

## Capital Campaign Leadership

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### **Background**

Over the seven-year period preceding my Van Lunen year, I was blessed to be a part of a rebuilding process at Immanuel Christian School in Prince Edward Island. Enrolment doubled, finances stabilized, and program quality markedly improved.

My job description over that time gradually expanded, but certain gaps in my experience and training became evident and felt significant as we approached a major capital project. I had only ever dabbled in school development: it was a small part of my role, and whatever I did know was essentially self-taught or passed down by local tradition.

Around the same time as I was accepted to become a Van Lunen Fellow, our school was blessed with an incredible new opportunity to relocate to a larger and much more suitable facility. The capital goal was daunting, however: a \$2 million campaign for a community that had a history of raising only \$100,000 a year. Located on an island with a small population very far from people who could give guidance during a capital campaign, we knew that our project would be challenging. I was particularly excited, therefore, to be entering the Van Lunen program at a time of obvious need.

In our first Van Lunen week, I was impressed by the teaching of Zach Clark, founder of Development and Leadership (D&L). His words were relevant, insightful, and encouraging. When I returned to school later that summer, I began encouraging my board to engage in D&L's year-long mentorship program. Three months later we began. Looking ahead, I anticipated that my Van Lunen year would hold exciting times of professional development as I oversaw a major school expansion project that seemed destined to be successful. It was easy to say, "This won't be easy," but I think in my heart I felt that it would. My self-confidence was strong. I did not at all guess just how difficult the path would be, nor how much the Lord was intending to teach me that I was desperately weak and unable to be a spiritual leader without first being humbled.

### **Phase 1, July to September: "Naivete and self-confidence"**

I had high hopes in the early going that we were well-positioned to run a successful campaign. We lacked professional guidance, but the combination of faith that the Lord had led us to the new facility and confidence in our own ability to communicate well and to manage a big project generated optimism. We envisioned people quickly coming on

board and easily committing to sacrificial generosity. There were no donations in hand to justify that hope, but we felt it nonetheless.

### **Phase 2, October to December: “Solid foundations and optimism”**

In October, we began the one-year coaching program and felt growing reassurance about the direction of our project, as we quickly grew convinced that we had added the missing ingredient: professional help. D&L was immensely valuable, grounding us in a renewed understanding of what we were actually trying to accomplish with our school – our purpose as defined by our vision for children. We began developing excellent communication strategies to complement the core work of relationship-building.

Each week I grew ever more grateful for the training and excited about implementing it. The combination every week of a video, a conference call, practical assignments, and cloud-based collaboration was very powerful. The weekly meetings ensured that our leadership team was always on the same page. We found the steps in the D&L curriculum were helpful and wisely ordered.

1. With our coach’s guidance, we started by refining our development message, making sure we could really describe well to prospective donors what we were seeking to accomplish with children. Our vision is not for a building, but for transforming children’s lives. We grew comfortable with articulating our vision for our students – what is really the key to winning people’s trust and support.
2. We began implementing a strategy of face-to-face meeting as the best way of strengthening commitment. We started meeting with our past donors, thanking them and reporting to them, and we identified and met new prospects in a search to broaden our support base.
3. We learned that timely, personalized follow-up is critical to “winning” prospects over.
4. We began thinking of ways to tie our development activities to the calendar, planning in six-week chunks, 100-day chunks, in quarters, and in donors’ seasons of giving.
5. We learned many practical ways of growing a healthy culture of giving: what communications should look like, how to use small groups, the value of steps and milestones instead of big goals.
6. We gradually developed a system for managing our prospect list that enables us to track each one well and avoid mistakes in communicating with them, by either neglecting them or “double-asking.”

7. We had lengthy discussions about the particular strategies of our own campaign, and about good ways of dealing with our own unique challenges.

Occasionally, we would enter a step that seemed too advanced for where we were at, but we made notes and will be happy in a year's time to revisit the concepts.

Besides development, many of the steps covered personal leadership areas where I needed to grow. Self-leadership needs to be strong before we can effectively lead others. We discussed ways of managing time and gaining efficiency by automating some things and eliminating others, and by relegating email to its proper place (a small place). We saw how I had grown hindered by an engrained habit of doing most things myself, not trusting others, and rarely delegating.

At every step, the great value was in the conversation about contextualizing what we were learning in our own school. Cognitive learning is of some value, but personalized application gives it force.

### **Phase 3, January to April: "Discouragement"**

As the winter passed, however, I gradually came to see that our campaign was not succeeding at all as we had envisioned. We had raised only a third of our goal. There were various reasons for this. Some of our supporters were pre-empting our "ask" by giving small gifts early. Others were waiting till late in the process to see how great the need was. Still others, we suspected, were thinking that "the widow's mite" doesn't matter, that "richer people can pay for it."

