
THE 110% TRAP

Balancing Personal
and Professional



WICKENBURG CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Kevin P. Armstrong, M.Ed., Administrator
260 West Yavapai, Wickenburg, AZ 85390
928-684-5916, Fax: 928-684-6104
k.armstrong.wca@gmail.com

Van Lunen Fellow 2017-2018

They say misery loves company. I'm not convinced that's entirely true, but I do know that there is common ground among all who answer the call to lead Christian schools. The mountains and valleys experienced by a Head of School are unique to the position, and the impact is eternal.

The Project:

Finding balance between personal life and professional responsibilities is an ongoing pursuit. But this year I was faced with a "gut level urgency" described by Dr. Henry Cloud in his book, "Necessary Endings." In reality, I had been close to this point at the end of the previous school year, but I managed to decompress enough over the summer to go at it again in the Fall. Now, I was back to an all-too-familiar sense of "something's gotta change." Really. Or our Board would likely be faced with a search for a new Head of School.

It was time to take the bitter medicine offered by Jim Collins "to confront the brutal facts," not only in the strategic, programming, or business sense, but on a personal level. Clearly, one or more necessary endings were eminent, and I was convinced my tenure was not one of them. I have always prided myself in being an "all-in" kind of guy... the one people ask to do things because they know it will get done. "Above and beyond" has been my M.O. and G.E.M.O. (good enough, move on) is difficult for me to swallow.

However, there is a price to pay for giving 110% to your work, even if it is a noble cause of ministry. The extra 10% has to come from somewhere: health, family, relationships, etc. Ruth Haley Barton's study of Moses and Jethro in "Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership" presents a list of nine symptoms that might manifest themselves when we become dangerously depleted. (I scored 8 out of 9...) I can also relate to pastor Wayne Cordeiro's experience with burnout, as described in his book "Leading on Empty." "I couldn't sustain the pace much longer. I had to restructure. My RPMs were at deadline, but I didn't know how to shift gears!" It is not enough to survive. In fact, God has called each of us to function as a part of the Body of Christ, according to our gifting, and he needs each of us to thrive for the Body to be healthy and effective. (Eph. 4:11) My project, by default, has become rebalancing my personal life and my professional responsibilities.

Lessons Learned:

- Balance is achieved by establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries.
- Acknowledging a problem/imbalance is the first step toward a solution.
- No one can/will "fix it" for me. I have to own the process.
- Start with physical health. Emotional, spiritual, relational health will follow.
- Burnout is a real, physiological condition with physical and emotional implications that can affect thought processes and functionality.

- After burnout, depression may never be far away. Anticipate relapse. Identify and begin to recognize triggers. Unplug when necessary.
- Healing and recovering from burnout require time and intentional incremental steps.
- Some people never return to a full “pre-burnout” state.
- Redefine “normal.” Restructure activities, responsibilities, expectations.
- Establish and protect a “sabbath” on weekly, monthly, and seasonal basis
- Attitude is everything. You cannot control the reactions of other people, the seasons, or the markets, but you can *always* control your response to them. Successful people focus on what they can control.
- The good cannot begin until the bad ends.
- Deciding *what not to do* is as important as deciding *what to do*.
- A leader’s greatest asset is not necessarily time. It is energy.
- Become an Arborist. Consider types of “pruning” and how I feel about them a) healthy buds, but not the best, b) sick branches not likely to get well, c) dead branches taking up space/resources.
- Embrace endings as a normal part of business and life. Anticipate instead of avoiding or seeing as a problem.
- Establish a new paradigm around “Strengths Based Leadership:
 - Old: “Leaders should strive to be the best at everything, using their strengths, constantly developing their weaknesses”
 - New: “Identify and focus on using gifts/talents/strengths. Identify and delegate weaknesses. (Do what you do best, delegate the rest!)”
- Understanding Top 5 Talents and/or Core Clarity Profile can have profound impact on effectiveness and satisfaction.
- My Profile: 1. Achiever, 2. Belief, 3. Responsibility, 4. Learner, 5. Ideation
- Identify top 3 professional responsibilities. Spend time working on them each day.
- “Frenetic has limits!”
- “Workaholism is an obsessive-compulsive disorder that manifests itself through self-imposed demands, and inability to regulate work habits, and an overindulgence in work- to the exclusion of most other life activities” - (Barton p. 105)
- Share the load, but “Delegation” does not mean “Abdication”

Impact on School:

In a word: Sustainability. This year in the Van Lunen program has resulted in a succession of incremental steps toward establishing a new norm, on several levels. The books, seminars, work sessions, and ongoing small group interactions have provided tremendous support and encouragement, and I am pleased with the progress toward rebalancing my personal health and relationships with professional priorities and responsibilities. In the process, I have also gained confidence in my skills as a leader, as I have been equipped with tools for the job, particularly through the practical guidance offered in Henry Cloud’s “Necessary Endings.” Over the past several months, as my understanding of my gifting has deepened through the “Strengths Based Leadership” and “CoreClarity” programs, our school leadership team has also made some organizational changes to make my workload more manageable, leverage my gifts more effectively, and tap the gifting of others in the organization in new ways. As a result, in the coming year, my responsibilities will focus less on oversight of programming and more on advancement efforts related to developing relationships within the school and in the surrounding community. Hope has been restored that there can, indeed, be balance between personal life and professional responsibilities.