical health. Emotional, spiritual, relational health will follow.
  
- Burnout is a real, physiological condition with physical and emotional implications that can affect thought processes and functionality.
- After burnout, depression may never be far away. Anticipate relapse. Identify and begin to recognize triggers. Unplug when necessary.
- Healing and recovering from burnout require time and intentional incremental steps.
- Some people never return to a full “pre-burnout” state.
- Redefine “normal.” Restructure activities, responsibilities, expectations.
  
- Become an expert Arborist. Consider types of “pruning” and how I feel about them
  - a) healthy buds, but not the best,
  - b) sick branches not likely to get well,
  - c) dead branches taking up space/resources.
- Learn to embrace endings as a normal part of business and life. Anticipate instead of avoiding or seeing as a problem.
- Establish and protect a “sabbath” on weekly, monthly, and seasonal basis
- Attitude is everything. You cannot control the reactions of other people, the seasons, or the markets, but you can *always* control your response to them. Successful people focus on what they can control.
- The good cannot begin until the bad ends.
- Deciding *what not to do* is as important as deciding *what to do*, what you need to eliminate in order to make room for strategic investments.” - Anne Mulcahy, Xerox’s Chairman
- A leader’s greatest asset is not necessarily time. It is energy.
  
- “Frenetic has limits!”
- “Workaholism is an obsessive-compulsive disorder that manifests itself through self-imposed demands, and inability to regulate work habits, and an overindulgence in work- to the exclusion of most other life activities” - (Barton p. 105)
- Share the load, but “Delegation” does not mean “Abdication”



- Establish a new paradigm around “Strengths Based Leadership:

- Old: “Leaders should strive to be the best at everything, using their strengths, constantly developing their weaknesses”
- New: “Identify and focus on using gifts/talents/strengths. Identify and delegate weaknesses. (Do what you do best, delegate the rest!)”



- Understanding Top 5 Talents and/or Core Clarity Profile can have profound impact on effectiveness and satisfaction.
- My Profile: 1. Achiever, 2. Belief, 3. Responsibility, 4. Learner, 5. Ideation
- Identify top 5 professional responsibilities. Spend time working on them each day.
- Build job description around “Top 5” and develop a tool to facilitate formal review process and discussion with Board.

- Figure out who you are and who you want to be:

- a. How will you define success?
- b. How will you measure it?

- Play the Movie Forward (Cloud p. 151)
- “More times than we realize, we are not executing an ending because of internal factors, not external ones.”
- Create Ending Alliances: “Who are your change agents... for the endings that you need to make happen?” (Cloud p.159) Leadership Team, Board members, task force, pastor, friend.
- Set Deadlines: “Deadlines force endings when nothing else does... focus time and energy together. (Cloud p.164)
- Create Structure: “create structure that aligns with urgency around the vital, as well as getting rid of structure that keeps the nonvital going.” Get an outside coach.
- Measure, Measure, Measure: What gets measured gets done. “We measure the things that are important to us... internalize this awareness... feel more urgent around ongoing performance. As a rule, the more immediate the feedback, the better the performance.” (Cloud p. 170)
- Sustainability is one of the most important reasons for a necessary ending. If someone or something is getting depleted or damaged as time goes on, an ending must be orchestrated. (Cloud)
- “Watch for those situations in life that diminish you or your assets over time. That should be an alarm to move immediately to stop the outflow, reorganize, bring in some sort of help, make a change, or do some kind of ending which is more than necessary... end the dynamic that is unsustainable... Take inventory, look at what is net negative in your life... if it is not leading somewhere that will end up reversing the negative outflow, plan an ending.”
- Practice saying no.

## 7 Lessons On the Path to Sustainability (Cordeiro)

1. Do not over-produce. There is no such thing as giving 110%. You only have 100% to work with. And that includes family, health, leisure, spiritual growth and other necessities of living. Establish guardrails to keep you on the road. No one else can do that for you. *Track working hours. Limit to 45/wk (or comp next week.) Don't bring work home.*
2. Steward your energy. *Schedule breaks and take them. 10a, 12p, 3p. Try split schedule 7a-12p, 2p-5p.*
3. Rest Well. *Sleep at least 7-9hrs/ night. More if needed. Cat naps are good!*
4. Exercise your way to recovery (p.130) *Get heart going for min 20 minutes 3x/wk. Elliptical, bike ride, walk.*
5. Eat your way to a good life. *Eat breakfast. Every day. Eat lunch. Every day. (not sitting at desk) Healthy snacks. Whole foods. Fruits & Veggies & natural protein.*
6. Recharge daily (p.135) *Do something every day, just because I enjoy it.*
7. Fight for your family (p.139) *Dinner with family. Date night w/ Leah. Get up early enough to share a "slow start" over coffee.*

## **Impact on School?**

In a word: Sustainability. This year in the Van Lunen program has resulted in a succession of incremental steps toward establishing a new norm, on several levels. The books, seminars, work sessions, and ongoing small group interactions have provided tremendous support and encouragement, and I am pleased with the progress toward rebalancing my personal health and relationships with professional priorities and responsibilities.

In the process, I have also gained confidence in my skills as a leader, as I have been equipped with tools for the job, particularly through the practical guidance offered in Henry Cloud's "Necessary Endings." Over the past several months, as my understanding of my gifting has deepened through the "Strengths Based Leadership" and "CoreClarity" programs, (thank you Christine Metzger!), our school leadership team has also made some organizational changes to make my workload more manageable, leverage my gifts more effectively, and tap the gifting of others in the organization in new ways. As a result, in the coming year, my responsibilities will focus less on oversight of programming and more on advancement efforts related to developing relationships within the school and in the surrounding community. Hope has been restored that there can, indeed, be balance between personal life and professional responsibilities.