



# Anatomy of an Administrative Disaster

## Midwest Faith-Based School



### Project Summary

#### “Anatomy” Goal:

Analyze *ex post facto* the structures, conditions, and administrative decisions that contributed to a dysfunctional relationship between Midwest Faith-Based’s governing board and its school head, eventually resulting in the resignation of the school head. Ultimately, the goal is to provide other school heads a framework to help them avoid a similar experience.

#### “Anatomy” Focus:

Some focus will be placed on governance structure and other environmental conditions as influencing, but not determining factors. Primary attention will be given to decisions made by the school head as potentially determining factors.

#### Two decision windows will be examined:

- The school head’s initial decision to accept or decline the position.
- Decisions, particularly mistakes, made by the school head after accepting the position that contributed to the disaster.

Midwest Faith-Based School consists of a K-8 program and a 9-12 program, separately funded but governed by the same board. Midwest is owned and operated by six Christian congregations, proportionately represented on the board according to size. At the time of the head’s resignation, Midwest had 400 students in K-8 and 120 in 9-12.



### Process

- Recollection, Self-Examination
- Review of Reports, Board Minutes, Agendas, Communications, etc.
- Interviews with Pastors, Board Members, other Administrative Staff, etc.
- Examination of Midwest’s Governance Structure

### Metaphor: Hurricane Katrina

#### Pre-Existing Choices:

- Katrina: Why would people build a large city 20 feet below sea level in a known hurricane area?
- Midwest: Why would a school head accept a position with certain structures and cultural factors that militate against the school’s (and the school head’s) success?

#### In-Process Choices:

- Katrina: Once the situation had started, why had those in charge not put into place effective relief mechanisms, and why was response not more timely?
- Midwest: Once in the middle of the situation, what errors in judgment and other choices were made by the school head that exacerbated the situation?

### A Framework for Success

**Know your own strengths.** (*Marcus Buckingham’s writings, particularly StrengthsFinder by Buckingham and Clifton, are helpful*)

#### Decide Whether to Interview

- What is the school’s mission and philosophy?
- Get a detailed position description.
- Do my gifts match the school’s needs?

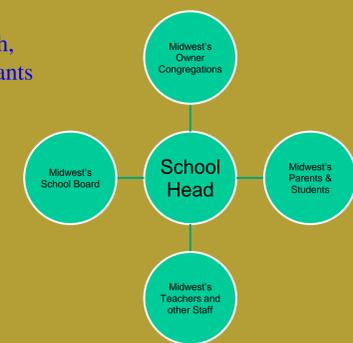
#### During the Interview

- What kinds questions are asked?
- Who is present at the interview?
- Who leads the interview, and what is his or her background?
- Be honest about your strengths and weaknesses

#### After the Interview:

- Are the stated expectations and priorities realistic and supported by staffing & budget?
- How do the REAL priorities of the board compare with the stated priorities?
- Does the governance model and function support a positive outcome?
- What is the third-source funding pattern of the school?

Structural Reality  
Courtesy of Les Stroh,  
Cornerstone Consultants



**Key Truth:** If there is unity among the constituent groups in vision, philosophy, and sense of mission, success is possible.

### Key Mistakes

- Not insisting that school head weaknesses be staffed by additional people.
- Not understanding/perceiving the discrepancy between the stated and unstated expectations of the governance.
- Not forcing focus on the school’s primary mission; allowing the Board to become distracted by peripheral issues.

### Turning Points, Key Events

- Board chair shift from educator to corporate executive.
- Board’s inability (or refusal) to grapple with philosophical/strategic/unity issues.
- Complete Board turnover within 3 years.
- Financial difficulties & other issues.

### Theological Implications/Conclusions

- God’s love and care are constant, even in difficult times.
- God is constantly working for the long-term good of His people.

#### Bibliography

Pictures from National Geographic, Fox News.  
Diagram courtesy of Cornerstone Consulting.

