

# Leadership Shares

— Volume 2 —

10 School Leaders  
Share the Journey  
of Building High  
Performance Schools



Leadership  
Capability



High Performance  
Teaching Teams



Positive  
School Culture

- Justin Washington
- Tania Angus
- Scott Cage
- Tracy Egan
- Ray Clarke
- Trudy Graham
- Jorgen Neilson
- Jan Carr
- Matt Newell
- Kate Russ

Edited by Dr Pete Stebbins, PhD



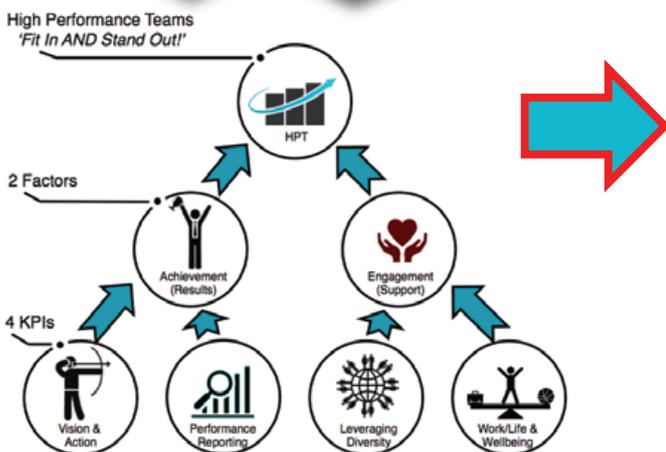
# High Performance Teams

## Maximise Staff & Student Outcomes\*

“Accomplishing the maximum impact on student learning depends on teams of teachers working together effectively...”  
 Prof. John Hattie

### The Highest Level of HPT - Level 5 Teams

HPT Level	Value* (Focus)	Confidence (Driver)	Challenge (Approach)
Level 5 Elite HPT	10x (Leverage)	100% (Legacy)	Super-Stretch (& Coach)
Level 4 Adv HPT	5x (Strategic)	90% (Growth)	Stretching (& Coach)
Level 3 HPT	2x (Collaborative)	75% (Understanding)	Improving (& Mentor)
Level 2 Functional	1x (Constructive)	50% (Acceptance)	Systems (Manage)
Level 1 Dysfunctional	-2x (Destructive)	0% (Distrust)	Structures (Manage)



**Our Mission: Every Team in Every School is a High Performance Team**

## Transform Your School with HPT!

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**Team Development Programs: 4 KPIs**

**Building High Performance Teams: 6 Skills**

**School Transformation: Train x Trainer**

### Getting Started: HPT PD Sessions & DIY Activities

Many schools begin the journey by participating in one of 10 staff PD sessions offered by HPTschools or by watching some of the online videos or reading one of the HPT Level Up books or workbooks.

**Foundations: Team Development Programs** HPT Team Development Programs run over 12 months and begin with 2 days of Foundation Workshops where teams develop their knowledge of HPT and develop their team strategy and 12-month HPT Action Plan.

**Intermediate: HPT Leadership Skills Masterclass** HPT Leadership Skills Masterclass is a 2-day course for Team Leaders who have completed, at a minimum, the HPT Introductory Workshops. We cover 6 key modules you will need to be able to effectively facilitate the implementation of HPT in your team.

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Individual and group based coaching is available for school leaders at every stage of their HPT journey. The aim of HPT Leadership Coaching is to provide confidential, expert & customised support to fast-track leader, team and school success by levelling up each of the 4 KPIs of HPT.

\*Kerr, A., Stebbins, P., De Young, B., Stebbins, D., & Rijnbout, J. (2016) High Performance Schools Case Study: West Key State School Achievement and Engagement (2016). Australian Educational Leader, 38 (2), p. 18-22

**Find out more:**  
[HPTschools.com](http://HPTschools.com)

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- Jan Carr
- Matt Newell
- Nick Burnett

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# With Special Thanks To ...



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## Introduction

# Extraordinary School Leaders

## What They Focus On Grows!

*“What you focus on grows, what you think about expands, and what you dwell upon determines your destiny. Clarity breeds mastery. And the goals you set drive the actions you’ll take.”*

– Robin S. Sharma

The presentation concluded and the question was asked: *“So after all your research on school performance, culture and leadership, what is the secret to success in building a High Performance School?”*

I paused to reflect on the hundreds of schools and thousands of leaders I had worked with over the years and then replied: *“Extraordinary school leaders have an uncanny knack of being able to do the right work, at the right time, in the right way...”*

*“... I believe a good school leader knows what the right work is; a great school leader can master the art of timing; but an extraordinary school leader takes it one step further and understands the importance of ‘method’ – different ways of leading transformational change. They flexibly adjust both the approach and the amount of scaffolding required to both maximise school improvement AND optimise the wellbeing and performance of staff and students.”*

### **“Right work, right time, right way” and...?**

On the long drive home, I was reflecting on the various conversations I had with school leaders over the course of the conference. I was a bit unsettled by the comments made by one of the participants who was on the verge of quitting her role as a school leader – “burnt out” as she described it – because there were too many “important” priorities that needed to be managed simultaneously. She agreed with the concept of “right work, right time, right way” but expressed doubts about how any modern school leader could achieve this with so many competing demands...



It is true that school leadership requires the juggling of many competing priorities – we often describe it as “keeping all the

plates spinning”. However, in all the in depth school leader interviews I had done, none had complained of this problem. Instead, each leader had explained – often in very strong language – what their key priorities and goals were and how much focus they, and their staff invested on achieving these specific goals. Perhaps the other ingredient of extraordinary school leadership was their ability to **“Focus”** as they juggled competing priorities common to all school leaders...

