Using our time, treasure and talent within Christian education

David d'Lima - FamilyVoice Australia, August 2020

The leaders of Christian schools do well to wisely steward the available time, treasure and talent, as resources that may encourage staff, students and the entire school community to achieve their full potential, guided by the following biblical principles:

- All of God's people are to ... *excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness* (2 Corinthians 8:7);
- *"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked"* (Luke 12:48);
- *"... use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings"* (Luke 16:9);
- *"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.' "* (Luke 19:17).

While we constantly perceive a lack of time, treasure and talent, our challenge is to better use the available hours while increasing the quantity of treasure and coaching ourselves and our colleagues to improve our talents. May our endeavours, offered in faith, be blessed and enlarged by Almighty God.

Wisely handling our time, treasure and talent

Each individual and each institution has *time*, *treasure* and *talent* that may be expended wisely to honour our Father and to benefit the world he loves. Let us therefore prayerfully discuss with all stakeholders (board, staff, parents and students) how best we may wisely utilise those resources.

Part of our challenge is to move out of a mind-set that gives focus only to the deficit or lack of time, treasure and talent. If we concentrate upon the lack of those three resources, we will not move forward. But as we seek the blessing of God, we may expect him to enlarge our capacities.

Time - using it prudentially

While we each have only 24 hours per day, we can apply wisdom to free our time, by minimising pointless or non-productive action and by concentrating on valuable activity. It is wise to apply the *Pareto Principle* (the "80/20 rule") which consistently demonstrates that 80% of the results come from 20% of the activity. It is helpful to set a priority on spending time on the 20% of activities that yield 80% of the results, while commending that principle to others.

Practical suggestions for the wise use of time are as follows:

- Managing the activity instead of doing the work;
- Delegating tasks to others;
- Recruiting an army instead of fighting single-handedly;
- Discarding parts and processes that get in the way;
- Minimising bureaucracy and unwarranted paperwork.

Treasure - its application, accumulation and development

The current assets of each Christian school ideally include a sophisticated governing board, a capable set of executives, one or more school principals, a dedicated group of teachers and support staff, a willing band of volunteers, a proud alumni association, a vigorous parents and friends group, forthright advocates in the community and generous school partners. Those assets may be applied, accumulated and developed as follows:

- **Board members** who are well connected to the culture and founding ethos of the movement ideally ensure excellence of governance. Board members may be drawn from leaders in the professions, the churches and wider community. They may be encouraged by each other and via consultations with rank and file members of the movement and from external sources.

- **Executives** ideally prepare an exciting but realistic business and ministry plan in consultation with all stakeholders and will work to achieve planned outcomes. Executives may be drawn from Godly people skilled in education and business. They may be encouraged by the Board.

- **Principals** ideally coach and mentor the teachers and support staff and other related people, ensuring they are all encouraged, equipped and nurtured continuously as they minister to children under the school's care. The well-being, safety and security of the team and the student body are of paramount concern. The workload, sense of fulfilment and ability to cope with daily challenges are ideally of key concern to the principal who must take responsibility, following after Christ the good shepherd: *"He calls his own sheep by name and leads them"... "I know my sheep and my sheep know me"* (John 10:3, 14).

  Principals ideally demonstrate genuine interest in the well-being of staff, encouraging them to achieve balance in work and life. Principals ideally ask staff and other stakeholders regularly what is getting in the way of success, and ask how together we can minimise or remove those barriers wherever possible. Principals may be encouraged by coaches and mentors that are provided corporately, or which are personally sourced.

- **Teachers and support staff** ideally enjoy educating young hearts and minds, being refreshed each day by the words of Jesus, who said: *"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me ..."* (Mark 9:37). Teachers and other staff may be drawn from among Christians who are suitably qualified and have a genuine love for children, the ability to bring out the best in students, a desire to serve God within Christian education, and who will operate in a united and cooperative manner. They may be encouraged by the school principal and also by pastors who are connected to the school, and by each other.

- **Volunteers** ideally provide one-to-one support to students requiring either remediation or extension, and may give specialised lessons, guest input in the classroom or assembly, and may assist with maintenance, gardening, spring cleaning etc. They may be drawn from among the parents or grandparents of students, and from retired professionals in churches. They may be encouraged by the school principal, teachers and by a coordinator of volunteers;

- **Alumni association members** ideally gather for their annual dinner at the school, so as to enjoy fellowship, networking and to fund-raise, having received a report of the year's work along with plans about further educational ministry. The annual dinner should refresh alumni in their financial sponsorship of the school - which expresses practically their sincere thanks for the formation it provided when they were students. They are drawn from the adults who have come through the school as children. They are encouraged in that role by the school principal, who also serves to build a positive expectation among students that they will hold a life-long connection to the school and shall support it in prayer and through donations and bequests.

- **Parents and friends group members** ideally assist with extra-curricula activities, including school camps, working bees, prayer groups, special events (eg a Shrove Tuesday pancake breakfast and awards night etc). They are drawn from the school community and may be encouraged by the Principal.
- **Community advocates** ideally lend their good name and any official civic position they hold, in support of school functions (such as MPs visiting the school, or the attendance by the mayor at awards events). They are drawn from the community and may be encouraged by the principal.
- **School partners** ideally are groups or individuals who will fund scholarships and who will make donations of books, capital items and their expertise. They may be drawn from the networks recommended by all the above asset categories and may be encouraged by the principal or association fundraising officer.

Talent - its production and enrichment

Christian leadership involves equipping for ministry: *to prepare God's people for works of service ...* (Ephesians 4:12). This requires identifying what are the gifts, abilities, dreams and visions held by all people who are involved in the organisation, whether those talents be natural, learned or gifted by the Spirit of God. Leaders ideally help all the team members to achieve their fullest potential, in the exercise and development of their gifts, abilities, dreams and visions.

When people need to learn new activities or approaches, acquiring new talents, the Christian leader has the opportunity to help those co-labourers transition into competence - like Paul who in his role to enrich the people of God living at Thessalonica:

> *For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory* (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

Christian leaders do well to regularly invite all stakeholders to suggest how the organisation could move towards greater excellence, and may rejoice to know that all stakeholders, ideally, shall hear the words of commendation from Christ, in the good exercise of the talents vouchsafed to their duty:

> *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"* (Matthew 25:23).

The wise leader seeks to encourage each stakeholder towards receiving that commendation.

Although leaders can be certain of failure and criticism (from time to time), such difficulties are part and parcel of success and can be re-framed accordingly - instead of provoking anger and prompting rebuke. To receive the criticism of a team player, unfounded though it may be, and to turn the critic into a partner, is a challenging but wonderfully rewarding vocation held by all Christian leaders.

Though Christ certainly felt frustration, even to the point of blasting his disciples, his love for them was never in doubt and he never wavered in doing his part, ultimately by his atoning death.

Concerning our Lord Jesus Christ it is written as follows: *People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said* (Mark 7:37).

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