

*The Creation
of
an Employee Manual*

By

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The goal of the project was to produce a document that would provide all faculty and staff consistent and clear governance. The document was to be in agreement with all other manuals and handbooks in order to put everyone on the "same page" regarding mission and vision.

The manual met every expectation and goal and, in some cases, exceed expectations and goals. The process was found to be as valuable as the product and actually provided a frame of reference for the manual.

The Van Lunen Project

The purpose of this project was to create a manual that could be used by the school with all faculty and staff in communicating clearly and consistently the school's policies and procedures. The school has a rich 45 year history, and during that history many policies and procedures were created; some made it to print and others just existed in the hearts and minds of loyal faculty and staff. The school needed a manual that collected all of these and consolidated them under one cover.

As a K-12 school system with two campuses, a manual containing and explaining the school's policies and procedures was necessary and important. The school requests its parents and students to use the Parent/Student Handbook as a guide to behavior; therefore, it is only natural that faculty and staff have a similar handbook to guide behavior. The school's mission states clearly that we believe that a Holy God has called us into existence in order to provide an education that is Christ-centered and excellent in all things. In order to provide such an education, all faculty and staff must clearly understand the expectations placed on them.

As the school restructures its educational focus, it does so through the employee manual. The school openly promotes that every person that works for the school is important in the education of children. These beliefs demand that the school hire faculty and staff that understand their calling in Christ and the school's expectations of them in the classroom and outside of the classroom. As we educate students, we do so believing that all that we do must be excellent, and that everything we do will either contribute to the development of the student or be a detriment to that student's development. We take nothing lightly and feel strongly that communication is an important ingredient in our success. The employee manual is a necessary part of that process, bringing all faculty and staff to a collective understanding of the school's expectations of them in conjunction with the school's mission.

Procedure and Process

The project was presented to the Chairman of the Board. The Chairman was given a summary and time frame which he read and approved.

The school did have a Teacher Handbook which was incomplete and inconsistent. This Teacher Handbook was a thin stapled booklet which no one knew well or took seriously. It quickly became clear that our issue with inconsistent enforcement of policy and procedure was due to the subjective nature of policies and procedures in the school. The old handbook was never used as an objective tool of governance, but merely as a reference and a guide used to help make subjective decisions. Our desire was to move to a more objective form of governance that would be known for its consistency, its continuity and its fairness.

One of the very first issues we encountered was how to graft this handbook into our other handbooks. We had already rewritten the Parent/ Student Handbook and the Athletic Handbook, and we liked the way those two handbooks worked. We decided to use them for guidance and reference with our goal being that each of three handbooks would communicate in the same spirit, verbiage and philosophy.

The Plan in Action:

September:

A primary committee was formed consisting of the administration team as each represented each division in the school.

The Primary Committee:

Elementary Principal:	Mrs. Robin Smith
Middle Principal:	Mrs. Cheri Maddox
High School Principal:	Mrs. Alma Huston
Director of Advancement:	Mr. David Hammond
Curriculum Coordinator:	Miss Bertha Dykstra

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Ex officio: Head of School: Mr. Craig Bouvier

Each division had a separate committee with the division principal overseeing that committee. Each committee was sub-divided in order to maximize efforts. A form was given to each committee to distribute to their respective faculty. It was the responsibility of each committee to distribute the form to their division faculty and staff and then retrieve the form. The form was created in a standardized format so as to give all faculty and staff an equal opportunity to provide input. As the primary committee met, the following time frame was approved:

October:

1. The primary committee will meet once per month to oversee the process beginning in October.
2. The committee will approve the time frame for completion of the employee handbook in the October meeting.

November:

1. Each committee should meet twice in the month to receive updates on the current status of the project.
2. The committee will use the Parent/Student Handbook as a guide to ensure that the employee handbook coincides with the Parent/Student (P/S) handbook consistently and in continuity.

December:

1. The primary committee will meet once to receive a status report from each group.

January:

1. A status report was given in Arizona to my faculty adviser.
2. The primary committee will meet once to receive a status report from each group.

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February:

1. Each committee will meet twice: once to finish the group work and the second time to set up the time frame to complete the handbook.

March/April:

1. The primary committee will meet twice to finish the handbook.
2. The primary committee will present the handbook to the faculty and staff for a first read and additions before finalizing the handbook.

May:

1. The manual will be completed and displayed.
2. The manual will be printed to be distributed to every faculty and staff member in the fall.

The Actual Project:

The project began with a question: how does a school handle change? From that initial question, the project was adapted to the point of addressing one area of change and how change is applied in a specific situations, specifically in governance. The administration identified one area of struggle in the governance of the school - the consistency of policies and procedures across the school-wide community. As we examined the situation in detail, we discovered that this governance issue was actually contributing to other issues.

As we examined different areas of change, we quickly determined that an employee manual with all the policies and procedures of the school contained on paper was needed. I was the initiator of the project; I began to put a plan and a process together with the help of the Van Lunen Program and the resources of the program.

