

# Discovering Who They Are: A Staff Development In-service

Cheryl Arthur

2009/2010

After reading an ACSI journal by Derek Keenan entitled “A Dangerous Complacency: Neglecting Professional Development,” the direction of our teacher in-service for the 2009/2010 school year became apparent. We needed to make sure our staff was serving in the right positions and their needs were being met. Our ACSI accreditation was completed in February 2008; the recommendations for professional development were of utmost importance both to the staff and to the school’s future excellence. With that in mind, we began to implement some new ideas in our school that addressed the value and needs of the individuals on our staff.

Our in-service was organized over a week’s time before the school year began. Staff was first given a paid week to ready their classrooms, as that tends to be a teacher’s main focus this time of year. Our staff then committed to a week of personal development without interruptions. Lesson plans were in order, classrooms were set up, food was provided by our school board and our Parent Teacher Fellowship, and we even provided childcare for those who needed it. We had a six fold emphasis for the week: learning styles, talents, love languages, stress levels, personality, and spiritual gifts.

## **The First Step: How do you learn?**

Faculty and staff took a short survey to determine how they learn. This was based on Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory and was a survey from a Kagan Cooperative Learning Tool that I received in a Secondary English Learners class. We discovered why it is important to understand how we learn and especially how that applies to working within a team. The most important fact that the staff came away with was the need to understand that we do not all learn the same. Within the group we had a sampling of all eight learning styles, and we realized that we typically only meet the needs of a few. In most classes we learn how we should not teach, such as only lecturing, and ironically the professor is lecturing. We were going to have to change our approach to staff meetings if everyone was going to be able to come away with good input and accurate information.

### **The Second Step: Are you satisfied with the use of your talents?**

After reading Marcus Buckingham's book *First Break All the Rules*, we took a survey using the twelve questions developed by the Gallop Poll to determine our employee opinion of where we were as a school regarding our employee satisfaction. The results of this survey showed that the two most important areas for us to change were in the areas of employee work expectations and our staff having the opportunity to do what they do best every day. After some discussion, we created a talent survey for employees to take to determine what it is they do best. This was developed from Marcus Buckingham's book *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. Buckingham also includes a code in his books for the Clifton Strengths-Finder survey. It was interesting to discover how people really do know what their talents are; they just have difficulty finding the right place to use those talents. The result of this survey allowed me to put different staff members in charge of various projects and led to assigning some leadership roles. This was a great team building experience that resulted in greater employee satisfaction because people felt more challenged and valued for their individual contribution.

### **The Third Step: What is your love language?**

Based on *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman, we developed a guide to determine love languages as it applied to a school setting. The love language survey included: words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. Faculty and staff met in groups and shared what they thought their love languages were and asked those who knew them best for input. This became one of the most fascinating aspects of the project and one of the most valuable to me as an administrator. Because of this survey, I was able to meet the needs of staff members in a whole new way. The predominant love language in our school was words of affirmation. Those who needed a hug, a word of encouragement, or some time talking now had the opportunity to have that need met. The result of this over the year was a great team working together to meet each other's needs.

### **The Fourth Step: What is your stress level?**

Understanding the stress level of teaching, we brought in a professional marriage, family and child therapist, Susan Kluge, who spent a day with our staff helping them understand family systems, communicating with others, conflict management and living a more balanced life. This was a step not to be missed. What this day communicated to our staff was how important they are to the excellence of the school. Susan Kluge went over the purpose of a family and the basics of family systems. She went on to help the staff understand the importance of setting boundaries within their families and with others. How we do relationships with their hidden agendas and the choices we make was another section covered. Susan went on to help the staff

see how balanced or out of balance their lives were. This was charted on a graphic organizer to diagram how “wobbly” our wheel becomes when our lives are out of balance.

The afternoon session with Ms. Kluge consisted of a time working on communication skills and conflict management. As a staff, we did some role playing and worked on some conflict scenarios. This was a great way to observe different styles of conflict management as the staff began to work out differences as a team. Susan Kluge ended the session with some stress management techniques that resulted in a very relaxing and caring atmosphere. We provided the staff with a list of Christian counselors and life coaches in the Prescott area. Many of the staff spent at least six weeks with a professional working on some personal issues as a result of this seminar.

