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whole elephants

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DATE: 5/25/00
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No. of pages transmitted (including this cover) ___2_

MESSAGE:

Working Smarter starts here....

XXXXXXX-

Before we meet at 7:30am next Wednesday, I'd like to share an insight from yesterday's Leadership Team meetings with you and Jerry. For me, what I observed added flesh to concepts like "working smarter" and "learning organization."

What you validated for me is the flip side of the old Dewey-ism - "Learning from Experience." That is, to do that you first have to be *aware* of the experience, and how hard it is to be aware of the experience while you are in the midst of it.

Here's why I mention this. Picture the chart of positions and teams that xxxx (the superintendent) put on the board that mapped appropriately how he envisions the MCPS world. On the right, you, XXXX (the superintendent) and XXXX (the other Deputy) have already learned from your personal experiences as evidenced by your actions. They seem to reflect basic beliefs about people and organizations that (from 20,000 ft. plus all modern management theory about human and organizational behavior) are right on.

The problem, as you already know, is how to move, or cascade, those types of belief-based actions on through the entire organization. Most others haven't had your learning experiences, and therefore accept as "normal" roles and relationships that in the end limit possibilities for both organizational and *personal* effectiveness.

As you move left across XXXX (the superintendent's) chart, it's easy to see that the two *Yin/Yang* connected Leadership Teams are the key immediate links to all your plans. And you are asking behaviors of them that, in the end, you would like to see in *all* staff right down to the classroom.

Here are three examples from yesterday's meetings that indicate how you are asking them to think and act in new ways:

1.   You modeled the value of seeing people as more than job descriptions, but as individuals who could play other *roles* at times because of the experiences they bring with them.   [Isn't this the model you want for all teams in the new collaborative structure -- in particular the performance and operating teams, and hopefully school staffs?]

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"...and so these men of Indostan   *Each in his own opinion*   *Though each was partly in the right,*
disputed loud and long.   *Exceeding stiff and strong.*   *They all were in*
the wrong!"

The Parable of the Blind Men & The Elephant

2. "Each time we define a little better," you noted. You see each step in the process as an action that you expect will be better the next time it's taken. While this is a key principle and belief for continual improvement, working smarter, and organizational learning it's counter-intuitive to the culture's [not just MCPS's] expectation that leaders are "supposed to know." To present plans carved in stone.

3. Collaborative problem-solving as a key knowledge-synthesizing strategy seems to be heard through mental filters that picture this as meaning more "meetings" to be added to an already full schedule of time requirements.

My point here is that I keep picking up signals that most members of the <u>Leadership Team</u> [especially the Community Superintendent's] presently feel-overwhelmed, unsure of their fit, threatened because of "risks" they are being asked to take, and *sure* of only one thing. Their expectation of how this nebulous enemy they call "the culture" will react.

While I wish I could suggest a direct way to make that go away, I think it actually can add value to, and accelerate your process if it can be seen as a microcosm of what others throughout the district [and community] may experience as they try to make sense of your upcoming roll-out actions. My suggestion then for possible discussion on Wednesday, is a question --- How can you tap into their present experience as a source of knowledge for dealing with it right now, as well as how to deal with it with others down the line?

How might you add a different level of "reflective practice" to the <u>Leadership Team</u> meetings, for instance, by once a month reflecting back on and processing the experience at these meetings. For example, yesterday XXX reported on the actions her department's taken to get underneath the algebra scores "problem." Content aside, she provided what seemed to me to be an excellent example of how to use data to understand a problem before jumping to Band-Aid solutions. How could this be used to provide a tangible example of what you [and *Baldrige*] mean by "data-based decision making" and "working smarter"?

Could the value of this type of approach be experienced if they looked at what sort of insights into the nature of the problem were emerging for them? And are some of them applicable to other current issues they are dealing with?

From my safe vantage point at 20,000 feet, I can see and understand the process you have underway and the requirements of the real time schedule on which your train is running.   From here, the key roles of the <u>Leadership Team's</u> are "obvious."   And there doesn't appear to be time for critical leadership team development as a separate activity.

That's why I'd like to discuss the above *learning-as-we-go* strategy with you, as well as one that would use XXXXx and the *Baldrige* in a slightly different way.

Have a restful holiday. See you next week.

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                                                            The Parable of the Blind Men & The Elephant