In Volume 2 of Leadership Shares, you will read the leadership journey of 10 extraordinary school leaders – leaders who, despite their imperfections, constantly strive to do the right work, at the right time and in the right way to build High Performance Schools – places where every student and every staff member can flourish. You’ll see their humanness – their early career learnings, the mistakes they made, the setbacks they have overcome. You’ll see their fierce determination to focus and do what is right for the betterment of their staff and students often risking their professional reputation with their peers who would otherwise “play it safe” and not buffer their schools from the whirlwind of increasing change across the education system. You’ll also see their fragility and the emotional impact – the stress and strain of school leadership – and their ways of

coping and going the distance – not burning out and maintaining a vigilant focus on being able to do the right work, at the right time and in the right way.

You'll read about Justin Washington, an extraordinary primary school and local leader of his indigenous community, who shares his journey and offers some powerful insights into working in rural and remote communities including some very practical ideas to engage disadvantaged and disinterested students and their families. You'll see this same passion for inclusion and engagement in Tania Angus, another extraordinary primary school leader working with "at risk" students and families in regional Queensland, who also works tirelessly to support her staff as they manage numerous complex and challenging situations.

The challenges in regional and rural education increase in complexity as students enter high school. Scott Cage is a very experienced high school principal with a deep passion for helping every student succeed and knows firsthand the challenges of running a large regional high school and the importance of simple and effective communication systems to keep staff in the loop and up-to-date so they can maximise their focus on quality teaching and learning. Ray Clarke is another inspiring high school leader who, with quiet determination, patience and persistence has achieved an incredible school transformation in a large regional high school despite the challenges of high staff turnover and many inexperienced staff.

Beyond the staffing and systems complexity of the high school environment are the challenges of student attendance and behaviour. High school principal Matt Newell knows firsthand the need for more flexible approaches to learning and student engagement, pioneering the use of flexi-spaces and other innovative practices to maximise learning for every student.

The challenges of maximising learning for every student are even more complex in the special education sector where the additional complexity of intellectual and physical disabilities must be factored into the individual learning plans for each student. Principal, Kate Russ shares her journey leading special schools and the importance of maintaining the energy, passion and enthusiasm in her staff as

they manage the complex needs of their students. As the focus on inclusive education continues to grow, supporting students with disabilities and families with complex needs forms an increasingly larger component of school leadership responsibilities in many mainstream Primary Schools. Principal, Tracey Egan has achieved some outstanding results in inclusive education within a very large urban primary school as well as achieving tremendous results in building high performance teaching teams. Investing the time and energy in "team based systems and cultures" has also been a key success factor for Jorgen Neilson who leads another very large primary school with a strong inclusion focus.

As we look to the future, the increasing focus on inclusive education is just one of a number of major transformative changes school leaders will need to manage. STEM driven curriculum changes, digital classrooms, social emotional learning, new formats for accelerated and flexible learning are just some of the many changes ahead. Former Principal and now Assistant Regional Director, Jan Carr is deeply focused on assisting schools adapt their programs to suit 21st century learners – students who will need to thrive in an increasingly VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world.

Leading schools rapidly undergoing such massive, future focused change presents a raft of challenges for school leaders. Former principal and now Assistant Regional Director, Trudy Graham is increasingly focused on developing effective models of collaboration among school leaders – using Principal forum groups as a powerful lever of support and change in building future ready schools that enable every student and every staff member to flourish.

It is through reading the leadership journeys of these 10 extraordinary school leaders you will see that they, like every other school leader, face a never ending list of important priorities. However, unlike their peers, these extraordinary leaders have developed an incredible ability to focus – not only to analyse and identify the right work to do, but to also get this work done at the right time and in the right way!

Read On!

**Dr Pete Stebbins, PhD**

*“The reality is all parents (indigenous and non-indigenous alike) want the best for their children. If school staff, including the Principal, are genuinely engaged with all families then the gap can be narrowed and even closed.”*

– Justin Washington,  
Principal, Surat P-10 State School

# Leadership Shares #1

## Justin Washington

### Closing The Gap in Rural & Remote Education

*When it comes to understanding the challenges and opportunities of education in rural and remote settings, Justin Washington is a very smart guy indeed! As the Principal of Surat State School and a member of the local indigenous community, Justin has a deep understanding of what it takes to build a rural and remote High Performance School where all staff and students can flourish.*

*In this edition of HPS Leadership Shares, Justin shares his school leadership journey and some very practical insights and strategies to help educators build positive relationships in rural and remote communities to close the gap and ensure that each and every child succeeds...*



#### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Teachers working within any community, but more specifically rural and remote settings, can have a significant impact in the community far beyond the classroom. As I have lived, worked and grown up in rural settings, from observations and my own personal experiences, a teacher who shows a genuine interest in the community will often have greater community support and respect.

An exceptional teacher in my opinion is one who takes the time to develop professional relationships throughout the school and also engages with the broader community via sporting groups and/or other groups not necessarily involving students. A school is often judged on the community engagement displayed by school staff including the Principal. If the school leadership and staff are community minded and engaged throughout the

community, then the community is supportive and speaks highly of the school.

It is vitally important for teachers to not be “yes people”, because work-life balance becomes an issue for some. Often, communities rely on the professionals within to coordinate and lead community groups. Balance and being able to say “no” to ensure you don’t over commit is important.

#### 2. The Big Issues

**Q: What are the big issues in education for rural and remote communities in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: My passion is rural and remote education. I believe our students deserve and should be experiencing the same successes as those in bigger centres. My challenge is to continue to offer opportunities and inspire our students moving into secondary school to stay rather than moving off to boarding schools.

Maintaining numbers in enrolment in the secondary school is important to be able to continue to provide specialist classes, which allows for the opportunities to be experienced by our students and community.

### 3. Your Brief History of Time

**Q: Give us a career snapshot. What work roles did you have prior to becoming a teacher? What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into leadership (which schools did you work in along the way)?**

A: As a child and student, my school experiences weren't the greatest. Growing up, my parents insisted that I had to have a job before I left school. I was determined to find a job so I could get out of school. Throughout my secondary school life, I worked in many laboring roles on holidays and weekends. Jobs included various unskilled farm and seasonal work on cotton farms around my home town in rural Queensland.