### **The Fifth Step: Who are you?**

The previous steps led to a realization that we needed to work with some personality testing. This was a difficult area to explore because we did not want the staff to feel as if this was personality profiling. We again called on the experience of several counselors to determine the best way to discover personalities and begin to understand each other in a deeper way. Two testing measurements were suggested to me: the Myers Briggs test and the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis. The Myers Briggs test can be taken online at a relatively low cost. It is important to note here that it is considered unethical to use this instrument without the consultation of a professional life coach or counselor. The advantage of the online testing is the elimination of a time consuming process of scoring the test for all staff members. The Taylor-Johnson testing must be administered by a professional, but there is an online test that can be used by a counselor. The counselor or life coach then works with the individual staff members over the course of three days, thirty minutes per staff member. This is a more time consuming process and is best done over the Christmas holidays or early in the summer.

### **The Sixth Step: What is your spiritual giftedness?**

This is a step that seems like it should have been at the beginning of the project, but the staff really needed to know their needs first. After consulting with my Van Lunen consultant, Rob Elliot, we moved forward and created a spiritual survey to determine how we could meet the spiritual needs of our staff. Three things resulted in that survey: teachers were already in great churches and small groups, staff needed a list of possible mentors, and we needed to work on knowing our spiritual giftedness. Since the staff was already attending church, we moved on to finding a group of mature Christians who were willing to spend the time praying for our staff and to do some spiritual counseling. We compiled a great list of mentors and

allowed the staff to connect with whomever they chose to be a prayer partner and guide. This was a wonderful connection for the school to make with different area churches.

The next step in this area was to set up an in-service time for staff to determine their spiritual giftedness. The best one I found is from Bruce Bugbee and Don Cousins and is entitled *Network*. There is a plethora of resources for spiritual gift studies and tests, but this one had some unique aspects to it. It comes with a DVD to help a leader facilitate the process as well as a participant's guide for each staff member. This study can be completed in one day or in two half days and this fits well into a staff in-service timetable.

The uniqueness of this study lies in the fitting together of spiritual gifts, personal style, and passion. The study takes the time to guide staff through a better understanding of personal style such as being task-oriented or people-oriented and being structured or unstructured. It goes into great depth in the discussion of spiritual gifts and has a great scripture study as well. The last area that I found most fitting is a section on passion and experience. Bugbee and Cousins do an excellent job in their explanation of understanding what energizes a Christian is important to the discovery of a spiritual gift. Being in a ministry should never be drudgery, but something that we look forward to. This is where the importance of experience comes into play. As we look back on our Christian life and service, we need to reflect on the ministries that energized us and made us most satisfied. This is an important key to finding a ministry fit.

### **An Administrative Step: How do I use this to improve a school?**

As an administrator or principal, life is too busy to do anything that is overwhelming. I used a graphic organizer to understand who my people were and how they fit into the school as an organization. Each staff member a confidential graphic organizer; when I really do not understand their reactions to a problem, I use the organizer as a resource. At first it was several days a week that I needed to refer to them, but the organizers really helped me to get to know my staff more intimately. The best part is that they now know who they are and I know who they are and we are able to work together on their giftedness and talents. My goal for them is to be able to say every day, "I had the opportunity to do my best today" by knowing what their best really is.

## **Resources**

Bugbee, Bruce and Don Cousins. *Network: Leader's Guide*. Zondervan, 2005.

Bugbee, Bruce and Don Cousins. *Network: Participant's Guide*. Zondervan, 2005.

Bugbee, Bruce and Don Cousins. *Network*. CD-Rom. Zondervan, 2005.

Buckingham, Marcus. *First Break All the Rules*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999.

Buckingham, Marcus. *Now, Discover Your Strengths*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001.

Chapman, Gary. *The Five Love Languages*. Northfield Publishing, 2007.

Kagan, Cooperative Learning: *Multiple Intelligences*. WEE CO-OP.

Keenan, Derek J. "A Dangerous Complacency: Neglecting Professional Development." March 6, 2009, <http://acsi.org/DesktopModules/EngagePublish/printerfriendly.aspx?itemId=2592&PortalId> (accessed March 6, 2009).