

Sowing Many Seeds by Kevin Bouwers, Principal (COO) of Providence Christian School

Dundas, Ontario, Canada

Background:

Providence Christian School is a Pre-K to eighth grade school with a population hovering around 200 pupils and it is situated near Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. It is in a rural setting and we have experienced 35% growth in the past 5 years. With the growth have come opportunities as well as challenges for the school. The focus for the project was to complete a strategic plan to help our school navigate these opportunities and challenges with our mission, vision, and core values at the center.

Sowing Seeds, Harvesting the bounty:

Coming into the Van Lunen Fellowship I had the idea that I would initiate and complete a strategic plan for Providence Christian School (PCS). What we need to address first was governance. It was one the biggest areas that we tackled. At PCS we had over half of our Board of directors as new recruits. With so many new board members it was not only a challenge but a real opportunity to reshape and refine our governance at PCS. One of the biggest changes we made was moving from a standard agenda to a consent agenda. This expedited the reporting process and allowed the board to tackle the strategic plan and to think more strategically in general. Having the board focus their energy on strategic thinking has already started to bear fruit in our school.

During the July session we were also prompted to look at and evaluate our website design and traffic. There was one slide in particular that referenced a website that was stuck in the past. Sadly, it was a website that looked much like ours. The seed was planted. We initiated a full redesign of the website and when it was completed I asked for feedback. Through Jim's direction we were able to refine our website and sign up for the email marketing campaign he was promoting. The fruit of our labour, a more friendly, accessible and marketing driven website is online, www.providencescs.ca.

In conjunction with the website redesign is the idea that you need to get prospective parents into the building and have them experience the culture of your school. In their meeting with the parents the most effective means of communicating during the first meeting is to use SPIN. I knew that our success in closing enrollment increased exponentially if we got them through the door. The SPIN technique formalizes the meeting with the family to you focus on the right kinds of questions and conversations. Another kernel planted. After using this technique during campus visits it has increased our effectiveness to communicate who we are and how we can partner with families on this journey of Christian education. The harvest is plenty and I am thankful for this tool.

After the session with Zach I created materials, a case for support, for our upcoming campaign for a renovation at the school. Using the materials that I had generated I was able to meet with donors and sit across from them and see how they could partner with us to make the necessary changes at our school. The session we had with Zach and the donor panel were integral in the work that was accomplished of the campaign at the school. Phase 1 is now complete and we are heading into Phase 2 this summer. I am thankful for what these seeds are producing. I am excited to see what next steps might be in store for me in the area of development work at PCS.

After the time in January it was time to take the next step with the Board of Directors. We were required to read the book, *The Advantage* by Patrick Lencioni. I challenge the board to read part of the book with me and spend some time identifying the core values of PCS. The seed was planted. To assist us in hiring people to sit on the Administrative Council we had to recognize how we behave and what is important to us and establish our core values. This comes from chapter 2 of the book. I created a presentation for our Board and took them through Board training around strategic thinking and pinpointing our core values. I had engaged the staff in this discussion earlier in the year and we had their input in front of us when we set out to drill down and explore the key characteristics and qualities that could be identified as our core values. After spending a considerable amount of time in discussion we were able to identify the core. We identified the core values and decided to work with one metaphor to develop phrases that would best capture the sentiments. We settled on a set of values that has been approved by the Board and will now help in form our practice, our policy, and guide our next steps as an organization. With each statement or phrase there is also an accompanying graphic to help illustrate the concept and give clarity to the core value. This will not only give guidance to our hiring practices but it also informs our strategic planning process as well.

In the end, through the restructuring of our board meetings we were able to complete our strategic plan that will help give direction to the growth and opportunities. There are a number of other seeds that have planted that will need to be tended over the next year. Praise be to God.