The passion for education entered my life as a young adult while I was working as a support worker at a State High School in western Queensland. I felt that I could become a role model for indigenous youth if I became a teacher. Five years of external study via the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) while working full-time to support my young family was endured and completed. Family and my desire to provide a stable and fruitful life for them became the key motivation for my study and completion.

In 2006, I started as a classroom teacher within the community which I lived, worked and studied in. My early teaching experiences were challenging but very rewarding. After four years in the classroom, I was ready to relocate as the work and community complexities were changing and having a negative impact on my community perspective. This presented my first leadership opportunity. My principal at the time encouraged me to consider taking on a Teaching Principal role at a nearby school. He felt that a change locally would be rewarding and challenging enough without leaving the area.

He was right. Three-and-a-half years as a Teaching Principal was sensational and highly rewarding in regards to my leadership and personal journey. As my children grew older, the need to seek a promotion to a larger school which catered for my older children in secondary became more evident. Promotion to my current P-10 school setting occurred six years ago. As a non-teaching principal, I am thoroughly enjoying the leadership challenges that are presented on a daily basis. I am living the dream!

### 4. Early Career: Advice To My Younger Self

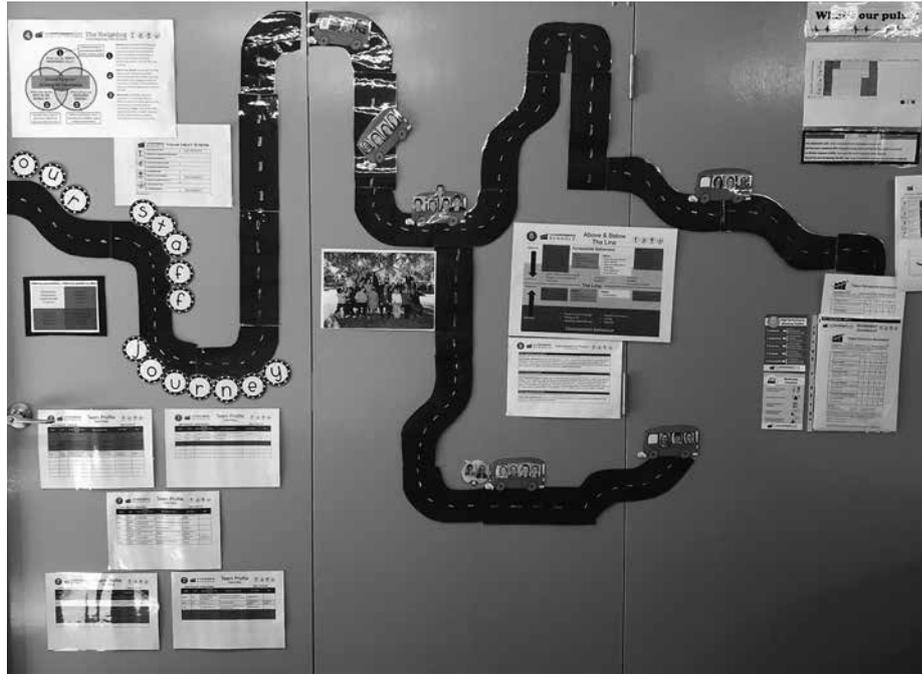
**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today?**

A: Developing authentic relationships with school and community members has been the key to my success. Upon reflection, I don't think I would change a thing. Every experience has provided the learnings that have allowed me to be where I am today.

### 5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes

**Q: How did your career progress to the role you had today? Have you had any setbacks which ultimately created subsequent success?**

A: As crazy as this sounds, I can't identify any setbacks that have impacted my career progression. Timing and knowing when the time was right to make a move and take the next step has allowed me to get the permanent promotions that I applied for without missing out. I have never been desperate enough to apply for any positions because they were available and vacant. Timing was key.



## 6. On Building High Performance Schools

**Q: What have been some of the successes and challenges in building a High Performance School? How do you enable your own leadership team to create High Performance Teams throughout the school? How do you use meeting cycles and dashboards to maximise staff and student performance and wellbeing?**

A: Developing a High Performance School has been a leadership journey and challenge for myself and school team. Development and maintenance of a high performance culture and mentality throughout the school has been exciting and challenging. Our wellbeing data monitored by our weekly pulse check-ins influences next steps in our school culture and development agenda. Culture and wellbeing has been our main priority over the past eight months.

We have recently established HPTs for a number of areas within the school to enhance autonomy and specific focus groups. The view is that this approach will allow ownership to be taken over specific areas of the school with a continued focus on our core purpose and improvement agenda. This will then improve wellbeing and work-life balance as teams are responsible for their own space and monitoring of the improvement priorities relevant to them, rather than leadership controlling and directing all

action. Intentional collaboration throughout the school has been influencing positive change.

## 7. Improving Education Outcomes For Indigenous Students

**Q: What are the main challenges that need to be addressed by schools to improve outcomes for indigenous students? What are some of the misconceptions teachers and school leaders must overcome to be more effective working with indigenous communities? What advice would you give teachers and principals new to a rural/remote community?**

A: I often hear people mention that indigenous families don't value education. This is usually due to a student's behaviour, attendance or engagement. The reality is all parents (indigenous and non-indigenous alike) want the best for their children. If school staff including the Principal are genuinely engaged with all families then the gap can be narrowed and even closed. Relationships are key.

The value of education is often implicated by the image that is put out to communities by schools. My advice to teachers and Principals is to be present and active community members, learn the political situations within the community before aligning

to specific groups, listen and don't be judgemental, everyone is on a journey. Be real.

## 8. Memorable Moments

**Q: What have been some of the memorable moments in your career?**

A: As a parent, teacher and Principal, it is always humbling to know that every effort you put into something a reward is going to be received by someone somewhere. The thought around the gift of an opportunity or knowledge that you can provide someone is always encouraging. As a leader, a thank you or a well done are few and far between. Leadership is often lonely, but the true joy comes from the belief that we are making a difference.

