

## Van Lunen Project Report May 30, 2017

*Darren Lewis, Lead Principal*

Kelowna Christian School

Kelowna, BC, Canada

### Priority – Creating Infrastructure to support a “Development Culture”

Kelowna Christian School has existed for more than 35 years. During that time and to my knowledge there has never really been an ongoing systemic approach to development. Even when our main Middle/School High School building was constructed 20 years ago, it was the result of a few people of means coupled with lots of vision, faith and God's grace.

This lack of a 'development culture' has been obvious for sometime. A few years ago when my immediate predecessor was hired he and the Board recruited a "Director of Development" and while he had some successes his efforts were hampered by a number of issues that resulted first in the forced departure of my predecessor and then in Director's stepping down out of a combination of frustration and other personal opportunities.

A couple of years ago, I inherited a system that was in crisis. After 8 years of moderate enrolment decline, the school had entered a period of more rapid decline. While we were fortunate that we were debt free, we lacked resources to invest in needed ongoing updates – from technology to replacing worn flooring. The last couple of years have seen our enrolment re-enter a growth period. This has allowed us to free resources to target some outstanding issues – such as commencing a reflooring project; however, the school needs significant investment to position it for the next 30 years and we are close to reaching the facility's capacity and will shortly be considering next major steps.

Some of the greatest concerns that I hold are as follows:

1. Our current buildings are becoming dated and we are close to capacity.
2. We have no systemic way to track and manage relationships.
3. With the departure of our Director of Development we lack any identified person to lead our ongoing 'development' efforts.
4. We have a full-time marketing person; however, I believe that our system needs that position to also support development planning and organization.
5. As head of our system I retain day-to-day responsibility for our High School. Our Elementary and Middle Schools have Vice Principals. I believe our High School also needs administrative support; however, our two location layout and other issues (as well as the existing personalities in place) make this somewhat challenging. Moving forward restructuring our administrative team to support this initiative remains a priority.

## The Original Plan

1. We were in the midst of completing a strategic plan. This process which was to have been completed in November was not finalised until March. We need to consider the direction set by the plan. Thankfully, there appears to be considerable agreement on much of the “broad strokes”. So I believe it is possible to do some of the immediate groundwork immediately.
2. Our Board has had a Development Committee. Its current role is somewhat ambiguous as previously its primary role was to oversee the efforts and direction of the Director of Development. Its role needed to be refined.
3. As head of the system I believe I need to be more involved in our efforts. As well our Marketing Manager lacks a development background. I believed we needed to invest in developing internal expertise and capacity.
4. We sought to develop the capacity for either the first systemic annual campaign or a major other project for rollout during the 2017-18 school year.
5. To plan and take the steps necessary for the rollout.

## A Quick Update on the School

As I write this we are well into our reenrollment/recruitment process for 2017-18. The good news is that for the third straight year we are looking at significant growth. We are at capacity in most grades. Our facility is close to being full. After 10 years of increasingly significant numeric decline we seem to have emphatically ‘turned the corner’. What staff refer to as ‘the bad times’ appear to be over. Even the one area of concern last year – preschool enrollment which had gone counter trend and declined – this year seems to have responded to some changes we made and quickly filled. All of this is reason to be thankful – and we are; however, it also has increased pressure on our system to come to terms with growth and to make decisions for either future expansion and/or renewal.

## Interruptions and Frustration

To start the process, I contacted Zach Clark (development consultant) and SCSBC (the school organization we belong to) in early September. Initially, it seemed that SCSBC might be able to negotiate a deal with Zach’s organization whereby all SCSBC schools would benefit from an association with Zach’s company. Unfortunately, after several weeks of going back and forth it became apparent that this would be impossible. As an alternative approach, we worked out a deal between the three parties whereby we would pay Zach for his services, and he would hire and train SCSBC’s Director of Development to be our Development Coach. SCSBC in turn would refund us the monies that were being paid by Zach to their Development Director – Cathy Kits. So we started a bit late, but with the capable support of Zach, Cathy and really the entire SCSBC extended family (which I would include Henry Contant in).

The next challenge was one of timing. The Board and Senior Leadership were about 2/3's of the way through a strategic planning process that had been scheduled to be completed in November. A number of delays hit. Several of them were of the simple scheduling variety. Our process involved at its core nine board members, four senior leadership team members and an outside consultant. Simple things like scheduling challenges resulted in several delays.

Thankfully, this was at least partially offset by the significant agreement that existed around the direction that the school should go in. We strongly affirmed our commitment to the school's historic mission to develop disciples of Jesus. The challenges and delays were that while we had broad agreement around the school's overall objectives there was a broad range of opinion related to how to achieve them – and specifically related to who does what.

In my opinion (and I think this could be the subject of broader analysis) a large portion of the cause for the “bad times” – the protracted period of decline, was the distrust that had developed between the various Heads of School and the Board. Over time numerous administrative staff were dismissed (often with little or no notice) and the school had developed a poor reputation as a place to work. My own position as Head of School was the result of being placed on an “interim” basis in the position, and having the position formalized when several changes we made under my leadership seemed to result in a recovery from decline. Perhaps I bore the legacy of distrust that existed between the office I inherited and the Board – or perhaps I was just inexperienced, but regardless, it seemed that different assumptions of who was responsible and what authority they held significantly handicapped our ability to move forward.