Another factor, I believe, is that we all paid lip-service to the need for prayer, but I don't think we actually prayed in earnest. There were few signs of community-wide prayer, and my own prayers were often perfunctory. It is easy to reduce prayer to a point of duty, particularly when the underlying spirit is one of self-confidence.

I now know that the Lord was using this weak start to correct us for our pride and self-reliance. I observed myself sinking into profound disappointment over those months, but I didn't know how to stop. Our donors' tepid reactions began feeding an anxiety and a discouragement that limited my own effectiveness in leading the campaign. Never before in my life did I experience such prolonged and profound worry. For a long season, I spent hours every night awake, thinking and fretting, and I frequently felt sick. I could rarely shake the feelings of failure and impotence. For the first time I could identify with people who suffered from anxiety disorders: I felt paralyzed. I found myself yearning for other work, critical of my community and critical of myself. My family and my staff became aware and expressed concern.

This, I now know, was the harvest of self-reliance. "If you want to do this on your own," God was saying, "then do this on your own." He was withholding success, letting me

exert the best of my energies with the best guidance we could find, seeing few results, and driving me into a place where there was no choice but to look to Him.

Throughout this “dark night,” our D&L coach was a constant source of encouragement. She kept us moving in the right direction, answered our concerns, and reminded us over and over that this is the Lord’s project, and that I should not be trying to carry the burden.

#### **Phase 4, May: “Renewed faith”**

Very recently, a series of providential circumstances (books, sermons, and many conversations) have brought some very valuable insight. The pieces of this puzzle have started to come together, and my perspective has grown much more grounded and healthy.

I have learned about my own pride as a root of many of my own troubles, and that a lack of prayer is a sign of a lack of faith in God.

I have learned that in all things we need to be constantly looking to him, to be able to say, “Our eyes are on you” (2 Chron. 20).

I have learned that it is not the destination or the actual accomplishment of the goal that matters to the Lord; what matters is the way in which we serve Him. Is my service based on implementing what I know best while merely aiming for what I think He wants, or am I constantly looking for His guidance along the way?

I have learned to put my confidence and my hope in the one who sent water from the rock, who parted the sea, who raised the dead, and who deliberately reduced Gideon’s army to prove that He has no need of human strength to accomplish His purposes.

I have learned that spiritual leadership is far more important than organizational leadership. Management skills, people skills, and human credibility fade quickly without the greater foundation of deep faith and humble trust.

I have learned that – even when not feeling like it – the call is just to obey, to do the job that I know I am called to do, setting my own ego aside.

Clearly there was something that the Lord was wanting to do in our hearts, using this very immense project to stress us and to break us, that he might refashion us more in His likeness.

While I do see that my own roller-coaster ride was far more intense than anyone else’s on our team, I am encouraged to see that they have been learning many of the same things too. We are growing in prayer and growing in authenticity as a community.

To capture some of this learning, I have begun writing “A Theology of Development,” which I hope will solidify for myself the lessons of the year.

## **Future Prospects**

Now, by the grace of God, an unexpected funding source has materialized, our campaign is progressing, construction is on track, and we will move in to our new facility in August. The Lord is proving Himself to be the owner of this school and the giver of every good thing. Funding is still a real concern, and the campaign path continues to be hard work, but we know that we are doing what the Lord has called us to. I am encouraged by the Lord’s words to Moses: “Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today.... The Lord will fight for you” (Ex. 14:13-14).

Practically speaking, I have been acquiring many new development skills and learning new systems that I feel I haven’t yet implemented very well. I am very eager for the construction dust to settle and for the campaign to slow down. There is much to do, to absorb, and to improve. I am also excited still to have another five months of D&L training. One day, I would like to be able to say that I know how to do school development well.

Most importantly, I am hopeful that my deepest foundation, my own spiritual health, is maturing to the point where I can be of ever greater use in the kingdom, that my engrained habits of trusting in myself can be broken. I earnestly desire to have the strength of faith and spirit that will enable me by God’s grace to weather even greater storms than those of the past six months.

## **Thanks**

Working with the Van Lunen Center faculty and with Zach Clark and Sarah Guldalian has been immensely valuable for me. I do not know how I could have survived the campaign without this encouragement and counsel. We have always felt blessed by the guidance and reassured about the wisdom of our direction, and I have no doubt that we have avoided many pitfalls along the way.

My purposes in becoming a Van Lunen fellow and then engaging in D&L coaching were – among other things – to acquire leadership skills and to learn how to run a campaign. However, the Lord’s plans have far transcended that, and I am very thankful.