## 9. Personal Inspo

**Q: What message about schools and education would you put on a gigantic billboard that everyone could see?**

A: Know your purpose! What impact have you made today?

## 10. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you “stay the course” during periods of change and uncertainty?**

A: If the purpose is clear, the course is clear. If the task is complex, then rest and a break from the task is what I use to re-align and re-focus. Time to reflect is usually a sound solution when I become unfocused. Separating work and personal life is very important to me. Having my third space and down time away from work is a must.

## 11. Sliding Doors: Into The Future

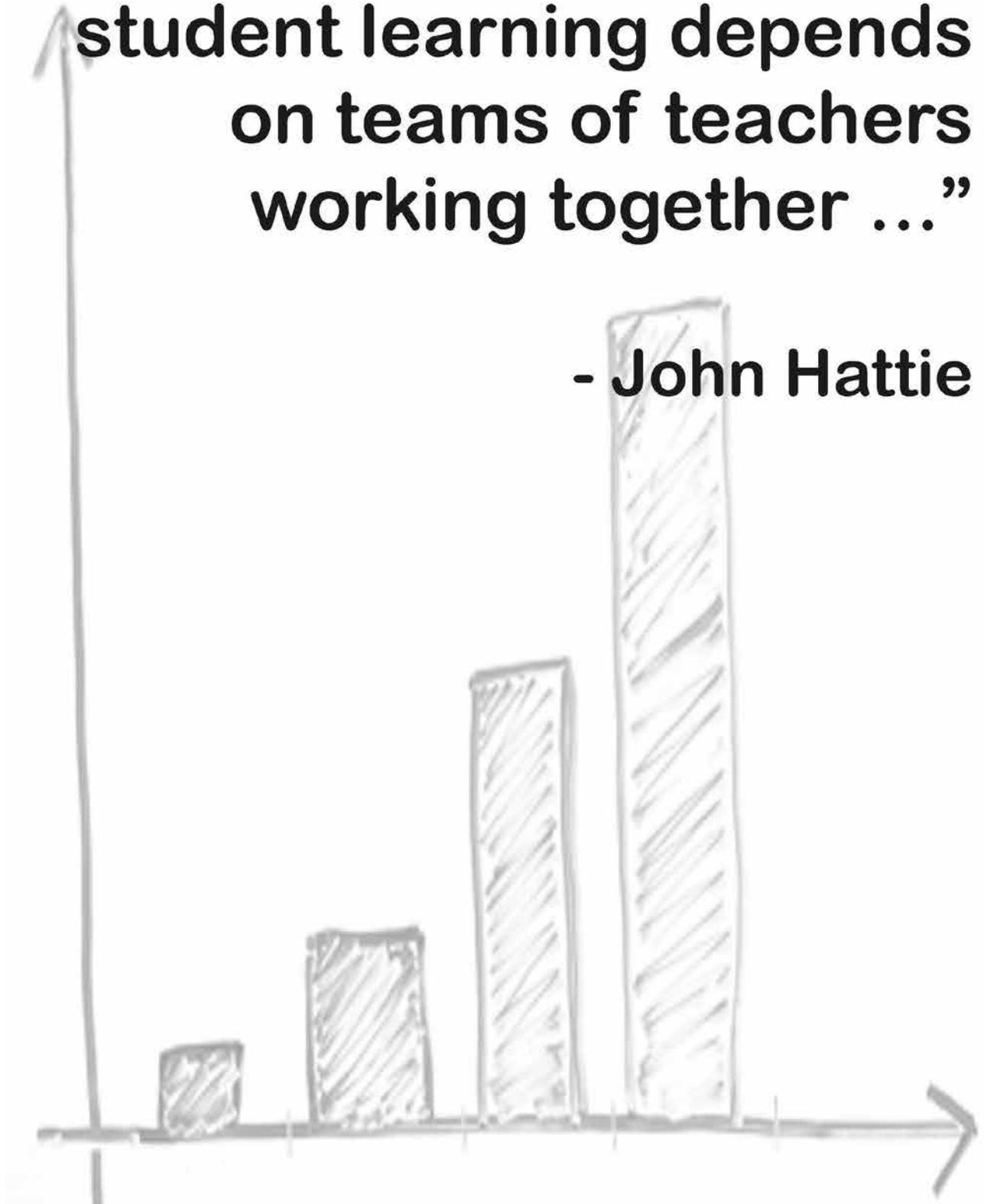
**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure in rural and remote education?**

A: Technology and connectedness to the world without leaving our communities is becoming more evident. This space will be greatly enhanced and engagement will be achieved as a result.

Personal contact will be less and therefore the opportunity to interact with others will be enhanced as technology will provide a platform for educational engagement inside and outside of our community.

**“Accomplishing the maximum impact on student learning depends on teams of teachers working together ...”**

**- John Hattie**



*“The altruistic motivations that many educators are driven by means we are at risk of overly harsh self-criticism, excessive self-expectations and prone to unhelpful rescuing behaviour – often to our own detriment.”*

– Tania Angus,  
Principal, Newtown State School

## Leadership Shares #2

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# Tania Angus

## Building High Performance Teaching Teams

*Maya Angelou famously said that people won't always remember what you said but they will always remember how you made them feel.*

*Tania Angus is an inspiring school leader who is building a legacy of care and respect among the staff, students and parents at Newtown State School in Toowoomba, Queensland. In this HPS Leadership Shares article, Tania shares her leadership journey from student to teacher to school leader and the important life lessons that have shaped her leadership journey, as well as her insights and strategies in building High Performance Teaching Teams.*



### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Absolutely! When I reflect on my own schooling experience, it was the positive impact of my music teacher, Ms Wiseman at Centenary Heights State High School in the early '80s, that contributed to me pursuing a career in teaching. Thanks Ms Wiseman! Whilst I did enjoy the curriculum area being taught, it was more about the way she made me feel in the learning process and how she built a professional relationship between the student and teacher that was supportive, encouraging and corrective. This created a sense of reciprocal respect amongst everyone in the class, which resulted in an enjoyable learning environment where relationship and conversation were valued.

