

**From Development to Survival to Thriving**  
Jim Landskroener - Van Lunen Final Paper - July 2014

**What I did:**

God blessed me by calling me to serve at Trinity Lutheran School in Toledo, Ohio. I replaced a long-time principal and joined a new leadership staff. Our church and school were moving in the right direction. I was ready to attend Van Lunen and start a development plan for Trinity.

One month before our first Van Lunen gathering in Grand Rapids, one of our pastors was removed from the church; then, our senior pastor found he had stage 4 colon cancer. A teacher left two weeks before school started. My consultant, Don Distelberg, sent me homework to set up our development plan. I began the project, but my focus was finding another teacher and building morale among my staff.

In October, we learned that one of our parents committed suicide. This occurred two weeks before our first auction, the first piece of my development plan. Our auction was one of many bright spots that occurred this school year; we had set a goal of raising \$15,000, but were able to raise \$25,000. This was significant, and gave me some credibility amongst the congregation - I had a plan and could carry it out.

In November, another congregational member took his life. Although he was not active in our congregation, it was our second suicide in two months. In December, our first-grade teacher's mother, who is our senior pastor's wife, died suddenly. More grief for our staff.

I came to Arizona for part two of the Van Lunen program a few days early to hike the Grand Canyon and take some time to rejuvenate. I was able to share some of my challenges with faculty. They suggested I shift my project and work with life coach Dave Medema.

A week or so after returning, one of my teachers killed himself. Three suicides in three months. I will tell you, my Van Lunen Fellows were there for me in full force; their prayers and support mean more than words or feelings can express. Again, we had grief counselors come in; we continue to deal with this loss.

**What did I learn?**

The biggest area I have taken from Dave is to slow down my reactions and try and look at the stressors in my life from an outside perspective. Knowing that I had to report to Dave every other week kept me accountable. I am very thankful that the Van Lunen program allowed me to switch consultants and work with Dave Medema these last six months. It became clear that I need to have a coach or a counselor to help work through situations as they arise. We worked hard at setting boundaries. I cannot share enough how much the Van Lunen program and the other fellows play a role in making me a better administrator and supporting one another in the trials we deal with day-to-day.

**What difference did it make?**

The support that the Van Lunen program has given to me the last eighteen months is just amazing. Their vision for Christian schools and those that lead them has been a huge benefit to me. The learning that has happened because of Van Lunen has translated to positive results at Trinity. Although my project on development changed, I have learned and gained many resources to accomplish this goal; I have learned to work on personal care for myself to be a more effective leader wherever God places me. I am very thankful to Dave and Don for their expertise and guidance in this process, and look forward to working with them and my other Great Whites into the future as we strive to Share Christ in all times and in all places.