

A Roadmap to Revival

Tri-City Christian School's Strategic Plan

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God's Word provides such great wisdom as evidenced by Proverbs 29:9, "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keeps the law, happy is he." At Tri-City Christian School, there has been plenty of vision and mission casting however, there has not been a well-developed plan that represents the voices of all of the stakeholders to achieve the mission and vision. A declining enrollment and lack of unity has paralyzed the school during this economic downturn. It became very clear that the school needed to develop, implement, and execute a strategic plan that would:

- address concerns and organizational problems voiced by stakeholders
- bring the school and elder board together in shared vision, mission, and governance
- move the school forward with everyone *rowing as one*

As the school's leader, I knew that I could not embark on this journey alone. Convincing the board that we needed to invest money from the lean school budget took some time, however, once the board interviewed our expert strategic planning facilitator, the train got moving. From November through May, much has been accomplished:

- a strategic plan was developed in 5-months
- our year-end parent survey results reflected increased satisfaction, happiness, and confidence in the school leadership (administration, the school board, and the church elder board)
- team-unity and renewed school spirit among the school's stakeholders are evident in the task forces working together to execute the strategic plan

Project Focus

One must understand the past in order to better navigate in the future. Tri-City Christian School has existed since 1971. During its best days in 2005, the school enrollment was over 1100 students. However, since 2005, challenges, debatable decisions, declining enrollment, personnel issues resulting in terminations, competition of charter schools, lawsuits, and the economic downturn have all impacted the TCCS community.

The reality that the school lacked a plan tied to fulfilling its mission and vision grew ever apparent in 2010-11. However, the faculty and staff at TCCS were in no mood to take part in a strategic planning process that would take up valuable time only to see it sit on a shelf collecting dust until the next time leader arrives and re-invents the wheel.

The thunderous voices communicated by all stakeholders has been, *“if we go through the strategic planning process we want the following to occur”*

- The voices of all stakeholders through anonymous surveys are heard and represented
- Transparency with open and honest discussions with the school leadership will result in action
- A plan that will be written and executed, not ignored and placed on a shelf

Therefore, the focus of this project is to create a plan that can be executed and completed over the next 3-5 years.

Method and Process

Guiding The Process

John 4:44 states, “For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country.” This truth is especially accurate if a person attempts to lead an organization through a strategic planning process without adequate experience or expertise. I realized that I needed a prophet for TCCS who fit the mold of a qualified facilitator. Fortunately, we hired an expert who earned the respect of all of the stakeholders paving the way for a very productive process. Our facilitator introduced the process which was recorded and sent to all of the stakeholders who did not attend the kick off meeting.

- Watch the video:
<http://player.vimeo.com/video/32676908?title=0&byline=0&portrait=0>

Collecting Data: Perception is Reality and We Needed to Hear It

The fact of the matter is that our organization was in great need of voicing and hearing the good, the bad, and the ugly. Parents, faculty, and students all needed their voices to be heard regarding their perception of every area of the school. Surveys were distributed to stakeholders electronically and by the old-fashioned way-through hard copy format. The faculty participated in a SWOT analysis which was also a valuable exercise in the process. The information that was collected proved to be foundational for the next step of the strategic planning process.

Team Work

In formulating teams, our strategic plan steering committee assembled a hybrid of volunteers and recruited team members. The analysis team leaders were recruited and provided training. Seven teams ranging from 6-10 members comprised of parents, teachers, and administrators were formed and tasked to conduct research and analysis and to report their findings of the following areas:

- Stakeholders
- Capabilities
- Competitors
- Technology
- Trends: Economic/political/legal
- Trends: Industry
- Trends: Socio-economic

Strategic Planning Committee Retreats to Mountain Top

Nineteen people were recruited to formulate the Strategic Planning Committee and were tasked to review every comment, statement, analysis team's homework, research, etc., so that when it came to writing the strategic plan, it would represent the voices of the stakeholders. Over a period of four days, our patient facilitator guided us through the process of intense and honest discussions as the committee identified key strategies and goals that now formulate the strategic plan for Tri-City Christian School. Over 800 plus hours were invested by the stakeholders and more work needs to be done.

Strategic Plan Approval and Communication

The strategic planning committee submitted the plan to the school board for approval and then to the elder board. The elder board suggested the addition of another pillar that is now one of the key strategies of the strategic plan. This issue resulted in some frustration as the pastor of the church attended all of the strategic planning committee meetings. The elder board raised the issue and the school board was surprised that there was the late discussion of implementing the strategy. At the end of the day, the plan was approved following the late edition and reflects a well

thought through process that allowed the stakeholders to openly communicate and work together. The plan was announced at our year-end annual parent meeting, emailed to all of parents, and remains posted on the school's website.

Project Results

The Tri-City Christian School strategic planning process has identified 6-major strategies with goals that need further action items. The execution of the plan is in process as task force teams are being formulated who will then tackle the work that needs to be done to achieve our goals in 3-5 years. Other results include:

- The roles of the elder board, school board, administration, and faculty and staff have been clarified
- Parent satisfaction and confidence in the administration, school board, and elder board (reflected in the 2012 annual parent survey) have improved
- The hiring of a development director was immediately conducted per our staffing plan/building our team which is listed as one of the goals under the financial sustainability strategy
- A renewed sense of unity within the Tri-City Christian School community has been noticeable as the school finished out one of its best years in recent memory
- One board member was recruited as a result of her being a part of the process

Analysis & Commentary

Over the past two years, our school board meetings have been transformed from discussing day-to-day school issues well into the late hours of the evening to strategic thinking meetings lasting 3 hours or less. The strategic planning process was a result of the board thinking strategically.

During the process, it was exciting to see the passion that all of our stakeholders had for the school and the cause of Christian education. Our vision of training up spiritual champions for Jesus Christ is worth every drop of blood, sweat, tears, and prayers. Having a plan that all of the stakeholders are aware of, agree with, and are working together to achieve makes decision-making easier.

Our facilitator informed our board and faculty that the fun part of strategic planning is coming up with the plan but the hard part is executing the plan. I now understand this as it takes a significant amount of time to recruit task force leaders and members to execute the plan. More than ever, I am aware that the success of the plan rests upon task forces getting things done.

Through prayer and calling upon the Lord, our school will claim God's faithfulness to us: Psalm 37:5 "Commit your way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."