Ms Wiseman's personal and professional attributes in terms of her behaviour, her tone of voice and her attitude towards us were one and the same giving a

sense of equal power, not power over. This genuine and authentic manner made it clear that she liked what she did and liked us; she was interested in us, as people, not just as students. The experience of reciprocal respect with my teacher as a young student, laid the foundation for the type of teacher I wanted to be and now, the type of school leader I aspire to be. A leader whose relationships and conversations are based on mutual respect as the platform for the way we work so that children, families and staff develop a connection to our school and that their time with us brings positive experiences and fond memories.

Now in my current role as Principal of Newtown State School in Toowoomba, Queensland, I witness teachers providing excellence in presenting curriculum and pedagogy that is flexibly adjusted and skilfully differentiated to respond to the diverse needs of learners everyday. However, with changing societal contexts, the impact of technology and the range of family dynamics and capabilities, teachers are more than ever having a larger impact in society,

again through the relationships with parents, carers and extended family members that are pivotal in supporting the individual student and their family.

As teachers develop their understanding of a student, they can often become the “connector” to enable students to pursue whatever it is that needs to be accessed to propel their learning, from assisting a parent in arranging a hearing test to entering a writing competition. As the relationship develops, teachers willingly seek out and seize opportunities for their students that might not elsewhere be available to them, impacting the trajectory of their future and their capability to make their mark on society and fulfil their lifelong dreams.

## 2. What Are The Issues That Keep You Up At Night?

**Q: What are the big issues for education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: There are many challenges school leaders face in understanding and supporting students. This includes walking the fine line of supporting the needs of an individual within the context of a class, being attuned to staff wellbeing and exercising good judgement and discernment to provide a safe learning and work environment for all.

The altruistic motivations many educators are driven by means we are at risk of overly harsh self-criticism, excessive self-expectations and prone to unhelpful rescuing behaviour – often to our own detriment.

### Big Issues:

- The prevalence of mental health issues (diagnosed and undiagnosed) in children, parents and staff that is evident right now and having a centralised system that is agile enough to respond urgently to emergent needs when considering inclusive education, industrial requirements, resourcing (adequate and timely) and staff capability. I believe this is an area that requires a lot more innovation and responsiveness as legislative demands and social norms have changed so much faster than the system has adapted.

- Unfortunately, violent and abusive behaviour of students and parents that can make one feel vulnerable and unsafe in their workplace. Again there is a need, not just for increased personal resilience but also system level responses, supports and safeguards that reduce these risks and provide alternative pathways for parents and students to choose when they are angry or distressed.

### Emerging Challenges

- These big issues are with us right now. The emerging challenge on the horizon, if not already with us, is staff wellbeing. Despite seeing passionate staff everyday who continue to want to do the best job they can and going to extraordinary lengths to support their students, I also see highly skilled, experienced and resilient people who are being worn down and disheartened by what they are managing on a daily basis. People who absolutely love what they do, but if not for their passion, their friends and family and our school team, who at the end of the day all support each other by leaving a chocolate, giving a hug, or finding humour in a ridiculous situation, might otherwise walk away from a career that does bring so many rewards when you get to work with children, who are our future.

## 3. Your Brief History of Time

**Q: Give us a snapshot of your career to date. What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into school leadership?**

A: My teaching career commenced thirty years ago after studying a Diploma of Teaching with a specialisation in Early Childhood Education at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education (now the University of Southern Queensland). Whilst studying, I also held a part-time job at K-Mart which provided the training ground for interacting with a diverse range of people of varying temperaments that has proved useful in building my tolerance, patience and resilience in the world of education.

I commenced my career in an Early Education Class at a three-teacher school, Amiens State School on

the Granite Belt, ironically at a location where my grandmother used to ride her horse to and from Stanthorpe. This historical family link immediately created a connection to my new occupation, the students and their families and the broader school community. After a year, I was the recipient of a forced transfer to Biloela. I completed my Bachelor of Education (USQ) and a few years later a Master of Education (QUT) with a thesis that researched that Social-Emotional development of a Student who was non-verbal within the preschool setting.

Those early years of teaching felt lonely in some respects. Whilst well and truly an adult and preservice training completed, that feeling of being totally responsible for the education (not so much wellbeing as it is now) of a group of children, made you suddenly feel grown-up! Add in moving away from home, living with an unknown roommate and finding your way in a new community, it was easy to feel alone despite being around people all the time. Creating a life outside of an all-consuming job is important and in those early years, joining a couple of sporting teams and the gym, helped create some connections outside of the classroom.

The catalyst for my move into leadership was probably my disposition which was instilled in me from a young age; a disposition to be open to new challenges and opportunities, even if it was something I didn't see myself doing! This disposition has resulted, by the most part, in my career seeking me rather than me seeking a direction. I have, however, always felt drawn to working in spaces that allow me to maintain a strong connection to children.

I am currently Principal of Newtown State School, a role I have fulfilled for almost three years. Prior to that, I was Principal of Withcott State School for four years following six years as Head of Curriculum. I was also Acting Deputy Principal at Drayton and Highfields State Schools in my career path. I've worked across a range of school contexts, in both rural and regional settings and in a number of teaching, leadership, advisory and mentoring roles across the Darling Downs South West and Central Queensland Regions.

Sharing this personal story highlights my value in making connections with the view that when you feel



connected to something or someone, you become emotionally invested. Strong connections can linger lifelong and they drive my sense of purpose in being a part of something that has the potential to alter the trajectory of a young person's life. As a leader, I aim to make connections with and understand the stories behind the students, their families and the staff to provide a mutually respectful school context that is engaging and purposeful, and enables students to become confident and creative thinkers.

