



**The City School**  
LIGHT TO THE CITY

**When God Says, "I Want Your Heart": Leadership Starting From The Inside** (PROJECT SUMMARY)

Jake Becker, Head of School, The City School, Philadelphia, PA; Van Lunen Fellow 2012-13

[www.cityschool.org](http://www.cityschool.org)

Consultant: Dave Medema, Pondera Advisors

**What I Did** - I looked inward. I believe Robert Quinn (*Deep Change; Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*) when he writes that we are all faced with the following personal and organizational decision - do we pursue deep change or settle for slow death? According to Quinn if we choose deep change, then deep change has to start with ourselves first. I chose deep change, and that meant I needed to care for myself and those around me in a more relational way. I can be tough to read and don't have the strongest drive for relationships (see Strengths-Finders and Pondera® Virtual Advisor profile results). My less relational approach created confusion and isolation in my first year at my school. One example of this includes having a strategic planning proposal voted down unanimously at the board.

Now, having finished my second year, we have changed our school's name and branding (formerly Spruce Hill Christian School/City Center Academy), established four core commitments (to Jesus, the city, excellence and accessibility) that guide us in the implementation of our mission, increased tuition 30 percent with increased financial aid for those who needed it, started an AP program and raised nearly \$1 million. By the start of school in September we will have adding a third campus for our middle school and overhauled our school management software. And none of this was supported directly through my participation in the Van Lunen program. All of supported indirectly. Instead of technical assistance on a specific project, I began proactive marriage counseling, became more mindful of my quality of being hard-to-read, pursued deeper relationships and sought greater opportunities to be thankful in the midst of the many difficult changes we are undergoing.

**What I Learned**

- That managerial competence is not supreme,
- That I need to be intentional about relationships even when I don't feel like it,
- That I am introverted analyst, which means I have thought very deeply about an issue and am usually able to sort through a lot of conflicting information to forge a clear path forward. It also means I can be extremely private and process much in my head, which means I can be hard to read, which means I can be hard to follow.
- That when God puts me in a place that needs to implement all of the important changes we have had to implement in the past 12 months what He really wants is my heart.

**What Is Different** - Jesus is followed by a little child who is more aware of his meekness and how he is honored in my relationships in all aspects of my life. I have invested heavily in my relationships with my board, and will be further with faculty. My wife and I are asking questions that we hadn't thought to ask before in our parenting, with each other, and about our own family histories. I am much more aware of the healthy tensions in leadership, such as adaptive confidence and grounded vision. I am working hard to discern what in your life is driven by a need to achieve as opposed to the needs and opportunities in a given situation. I am more self-aware and becoming more attentive to self-care and self-gentleness that extends to those you love. Hopefully all of this means that I am becoming a more balanced person who is better equipped to create and sustain a healthy balance of loving myself and my love of work and service.