

The Leadership Team

You have identified “the leadership team” as an area of weakness in your school and one that needs improvement.

Recognizing the pivotal role of the leadership team in the success of a school, it is imperative to address areas of weakness and implement strategies for improvement quickly. Of course, leadership excellence starts with the head of school. The head of school needs to embody his or her leadership in a way that manages to the established mission, vision, and values. He or she also needs to continually evolve the vision to the needs of the school and translate it into annual goals and priorities. He or she must establish, maintain, and develop excellent leaders uniquely skilled in their areas of oversight including academic achievement, school culture, spiritual life, student services, admissions, development, athletics and co-curriculars. Finally, each member of the leadership team must be able to continually show measurable results to support their continued work and have plans for on-going growth and improvement. The uncommon Christian school actively identifies, trains, and develops their current and new or upcoming leaders toward the goal of having a lifelong impact on the lives of the students and families that it serves.

In considering the type of leader necessary to lead an uncommon Christian school, we believe it takes an aspiring “Level 5 Leader” as introduced by Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great*. Collins originally called this “servant leadership” but changed it to “Level 5” because his team thought his secular business audience wouldn’t understand “servant leadership.” As believers, we realize that what Collins and his research team were trying to describe as the most effective kind of leadership is the “servant leadership” modeled by Christ. According to Collins, Level 5 Leadership represents the highest level of leadership effectiveness and is characterized by a unique blend of personal humility and professional will. Qualities we believe are required to lead an uncommon Christian school. For your reference, here are the key qualities of a Level 5 Leader as detailed by Collins:

1. Personal Humility:

- Level 5 Leaders are humble individuals who focus on the success of the team rather than seeking personal acclaim.
- They attribute success to the collective efforts of the team and take responsibility for failures themselves.

2. Professional Will:

- Despite their humility, Level 5 Leaders demonstrate unwavering determination and commitment to achieving long-term organizational goals.
- They possess an exceptional work ethic, resilience in the face of challenges, and a strong drive to see the organization succeed.

3. Ambition for the School, Not for Self:

- Level 5 Leaders have a deep and enduring ambition for the success of the school rather than personal success or fame.
- Their focus is on building a sustainable legacy and ensuring the school's prosperity beyond their own leadership tenure.

4. Resolves Paradoxes:

- Level 5 Leaders can navigate and resolve paradoxes, balancing seemingly conflicting qualities such as humility and will.

- They can make tough decisions that benefit the school as a whole, even if those decisions are personally challenging.

5. **Builds Enduring Greatness:**

- Level 5 Leaders are driven by a desire to build enduring greatness for the school rather than achieving short-term success.
- They set the stage for the school's long-term success, creating a foundation for sustained excellence beyond their leadership.

It's important to note that Level 5 Leadership is a rare and exceptional form of leadership that goes beyond traditional leadership models. According to Collins, Level 5 Leaders contribute significantly to the success and enduring greatness of the organizations they lead.

Next, the head of school must build his or her leadership team. We believe that Patrick Lencioni in his book "The Ideal Team Player" introduced three essential virtues that characterize individuals who contribute effectively to a high-performing team of the uncommon Christian school. These virtues form the foundation of what Lencioni calls the "ideal team player." The three virtues are:

1. **Humble:**

- Humble team players are not focused on their own status or personal success but prioritize the success of the team.
- They are willing to acknowledge the contributions of others, share credit for achievements, and admit mistakes.
- Humble team players are not self-promoting and are quick to praise and support their colleagues.

2. **Hungry:**

- Hungry individuals are highly motivated and demonstrate a strong work ethic.
- They are proactive, take initiative, and consistently seek ways to contribute to the team's success.
- Hungry team players are driven to achieve goals and are not satisfied with mediocrity; they continuously strive for improvement.

3. **Smart (People Smart):**

- People smart, or "smart" in Lencioni's terms, refers to individuals who possess emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills.
- They are aware of the emotions and needs of others, communicate effectively, and build positive relationships.
- People smart team players contribute to a healthy team dynamic, fostering collaboration and a positive work environment.

According to Lencioni, the ideal team player embodies a combination of all three virtues: humble, hungry, and people smart. Teams that consist of individuals with these qualities are more likely to be cohesive, effective, and successful in achieving their goals. Lencioni emphasizes the importance of these virtues in building a strong organizational culture and fostering teamwork, ingredients necessary for building and maintaining an uncommon Christian school. Leaders are encouraged to assess and develop these virtues in themselves and their team members to create a work environment that promotes collaboration, innovation, and overall team success.