My early career as a preschool teacher-in-charge enabled the development of leadership skills for directing and managing a school. In the years that followed, my diverse roles as a District Preschool Curriculum Advisor, Smart Classrooms Mentor and Project Officer with a Technology, Maths and Science Centre for Excellence, enabled me to develop capability in quickly building relationships, coaching and working with a range of professionals in varied school, business and tertiary contexts.

I now hold a position on the Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP) Management Committee and prior to that was President of the Toowoomba Branch for three years. I value the opportunity that involvement with QASSP provides, whether it be as a member, as a member of the branch executive or on management committee to

have input to, and advocate around, a whole range of issues that affect daily work in schools. I appreciate the prospect of influencing the educational agenda at a policy level that being involved in QASSP provides, as a highly respected professional association. I think being a member of QASSP as an opportunity to contribute to the broader education agenda, utilising my skills as a professional educator in creating opportunities for children, through education.

#### 4. Early Career: Advice To My Younger Self

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today? What advice do you wish you had ignored?**

##### Leadership Learnings

- Just prior to commencing my first Acting Principal role, I engaged in the Emerging Principals Program run by the Queensland Education Leadership Institute with a number of experienced principals sharing their insights. One of the standout comments I heard from a Principal which still resonates with me is, *“in the multitude of experiences and situations you encounter as a Principal, it’s important to be yourself”*. It still resonates because in a position that is judged, commented upon, often in the public and media arenas, there is opinion as to how a Principal should “be” The comment *“be yourself”*, gives permission to maintain that sense of self and not be entirely defined by a stereotype of your occupation.
- It’s all in the relationship... you can’t create connection without relationship. Relationship sets you up for the most optimal outcome, even in difficult situations.

##### Advice To Younger Self

- Observe, listen, but above all trust yourself... “you’ve got this!”

##### Advice to Ignore

- I think all advice can be useful, even if it’s to help in clarifying your own thinking. I do wish I’d challenged those with the opinion that “play” is not of value in early childhood education. We do need to embrace the importance of “play” as an age-appropriate pedagogy.

#### 5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes

**Q: How did your career progress to the role you had today? Have you had any setbacks which ultimately created subsequent success? What has become more important and what has become less important to your leadership?**

- Whilst I was Head of Curriculum in my previous school (Withcott State School), I had the opportunity to act in the Principal role on many and increasing occasions as the Principal was transitioning towards retirement. A six-month stint as an acting Deputy Principal in another school, also positioned me well for aspiring to Principal.
- I really don’t see myself as having experienced setbacks as such, but I have had some extremely negative experiences (e.g., abusive parents) which ended up providing great learning and growth and ultimately, a more positive and productive relationship.
- More important – relationships, less important – trying to satisfy the “squeaky wheels” and realising you can’t!

#### 6. On Building High Performance Schools

**Q: What have been some of the successes and challenges in building a high performance school? How do you get teams working effectively within cohorts and collaborating across the school? How do your meeting cycles and dashboards maximise school performance?**

##### Successes:

The enactment of the school’s vision and the clear articulation of just a few priorities, all of which are

## MEETING PROTOCOLS

- + Establish Session Moderator and role
- + **Yellow/Red Cards**
  - = Stay on track/Move onto next item
  - + Red = Stop the group and refocus to the issue at hand
- + One Word Barometer & Conversation Starter
  - +?
- + Staff Drops
- + Agreed above/below the line behaviours (on table)
- + Moderator check-in at end

aligned and reflected in the allocation of resources set the scene for teams working towards common goals.

**The use of the High Performance Teams (HPT) tools** (meeting protocols, moderator cards, meeting template and update tool) has transformed the ways that teams work and meetings are conducted within the school, giving rise to disciplined dialogue, moderated yet heard voices and agreed protocols. The one word barometer gives everyone in the room a sense of the lens through which a person is participating in the meeting and the conversation starter helps members connect with and learn about each other.

**Building teacher capability using the Learning Sprint (Agile Schools) process.** This process draws on the collective knowledge and experience of teachers to work as a team in an intentional collaboration model that focuses on a small, specific aspect or outcome to improve with a small number of kids... and by being precise in the pedagogy, increase the impact of that learning. Learning sprints are simply a system for improving an outcome that you're already working on for a group of kids you already teach.

The Learning Sprint process is based on the premise that the best way to make an impact on student learning is not just to focus on the gaps in student learning, but also the gaps in teacher expertise. When teachers learn how to teach something better with precision practice as part of the 4-week sprint process, they have built their capability to do that again and again into the future. It's about these small steps of incremental growth that accumulate over time and will give us all a dopamine hit, not

Sprint Recording Sheet: Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Define	Understand	Design	Sprint
What outcomes do we want to improve, and for which learners? <b>BOULDER</b> Reading Comprehension	Why aren't these students making the desired progress? • Knowledge Gap: Read text resource into - CAFÉ Reading, First Step, Reading folder • Proficiency Gap: Opportunities in groups already provided Focus on oral retells • Engage with learners: SAY: Require prompting and questioning to elicit responses DO: Rely on memory and promoting THINK: Hurry up and ask me a question FEEL: Some reluctant students pressed when they answer questions Summary: Reflectance and prompting required indicates that students do not have the skills they need for success	How can we better design learning to support student progression? 3 teachers trialling 'Rope Retell' from CAFÉ Reading Assess - How will we know it is working? Pre and post video recording of student retells	Review What did we learn and what should we do next? FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS ON IMPACT AND EVIDENCE. Weekly (about 15 minutes): • What's working? • What's not? • What's getting in the way? Full cycle (teacher evidence) • What did you do? • Who did it work for? • Who didn't it work for? • What did we learn? • What do we do next?

