

Quality Education News

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The Editor observes ...

Dear Friend of Quality Education

Every institution is vulnerable, no matter how great. No matter how much you've achieved, no matter how far you've gone, no matter how much power you've garnered, you are vulnerable to decline ... Anyone can fall and most eventually do.

Jim Collins in *How the mighty fall*

Rhonda Smith was driving her Toyota Lexus in October 2006 when it suddenly zoomed to 160 km/hr. She tried to get the car to stop by putting it into neutral, then reverse and slamming on the emergency brakes. She was able to get out of the car physically unharmed. A small number of other Toyota motorists worldwide were also experiencing braking problems.

You might remember the Toyota advertising slogan of former years: 'Everything keeps going right ... Toyota'. That catchy slogan was used in their print, radio and TV advertisements. In recent times that slogan no longer applies. Toyota has had to recall over eight million of their vehicles because of faulty workmanship.

What went wrong at Toyota? The company had iconic status for the quality of its' vehicles. *Newsweek* magazine (15 March 2010) observed that Toyota was once, 'the global standard for manufacturing quality.' As in most things that go horribly wrong, Toyota received a few warning amber lights. The auto manufacturing giant was too busy, too preoccupied to take note.

One of the core management principles of Toyota is to listen to the customer. Toyota wasn't listening to a trickle of customer complaints. They played down the complaints; they went into denial. Now Toyota is dealing with a tsunami regarding its' reputation. It's costing the company billions of rands to recall and repair faulty vehicles. The company is also spending millions as it restores its credibility amongst customers across the world.

Every organisation has clients or customers. One dare not listen to them when they raise concerns or complaints.

You are likely to personally have an association with a school. You might teach in one or you provide professional services to a number of

them. Maybe you have children at a particular school. Think of a school that you've known for ten years or more. Have you noticed how the reputation of the school has fluctuated through the years? The quality of education and its reputation are never static. Quality can soar but it can also plummet.

Organisational quality isn't determined solely by the end product such as a reliable car or a child getting a good matric. Intangibles come to the fore. One of them is ethics. Does the organisation adhere to a code of behaviour in its interactions with employees and all who use their services? Do values such as fairness, honesty and openness accurately describe the business or school? Is the organisation corruption-free as regards financial management as well as the criteria used to select staff?

The Ethisphere Institute in New York has a think tank which studies business ethics. It compiles a list of the world's most ethical large companies. Of the more than 3000 listed companies, Toyota used to be in the top 100. No more. The 2010 list has demoted Toyota.

To its credit, Toyota has reread the management training manuals. As in the past, the company is once more listening intently to the customer. The company president, Akio Toyoda, has apologised to the American people in the US Congress. Here in South Africa the president of the local company has placed open letters of apology in the major newspapers. He's been open about the manufacturing problems and what will be done to rectify the situation.

What happened to Toyota can happen to any organisation. If you forget to listen and respond to your clients and customers, remember that there are negative consequences. When you trip up, your competitors (all schools compete with each other!) won't waste a moment to take advantage.

Schools work incredibly hard at building their reputations. An outstanding reputation can be trashed so quickly. To recover the good reputation of a school can be emotionally traumatic for everyone in it. Be a good listener. Act decisively and promptly on complaints. Then you'll find that everything does keep going right.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward



This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.



Handling a crisis



It was a typical Johannesburg school day morning. A mother was dropping off her eleven-year old son, Tristan, at the local primary school. As she drove her car slowly towards a side gate of the school, two people jumped out of a van parked nearby. They rushed towards the mother's car. Within seconds, pistols were pushed against the heads of the terrified mother and son. In less than a minute, the mother and son had been ordered out of the car. The hijackers had fled and the vehicles had merged into the Johannesburg traffic.

Talk radio picked up the hijacking incident and spread it across Gauteng before the first school lesson of the day. Rumours and questions started flying. How many cars had been hijacked? How many people had been shot? The school switchboard was flooded with calls from understandably anxious parents

No school is immune from the possibility of having to deal with a crisis. There are the natural disasters such as earthquakes, bush fires, floods, hurricanes and volcanic eruptions. Then there are the man-made ones. Recent examples in South Africa are: barricading of schools/offices to prevent entry or exit, torching of buildings, students and teachers being knifed, shot or being run over.

Schools have a huge responsibility to ensure security and safety for everyone who walks through their gates. Perhaps one of the tough realities that confront thousand of South African schools is insufficient funds to ensure optimal safety. Yet with limited resources a school can still do much to ensure the safety of children, parents and staff. Everyone needs to know what's expected of them in a crisis. Effective crisis management minimises physical damages as well as reduces hysterical reactions.