How to –

The following detailed suggestions aim to form and fortify the leadership team, and enhance overall school effectiveness:

1. **Select the Right Head of School:**

- Undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the current school head's leadership capabilities and alignment with the principles of Level 5 leadership as described by Jim Collins.
- If the current head is not a suitable fit, consider facilitating a transition to a lesser role or, if necessary, a new leadership direction.
- Seek a leader who not only embodies Level 5 leadership qualities but also demonstrates a deep commitment and ability to lead the team in achieving the school's mission, vision, and values.

2. **Build the Right Leadership Team:**

- Empower the head to strategically build a leadership team that is uniquely qualified for their areas of oversight and can show measurable results.
- Encourage the head to identify and recruit team members who exhibit the qualities outlined in Patrick Lencioni's "The Ideal Team Player."
- Foster a collaborative and cohesive team culture that values open communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the school's objectives.

3. **Invest in Professional Development:**

- Prioritize ongoing professional development for the leadership team, focusing on leadership skills, educational trends, and effective management practices.
- Facilitate regular training sessions, workshops, and conferences to ensure that the leadership team remains well-equipped to navigate the evolving landscape of education and leadership.

4. **Align with Organizational Goals:**

- Clearly articulate the school's mission, vision, and values to the leadership team, ensuring a shared understanding and commitment to these foundational principles.
- Translate the mission, vision, and values into annual strategic and operating goals.
- Break down annual, mid-, and long-term initiatives and assign accountable owners.
- Establish milestones and deadlines.
- Establish key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with the strategic and organizational goals, enabling the leadership team to measure progress and adjust accordingly.

5. **Implement a Cohesive Team Model:**

In "The Advantage" by Patrick Lencioni, he introduces a cohesive leadership team model that emphasizes organizational health. The model is designed to help leaders build a high-functioning and cohesive team, ultimately leading to a competitive advantage for the school. The four disciplines of the model are:

- a. **Build a Cohesive Team:** Lencioni argues that the foundation of organizational health is a cohesive leadership team. This team is characterized by trust, healthy conflict, commitment, accountability, and attention to results. Each of these elements is crucial for creating a team that works well together, makes high-quality decisions, and collectively pursues the organization's objectives.

- b. **Create Clarity:** The second discipline focuses on creating clarity by answering six critical questions that define the school's identity and purpose. These questions include clarifying why the school exists, how it behaves, what business it is in, who its competitors are, what its priorities are, and who must do what. Clarity in these areas ensures that everyone in the organization is on the same page and understands the collective direction.
- c. **Overcommunicate Clarity:** Once clarity is established, the third discipline is to overcommunicate it throughout the organization. Leaders need to ensure that the key messages related to the organization's identity, values, and priorities are consistently and repetitively communicated to all members. Repetition is crucial for reinforcing clarity and preventing any ambiguity.
- d. **Reinforce Clarity:** The fourth and final discipline is to reinforce clarity by establishing human systems that support the school's values and priorities. This includes integrating clarity into hiring processes, performance management, and decision-making. By reinforcing clarity, schools ensure that the desired culture is consistently upheld and that individuals are held accountable for living out the school's values.

Lencioni's cohesive leadership team model is designed to address common dysfunctions within organizations and help leaders build a healthy, aligned, and high-performing team. By focusing on clarity, communication, and reinforcing desired behaviors, schools can gain a competitive advantage through a cohesive and effective leadership team and become an uncommon Christian school, having a lifelong impact on the students and families it serves.

6. **Implement Regular Team Assessments:**

- Implement regular assessments and feedback mechanisms to evaluate the performance and dynamics of the leadership team.
- Encourage open and honest communication within the team, fostering an environment where constructive feedback is valued and utilized for continuous improvement.

7. **Do Succession Planning:**

- Develop a robust succession plan for key leadership positions, ensuring continuity and a seamless transition in the event of changes in leadership.
- Identify and mentor potential leaders within the school community to cultivate a pipeline of capable individuals for future leadership roles.

8. **Conduct Effective Team Meetings:**

- Conduct regular leadership team meetings that have clearly articulated objectives, focused and time boxed agendas, and are aligned with the strategic and operational priorities of the school.
- Empower team members to contribute insights, share expertise, and collaborate on initiatives that drive the school toward being an uncommon Christian school.

The above provides background and some suggested steps for improvement in this area based on best practices. To make more detailed and specific suggestions, we would need to know more about your circumstances. Please contact us if you would like to discuss your unique circumstances or would like assistance in facilitating the above steps.

Resources:

Good to Great, by Jim Collins

The Ideal Team Player, by Patrick Lencioni

Disclaimer

Once again, we emphasize that these ideas and suggestions may or may not address your school's specific needs as they are based on your responses to the survey. The feedback is limited to the questions asked and your responses. There is a whole lot more to every school.

We pray that God will lead you in your journey to becoming an uncommon Christian school and we do hope the input is helpful in this journey. If you want more detailed feedback, have questions, or would like assistance in any of these areas, please don't hesitate to contact us.