### Newtown State School Teacher Update Tool

**Priority Update**

On Track	Off Track
Classroom routines and expectations clear	Marking maths assessment task
Learning Sprint define, understand & design steps completed	Running records
ICP planning	English unit

**Successes and Challenges**

		Description	Impact	Action to take
Successes	Last 5 weeks	Positive classroom culture established	Students working well together	Continue fruit break meetings and brain breaks
	Next 5 weeks	Use of pACE to de-escalate situations	Student calmed quickly and remained in classroom	Continue to use pACE and remember not to react from personal emotion
Challenges	Last 5 weeks	High needs student in class	Classroom dynamics	Continue to build relationships and revisit classroom expectations to pre-teach expected behaviours
	Next 5 weeks	Complete running records	Clearer understanding of students reading needs	Complete 3 running records per week

**Hot Issues**

Description of Issue	Why is this an issue	Action/Solution
Student absenteeism impacting on completing assessment tasks	Trying to find time to catch up with these students	

only as our students experience success but in the joy of developing greater levels of mastery in our teaching craft.

**Challenges:**

The challenge initially is in staying true to the course and the cause and in being rigorous in the application of the tools (Meeting protocols, Update Tool, Learning sprint process). With persistence and the tools become part of the way of working, they become subtle, yet powerful and allow the disciplined dialogue to occur.

**Enabling Leadership Team:** Every member of the leadership team needs to be clear on their role, the tasks they are responsible for and the areas they lead. The use of coaching models and Common Planning Times (year level teams, embed sprints), Committees/Teams, using HPT protocols

**Teaching Teams Working Effectively:** The effective use of Improvement Sprints and HPT Protocols as outlined above.

**Meeting Cycles and Dashboards:** Again, through more of the above, use of the Mid-Term update tool – teachers reflect on what has worked well in the last 5 weeks and where to next.

## 7. Influential Leaders & Mentors

**Q: Who do you think of when you hear the words “Influential School Leader”? Have mentors played a significant role in your career? What characteristics do you find most helpful in a mentor?**

**Influential School Leader:** Mr Paul Williamson, a Principal who I worked with back in the late nineties at Highfields State School. His calm and considered approach, wealth of knowledge and ability to see the big picture yet remain true to his “why”, inspired me.

**Mentors:** Yes, in subtle ways, they might not even know... currently I view Mr Ken Green, Principal at Harristown State High School as a mentor, though not through a formal arrangement. Again, his calm, considered and respectful approach is admired. He is someone who gives you full time and attention when he engages with you. I remember when I took up an Acting Deputy Principal position at another school, he sent me an email to welcome me into the cluster. I’ve also remembered how it made me feel... to be part of a new group when I didn’t even know him at that point. Nine years later, he still inspires as he demonstrates such commitment to rigorously implementing some principles based on the premises of the Breakthrough Coach to have a career and a life.

**Characteristics:** They listen, are considered in their communication, and every word, movement and action is representative of who they are and their “why” is clear.

## 8. Strange But True...

**Q: What have been some of the more memorable and unusual moments in your career?**

**A:** The zeal and energy of young children is still so infectious to be around. Their natural curiosity and demeanour to explore is so fascinating to watch and be invited into. A memorable moment, particularly in working with young children has been when they’ve lost their first tooth at school. Some are so excited, some are surprised and some are upset when it’s gone down the wrong way! It’s so exciting to be witness to a child who has lost their first tooth at school!

Many years ago, a young student saw me leaving my classroom and he said to me, “where are you going?” I replied, “home” to which he asked, “don’t you live here?!” The look on their faces when they realise that you’re a real person with a real life is priceless!

## 9. Personal Inspo: Favourite Books & Quotes

**Q: What are your most gifted and or recommended leadership books to others? What message about schools and education would you put on a gigantic billboard that everyone could see?**

**Book:** Last Christmas, my husband gave me, *Start with Why?* by Simon Sinek. Yes, I do have everything! This leadership book is written for anyone who wants to inspire others, or to be inspired. I’d recommend it as a book for digging deeper into the importance of keeping the “why” of an organisation front and centre, year after year.

*The Third Space* by Dr Adam Fraser is another “gift” I’ve received that I recommend for leaders. Adam outlines a framework that has been extremely useful in utilising the third space; the space between meetings, events and experiences that allows you to review, rest and reset... it’s a gem.

**Billboard:** “Every child matters.”

**Quotes:** Be Yourself... Everyone Else is Taken.

They're all precious gems



**Something Else... Inspo...:** I find using metaphors useful to convey what I'm trying to say and in setting the scene for this year, I likened our students to gemstones; unique and from all corners of the world... that what's on the outside is only part of the story and when you take the time to see what's inside, their shine, sparkle and beautiful colour is revealed. I see our job as to walk alongside our students; our precious gems, to reveal their colour, shine and sparkle and my hope is that they will help others to do the same.

## 10. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you “stay the course” during lengthy periods of change and uncertainty?**

- Breathe! Currently I am looking into meditation and how it might benefit me as a daily practice.
- Being conscious in my “third space” and working through that process.

- Go and walk out in playground, spend some time in a classroom – getting amongst the kids and my talented staff inspires me to keep going.
- Get more sleep.
- Exercise – maintain the routine or get back into it – run, gym.
- Spend some time with my family.
- Have a ritual that is just for me (e.g., Saturday parkrun followed by coffee and breakfast at my favourite Café).
- Talking with family, connecting with colleagues.
- Ask for help – not easy for me...
- Find the funny side and have a side-splitting laugh!
- Staying focused on why I do what I do!
- Sheer determination!

## 11. Sliding Doors: Into The Future

**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure of the education system?**

- Positioning teaching as a worthwhile, rewarding and important career of choice.
- Positioning school leadership as job that is doable.
- Agility of the system to respond to the emergent needs of schools – especially teacher wellbeing, complex parent and student needs and supporting changes in curriculum.
- Doing all that is possible to ensure safe working and learning environments so that every staff member is positively challenged and enjoys their work AND each and every student succeeds!