Here are eight suggestions on how to handle a crisis (Acknowledgements: N Flanagan & J Finger in *The management bible*; J Spark in *The Star* – 13 March 2010):

1 Prepare for an emergency – now!

Be prepared to deal with a crisis. Have an evacuation drill in place that's understood by everyone. Every staff member should have a copy which includes emergency contact numbers. Practise evacuation drills once a term (yes, there might be the odd staff member who'll grumble about it being a waste of time!). Make sure that the fire extinguishers and fire hoses are checked annually.

Put a crisis team in place. The members need to know their specific duties. Check that the sick rooms have suitable first-aid equipment. Ensure that contact details of the families of every child are readily available. (Cell phone and landline numbers need frequent updating). Insurance is a 'grudge purchase' but it's necessary. Comprehensive insurance will help a school deal financially with issues such as burglary, fire, theft, injuries in the classroom and on the sports fields.

2 Analyse the situation: Is it really a crisis?

Unfortunately, some folk really enjoy a crisis. 'Fire! Fire!' is a favourite refrain when a single lighted match is dropped. Ask these sorts of questions before going into crisis management mode:

- ◆ Is it really a crisis?
- ◆ If it is a crisis, who else needs to be involved?
- ◆ What resources do we have in place?
- ◆ What needs to be done?

3 Stay calm

In the first verse of Felicia Hemens's famous poem titled *Casabianca*, a twelve-year old English boy showed exceptional bravery. As a youngster in Horatio Nelson's naval squadron at the 1798 Battle of the Nile, Casabianca is immortalised thus:

The boy stood on the burning deck
Whence all but he had fled
The flame that lit the battle's wreck
Shone round him o'er the dead

Casabianca is an extreme example of remaining calm in a crisis. Obviously one is nervous in a crisis situation. Think positive. Know that you will find the resources to deal with the crisis. Use the nervousness to good effect, to move you to action. Work through a 'to do' list and prioritise what needs to be done.

4 Get the crisis team moving

It's now time for action. Team members have different roles to play. They know what procedures need to be followed. The team assists and directs others on how to deal with the crisis.

5 Ensure open communication

In a crisis people want to be told the truth about what happened. They also want to know what's being done to avoid it happening in the future.

To reduce panic, make sure that there's an 'official' spokesperson. That person needs to give information that is both honest and frank. That person's words need to be trusted.

Communication can be conveyed verbally in the classroom, over the intercom, in the staffroom or at a specially convened Assembly. Staff should be available at the switchboard to answer telephonic enquiries. Written communication can be done by means of circulars, newsletters, school website postings and SMS messages.

6 Provide post-trauma counselling

In the car hijacking incident mentioned above, Tristan and his mother were traumatised. Post-trauma counselling was urgently needed. Most schools have a counsellor on staff. There are times when the professional skills of the counsellor are insufficient for the level of trauma experienced. If specialist skills are needed, call such experts into the school.

7 Be a personal support to children and colleagues

A crisis in a school can cause long-term generalised anxiety. Be sensitive to that concern. The simple activity of face-to-face chatting about the issue helps. Victims unload their concerns. Ask the question, "What can we do for you?" Keep everyone informed about what's being done to deal with the crisis.

8 Evaluate actions and revise

During a crisis, monitor how things are progressing. An emergency plan helps you set out on the right path. The actual emergency doesn't go precisely according to the manual! Tweak the action to the unique situation that confronts you.

Once the crisis is over there's a need for a review. The crisis team should have a thorough debriefing. What happened and how was it handled? A ruthlessly honest review will highlight problems that were encountered. The review discussion will help improve, if necessary, ways of dealing with such a crisis in the future.



“Oh boy . . . another complaint!”

There isn't a teacher who hasn't been on the receiving end of a complaint. You might get the complaint via email, SMS or a note in the homework diary. If

you're somewhat unlucky, there might be an irritated parent at your classroom door at the start of a school day. Such a person wants to vent their anger even though you have a class waiting to be taught.

Should you be a member of the school management team, there's a strong likelihood that you deal with more complaints than the classroom teacher. A single example would be the Head of Department for sporting activities. That person is responsible for coordinating a team of coaches as well as a range of sporting fixtures for hundreds of youngsters. Hiccups happen.

What's your response when someone complains? Ignoring or running away from the complaint won't help! The complaint won't go away. A small complaint not addressed as soon as it's identified, grows. Huge damage can be done to the good name of the teacher and/or school.

Quality management theory views complaints as opportunities. Be grateful to those folk who point out defects. The theory states that for one person who complains, there are a staggering 26 more people with problems. The complainant tells 9 or 10 more people. (M Tracey in *Harvard Business Review*, January 1993). Satisfy one parent and you're satisfying many others. Complainants quite often point out things that have gone under the 'radar' of what's observed by the staff. Dealing effectively with complaints will help improve the school.

It's important that the school community is aware that you're a listening school . . . a school that listens to children and parents. Let them know the route to follow if they wish to raise concerns. This note appeared in the headmaster's weekly newsletter at a Johannesburg school:

ANY COMPLAINTS?!