Ultimately the Board chair requested that the consultant we were working with do a workshop on Board governance. The presenter shared later with me (and I'm assuming this paper is 'off-the record') that the Board chair was annoyed with some of what he had said – which ultimately came down to a model of governance where the Board distinctly stays out of a fairly broadly understood sense of what constitutes the operation of the school. Since that time, we've been able to make renewed progress; however, there remain a number of challenges. One sad consequence of the tension has been that my relationship with the Board chair has been damaged and although he has declared his intent to step back from the role, this is an issue that requires further investment on my part.

## Progress

Despite the frustrations, with some hard work from my staff and I – and with Zach and Cathy's able support - we've been able to make some good progress towards our goal of being ready for an annual campaign for the 2017-18 school year.

Long-term personally, I think the greatest benefit isn't going to be the infrastructure we're creating or even the campaign that we're going to run. Really for me, it's more related to the growth in myself of a “development mindset”. I think Zach gets it right when he puts the emphasis on relationship. Early on in process I asked him about the technology he uses (quite

impressively) to connect with folk. He really admonished me that the tech was totally secondary to the emphasis on connecting with people personally. I've found this emphasis and the time commitment/accountability he requires helpful in overcoming my own personal tendencies to introversion and task focus. When I personally look back on Van Lunen – I think that's going to be the biggest win.

From an infrastructure perspective, we've accomplished a lot. We've created contact and donation databases – and more significantly, we've spent considerable time and energy ensuring that they are populated with correct information. Additionally, I've met with many of the folk who have had historic connections with the school but where connections had been allowed to lapse and followed on these meeting to try and rebuild relationships.

We spent considerable time building our 'ask'. Really considering who we are as an organization and where we are going. Zach is fond of saying that people will only give to change lives or to save lives. It's been great that although keeping the two processes aligned has been at times difficult, the strategic planning process and this one have really complemented one another.

### [Another 'Interruption' – The Library/Learning Commons](#)

Sometimes those of us who are task-focused need to be reminded that what seem interruptions from our God-given tasks – are in fact God-given moments of opportunity.

In December one of our Vice Principals approached me about a conversation with a grandparent he had just had. They had suggested they would like to support the school in some way financially and he sought my advice on how to respond.

We discussed school priorities and basically, I advised him to seek 'resonance between our story and who they are'. We chatted about several opportunities – including our high school library, which has not been updated since its construction 25 years ago. When the next conversation occurred, they clearly connected with the idea and offered \$80,000 to fund the project.

Remember though that this occurred in December and that our strategic plan was not completed until February. The initial response by the Board chair was that we shouldn't accept the donation as the strategic plan was not yet ready. The donor though was suggesting that we would need to accept the gift by year-end and they were excited about the library (apparently, she was a former librarian – really must be a God-thing). A conundrum. I sought and got some great advice from Zach on how to proceed and was able to overcome the uncertainty at the Board level and accept the donation.

At least part of the concern of the Board Chair was valid. Although a library update had been 'on the radar' for a number of years – we hadn't done a detailed costing. The \$80,000 figure was based on the most preliminary of estimates.

As a leadership team, we sat down and dreamed – and quickly realized that to do this right we would need more like \$120,000. There was some friction at the table about what to do. I felt we needed to stay within budget and not allow a gift to reset our priorities – that we needed to act in accord with the

objectives of our strategic plan and the budgeting process that was already under way. What to do? I picked up the phone and had another quick chat with Zach – his advice was to put the dilemma to the donors and go from there.

When presented with plans, the donors were clearly excited. We left them with a “this is the long-term plan” but we aren’t going to be able to do all of the furniture in the first round. They promptly committed another \$40,000 to complete the project.

Demolition of the existing library starts in a few weeks – it’s going to be an amazing space. We plan on using it to launch our 2017-18 Annual Campaign.

### [Back to the Main Story](#)

We continue to work hard to see connections between our mission statement to “build disciples of Jesus” and our need to address facilities deficiencies and vision.

The library project has been a game-changer in that it was one of the spaces at our main campus most in need of updating.

The details of the Annual Campaign are coming together....

“Believe – that Christian Education can make a difference”

#### **Targets:**

- equipping a “Discipleship Centre” at our Secondary campus.
- Playground update/repair at our Elementary campus.

We’re working hard on the various materials that we will use to support the campaign. Starting with teasers at the end of the year and over the summer. We’ve struck a committee to head up organizing the campaign.

### [Another Interruption](#)

As we began to think about where to put a “Discipleship Centre”, we quickly ran into the challenge – where to put it? As I walked our building looking for appropriate locations with our Student Life Director, each time we looked at a possible location, the question arose “but where do we put the displaced class/function”? For a growing school, that’s a challenging question.

Interestingly enough, as a part of the library project, I had to break out the original architectural drawings of the school. As I looked at the drawings, I was struck with a question regarding why two areas on the upper floor were not developed. Several phone calls to our architect later and early indications are that we can extend into these ‘discovered’ spaces for costs very comparable to purchasing portables. Further, they meet all the criteria we had set as optimal for a “Discipleship Centre”. Again, it seems that just when we needed a particular space or thing – an opportunity has arisen (or at least become apparent). The story continues.