

Professional Background

Executive Director of the South Carolina Humanities Council

My career path has been non-traditional and thoroughly enjoyable. Though trained as a scholar in American literature, I never worked inside the academy after earning my degree. Moreover, my pathway has not been “up through the ranks” within a given professional context. Instead, I have had the good fortune to serve, for the past thirty-four years, as the chief executive in non-profit and educational arenas.

For thirteen years I served as Executive Director of the South Carolina Humanities Council, a grant-making agency with a base budget provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Council served a broad range of constituents: colleges and universities, schools, public radio and television, independent producers, and a variety of arts, historical, and cultural organizations. The impact of this diversity on my professional development was significant in terms of what I learned about organizational and governance structures, institutional missions, and finance.

The South Carolina Governor’s School for Science and Mathematics

In 1988, I was asked to lead a brand new residential school, the South Carolina Governor’s School for Science and Mathematics. Publicly funded with a legislative proviso that allowed it to operate independently from the State Department of Education, I was nonetheless taking a highly publicized position without having any background in science or mathematics or in public education.

What I learned is that leadership matters, especially confident and inclusive leadership. Very quickly, I gained credibility and trust, built consensus, and made sure that the humanities and social studies curriculum was rigorous and challenging, not just an attachment to the science/math focus of the school. In terms of external duties, I was the primary point of contact with the public, the legislature, and directed administrative private fundraising activities.

Christ Church Episcopal School

In June of 2000 I was called to head Christ Church Episcopal School (CCES). Here I have provided strong, positive, inclusive leadership which the school particularly needed at the time of my arrival. During my tenure, the school completed its most successful capital campaign and significant gains have been made in curricular consolidation, faculty development, school climate, enrollment growth, communications, major gifts, and the expansion of non-tuition revenue streams.

Leadership Skills

Over thirty-four years, the executive and leadership abilities I have developed are significant, and they are particularly relevant to the needs of today’s independent schools. I inspire confidence, trust, and good will among parents as well as fellow administrators

and teachers. I am an effective consensus builder and problem solver and can powerfully communicate school mission and vision to all constituencies. Excellent written and oral communication skills contribute to all aspects of institutional development.

Of course, one can be a competent administrator without being a leader. I believe that effective leadership facilitates and elevates effective administration; and an environment for effective administration cannot exist if there is a vacuum in leadership. All members of the school family—students, faculty, and staff—want to know that someone is in charge, that there is a leader who is authentic, who cares about them, and who assumes responsibility for the welfare of the institution and its members.

In today's environment, with the demands and expectations placed on a school head, and with the plethora of roles he/she may be called upon to play, the effective leader is also going to be an effective delegator. With a leadership style that engenders confidence and trust, I place great emphasis on team building and the clear communication of goals and expectations which in turn derive from a common understanding of mission and lines of responsibility for institutional goals. Those who work directly with me are given responsibility and authority coupled with accountability. Team members, therefore, must be able to act independently, without close supervision, and be willing to take reasonable risks.

My style is to lead through encouragement, example, and consensus rather than by authority or fiat. Words that would describe my approach to leadership are: **patient, consensual, supportive, humorous, clear, and confident**. A reasonable modicum of wisdom gained through experience has helped to develop my talent for easing tensions, solving problems, and reading people. I am open and accessible and for these reasons people find themselves comfortable in my presence and tend to trust my judgments.

Though I prefer to reach decisions through a process of consensus building, I do not hesitate to become more directive if consensus is too slow to emerge or the institutional need is great. Given responsibility, trust, authority, and accountability, it has been my experience that people rise to the occasion, especially if there is buy-in on key issues and strategic direction is clearly understood. I tend not to take overt ownership of ideas and achievements, and it is my practice to recognize and credit the contributions of faculty and staff in every institutional accomplishment. These guidelines have been a key to excellent board relationships throughout my career. The result has been a high degree of effectiveness in building and articulating institutional vision, strategic planning to meet present needs while enabling the future, and finding consensus on policy issues.

Teaching, Learning, and Value

Though we do not regard our students and parents in crass commercial terms as purely “customers,” the independent school enterprise is, in fact, a business with an ethical responsibility to offer a credible value proposition as a return on the investment of tuition dollars. The end of the pipeline is college placement and if we do not deliver on the promises—implied as well as explicit—embedded in a college preparatory curriculum, then we are not deserving of the tuition dollars that are paid for our services.

That of course describes only a portion of a school's true value. At Christ Church Episcopal School, we prepare our students for college, leadership, and life and our core values, represented by our initials (CCES), are character, community, excellence, and service. This is an overarching mission umbrella. It enables a school to ask its constituents (customers), "Is this what you see being taught and lived, outside the classroom as well as in?" The answers tell the school how well it is keeping its promises.

Below this macro level, I am a traditionalist in that I continue to celebrate the virtues of a rigorous liberal arts curriculum, a central component of which is the discovery of one's moral center. Such an approach is not at all at odds with the importance of innovations, technology in the classroom, developing 21st century competencies, or addressing different learning styles. There is no necessary disconnect between content **and** skills.

Academic rigor supports breadth and depth of subject matter, for without sufficient challenges to one's intellect, the educational process is vulnerable to becoming an arid, sterile exercise, what Alfred North Whitehead refers to as the perpetuation of "inert ideas," subjects "merely received into the mind without being utilized, tested, or thrown into fresh combinations." Today we call this the development of critical thinking skills, and it is something that great teachers do with profound effect.

It is, of course, the teacher who is always at the heart of the matter. The mandate for the school leader is to ensure that there is an appropriate, challenging curriculum that keeps its promises to students and families, and that there are superior teachers engaged with students actively learning.