I hope not! Yet if there are any complaints, suggestions or queries, please contact us. Speak to the teacher, Grade Facilitator, Head of Department, Deputy Head or myself. Every reasonable effort is made to respond to the concern on the same day or evening. As a staff, we are committed to giving your child a caring, quality education.

An insightful book on dealing with clients (remember that in the 21st century, parents and pupils are clients!) is Larry O'Sullivan's book titled *Client Service Excellence: the 10 Commandments* (Knowres Publishing: Randburg; R 253 at Exclusive Books).

The 10 commandments to client service excellence (O' Sullivan 2010: 138)

1	Positive and helpful attitude
2	Values
3	Passion for service
4	Go the extra mile
5	Be a world-class listener
6	Best advice, best value
7	Do what you say you are going to do
8	Stay in constant contact
9	Importance and uniqueness
10	Treat the client as you like to be treated

Complaints can sometimes be very unfair. There are individuals who get perverse pleasure in complaining. If it's done to you, listen politely. Firmly but not aggressively state the true facts of the situation. Remain calm even if the complainant gets 'difficult'. Sometimes it's a good idea to have another staff member present as a silent witness.

Don't let complaints depress you. A handful of parents complain and we forget about the overwhelming majority who have no complaints. One caring and esteemed headmaster has a simple solution when he wants to get complaints into perspective. He's able to slip out of the back door of his office and visit the pre-primary classes. There he's surrounded by the little ones who have no complaints whatsoever. Their smiling faces and warm welcomes remind him that – together with the rest of his staff – he's creating a wonderfully happy and high achieving school.



They're listening at



Howard Lazarus is the Managing Director of Look and Listen, the music store. The company has 25 branches, 500 full-time employees and a further 400 part-time staff. Annual turnover is in the region of R 600 million. Howard Lazarus is a very busy man. Yet he's never too busy to speak to any one of the thousands of customers who walk into his stores. If there's a complaint, he wants to hear about it personally. As Lazarus observes:

I prefer to hear from the customer directly to ensure that nothing gets swept under the carpet at store level.

If he gets to hear of a problem encountered at one store, it alerts him as to whether a similar problem could be at another store. This is an opportunity for the company to further improve the already very good customer service. During staff training, staff are reminded of the truism:

Customers are not interrupting your work; they are your work.

The training manager, Nick Kok, makes the point that in the traditional way of running a store, the manager is more involved in running the store. Very little time is spent interacting with the customers. At Look and Listen, the managers are required to spend a percentage of the day actively engaging with the customers.

In a school, senior management and teachers can be overwhelmed by the deluge of documentation, myriad meetings and piles of paperwork. They can help add quality to their schools by making sure that they do spend part of their listening to their customers ... the children, parents and staffroom colleagues.

Is a Suggestion Box such a good idea?

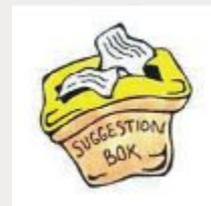
Some schools have suggestion boxes. There's an open invitation to write complaints as well as suggestions and put them in a box near the principal's office. The argument is that certain children and parents are too nervous to approach the principal directly. They are scared that they'd be victimised by the staff.

A counter argument is that a Quality school has open and honest communication. If a person has a concern,

the individual knows that they will be listened to in an empathic manner. Any form of victimisation is bullying and Quality school don't tolerate any form of bullying. Encourage face-to-face meetings so that all the facts can be put on the table.

There's a far better way of finding out what concerns folk than by having a suggestion box filled with anonymous notes. Make sure that there are sufficient meetings with the children, the parents and the staff.

Invitational leadership welcomes the sharing of ideas and suggestions on how to improve the school. By so doing, open communication is encouraged and gossiping discouraged.



“What should I do with the anonymous letter?”

You might have received an anonymous letter where a colleague is trashed or a defamatory letter is written about a child. What do you do? The solution is simple. Bin the letter!

Do the same to anonymous emails. Refuse to take phone calls from anonymous callers. Trying to act on an anonymous tip-off about, for example, a staff member is grossly unfair. That staff member is put under suspicion. It can damage relationships amongst staff. If the school claims to treat everyone with honesty and fairness, then 'walk the talk' of such values.

Quality is free

If you would like free download material on leadership and management topics, please visit these sites:

www.MySchool.co.za

Click 'Quality Education News' on the home page. Back numbers are available.

www.saqi.co.za

The Education section has all the back numbers of QEN as well as material that is on sale. Details on how to order the Caxton-sponsored book, *Making quality education happen: a how-to guide for every teacher* are provided.

Training programmes

SAQI has a range of leadership and management programmes. They are adapted to the specific requirements of a school. Programmes are done in all provinces. Poor schools are sponsored. For more details, please contact either:

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