One of the first action items for me was to contact Mr. Dave Medema. I had a conversation with Mr. Medema, who then sent several documents via email as examples of different types of manuals. These documents, along with a summation of the project, were presented to the administrative team which was tasked to serve as the primary committee for this project. The

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Administrative Team, by its nature, already represented the needed cross section of the school to oversee this project. The primary committee formed and promptly began the process with three actions.

- Each division head was tasked with soliciting input from their faculty.
- A template was selected by all members of the committee.
- The template became an active working document that was updated by each member of the committee after each meeting with their faculties.

In January all work on each template was completed. The division heads then brought their copies of the template to a series of meetings where the group began to edit the template. After six committee meetings, a final draft was completed and approved. The draft then was given to editors to proof. Once the proofing process was completed, three drafts were printed and put on display for each faculty. All faculty was encouraged to view the document and make comments and suggestions. These comments and suggestions were then considered by the committee to be included in the manual. The document was on display through May. After the last day of school, the committee met one more time to edit the document and approve the final copy.

In early August at our first in-service of the 2009-2010 school year, copies will be printed and given to every faculty and staff member of the school. It will be part of their employment at Westminster. The manual will be contained within a three-ring folder that will have a section for new policies and procedures as well as a section for faculty meetings. We will encourage all faculty and staff to read and know this book by doing several things:

- *It will be required at all faculty meetings.*
- *It will be referenced in my Monday Memos (a communication I produce each Monday for all faculty and staff).*
- *It will be referenced in different but fun motivational techniques to promote reading and knowing it.*
- *It will be treated with importance and value.*

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This manual will also remain school property, and all faculty will be informed that the manual is part of their employment and will be returned to the school when an employee's employment with the school ends.

An Important Element of the Process:

This manual was created with the Parent/Student Handbook as a guide. Our goal is to make sure that this manual is consistent with the Parent/Student Handbook in all things so as to create continuity and consistency in all policies and procedures of the school.

Outcomes of the Project:

Division produced Union

When the process began, the policies and procedures of the school tended to divide the school. The school has two campuses that are physically separated by 8 miles. The Lower campus and the Upper campus were also divided according to policies and procedures. The process actually produced unity as members from both campuses worked on the project.

Authoritative became Democratic:

As the process began, there were preconceived notions on both campuses regarding policies and procedures. Incorrect assumptions were made regarding the reason for policies and procedures. These assumptions were rooted in the past and an authoritative tendency to offer no explanations for any policy or procedure. The process provided both explanations and opportunities for all faculty and staff to understand all policies and procedures.

Scattered produced Themed:

This manual was created in conjunction with other manuals so as to be consistent in all of the school's governance. The scattered appearance of governance as now been moved to a more thematic approach.

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List of Project Successes and Challenges:

Successes

- A continuity of thought on the why of policy and procedure was achieved by faculty, staff and administration.
- By making this project a top priority, it made a statement to faculty and staff regarding their value to the school.
- The project was educational for those involved.
- Collaborative Approach: the project included every branch of the organization
- The project provided a means of analysis of why we do what we do regarding policies and procedures.
- Created major discussion among groups that might not otherwise collaborate.
- All faculty and staff were given opportunities to offer input.
- The faculty engaged in discussions with the administration which built relationships.
- All Faculty and Staff had a sense of empowerment and ownership during portions of this process.
- A timetable was clearly established, followed and adhered to during the process.

Challenges

- Developing an effective primary committee.
- Scheduling meetings that all participants could attend.
- Creating time for discussion and input.
- Understanding the boundaries and making sure participants did not over-step those boundaries.
- Considering the outside influences, such as parents and churches.
- Determining how to ensure that this manual would be taken seriously and used correctly.
- Determining how to keep this manual relevant and effective.
- Finding a balance of grace and law in the manual.
- Ensuring that the manual was not treated as a book of laws or rules, but instead, used as a way to unite and become more consistent.

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Recommendations:

- This process is a year long process at best and can not be rushed in any way.
- This process is a collective process and will not achieve the desired results unless all members of the school are allowed input and participation.
- The manual itself must be consistent in language, spirit, policy and procedure with all other school manuals.
- Meetings must be held face-to-face and not over email or phone.
- The wording used in this manual is extremely important to this process.

Summation:

We were surprised at how important the process was in the development of this manual. We have a finished product that will help our school, but we also benefited as much, if not more, from the process of putting together the manual. Putting people from different campuses and different grade levels together to work on a manual that will govern the entire school taught us many things. The following four points were the most important points we learned in this process:

1. Governance is about communication and not rebellion. Often people perceived a policy in different ways. This is more the case than rebellion.
2. Practicality is part of what makes policy work. When a policy is not followed It is often a case of the impracticality of the policy as it relates to that academic division.
3. Knowledge is extremely important to policy and procedure. We found through this process that knowing policy and procedure is an important problem to solve.
4. Understanding policy and procedure is also important. What may make Perfect sense to me does not always make perfect sense to others. How policy and procedure is written is important.