*“The ‘Golden Thread’ of alignment is very important. Developing performance reporting systems that make it easier for everyone to be in the loop and up to date – giving staff more time to focus on their students and their teaching.”*

**– Scott Cage,  
Principal, Mirani State High School**

## Leadership Shares #3

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# Scott Cage

## The Golden Thread in High Performance Schools

*Scott Cage is an outstanding school leader in terms of his passion, commitment and drive to build the Highest Performance School possible! Scott has a deep belief in the potential of all students and staff with the courage to challenge the status quo and the sheer determination to doggedly persist with the change journey that is necessary for genuine school transformation.*

*In this article, Scott shares his leadership journey, the set-backs, growth challenges and some important insights about the systems and structures needed to effectively run a larger student focused school...*



### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

Absolutely. Almost everyone can remember “that” special teacher – the “champion teacher” that literally changed their life! That took an interest in them, cared for them and persevered with them when they doubted themselves or simply wanted to give up. My champion teacher was Mrs Thomas. And I still remember how much interest and belief she had in me. On the flip side, when teachers are unable to relate to a student (or caught up in unhealthy conflict with a student), the damage that can be done can last a lifetime.

The teacher-student relationship is a major influencer on the student’s level of self-expectation and self-belief. Thus, as a Principal, I firmly believe the most important aspect in any classroom is the teacher-student relationship and equipping

the teacher to be able to adopt a pastoral care role when needed is a critical component of any High Performance School.

### 2. Future Tense...

**Q: What are the issues that keep you up at night?**

A: The ongoing dilemma of how best to leverage new opportunities and managing demands that exceed finite resources “keeps me up at night”. I find myself reflecting regularly on the difficult question of how best to evaluate the cost-benefits of our decisions and how to maximise resources to meet all our students’ needs.

What is the best way to allocate our set resources to best meet the needs of all students? How do we ensure that, within the resources available to us, every student has the opportunity to have the best possible result (BPR) and has a pathway to further contribute and be part of society?

**Q: What are the big issues for education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

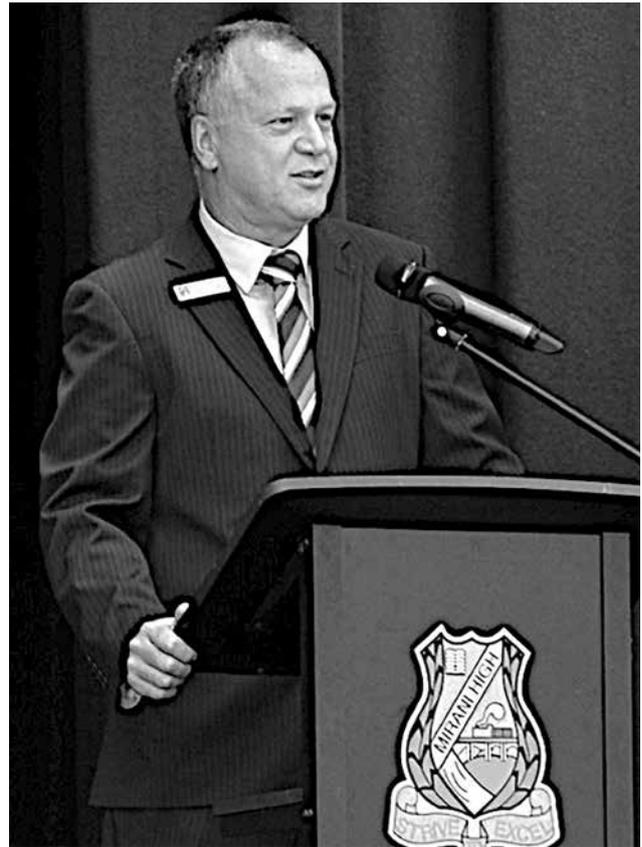
A: Education has the same challenges that other professional service providers must also face. Quality people deliver quality outcomes! And quality people are in short supply and the opportunities to develop staff are not in sync with the demand and expectations of the community – who expect every teacher to already be at their best! Rural areas have the added difficulty of attracting experienced high performing staff and have a higher staff turnover as people leave to return to the S.E. corner. This means that professional development is a larger slice of the budget of rural schools than their urban counterparts.

Regarding emerging challenges, I see the use of technology in schools and industry as the biggest issue. The curriculum is very crowded so it's challenging to ensure that our students have the appropriate attitude and IT skills to engage and maximise opportunities when they leave school, while also meeting accrediting authority requirements when at school! The challenge in this is twofold – firstly, teaching students to use technology can be its own challenge. Technology, if not used correctly, can increase the cognitive load on the learning process. Secondly, the extent to which accrediting authority requirements and real-world demands align with technology is not always in sync. This creates backward pressure on staff trying to maximise academic results, industry relevant skills and the likelihood of employment. The rise of online learning like udacity.com is an example of industry recognising a gap in required IT skills.

### **3. Your Brief History of Time...**

**Q: Give us a snapshot of your career to date. What roles did you have prior to becoming a teacher? What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into leadership?**

A: Growing up, school was a non-entity for me – socially good fun, but absolutely boring in class. After being a straight academic student in the early years of high school, in the top academic class 8A1 to 10A1 in a large high school, I had a massive reversal



of both motivation and performance with total disengagement in Years 11 and 12. As I look back, I think this was due to school having no purpose for me in those senior years.

After I left school, I had the pleasure of working as a theatre orderly at Saint Andrews hospital. As a theatre orderly, I had to shave men's groin region in preparation for surgery and this was definitely not a highlight of my working life! I gained a sheet-metal apprenticeship and after six months changed to a fitter and turner apprenticeship with E.I. Engineering in Darra, Brisbane. I completed my trade mainly as a first-class machinist and then worked as a fitter at various locations in Brisbane.

Starting in 1984, at Q.I.T. (Brisbane), I studied a Diploma of Engineering three nights a week for two years before seeing an advertisement for scholarships to be a Manual Arts teacher. I was not enjoying my contract work as a Fitter installing a Bundy Rum bottling plant at Acacia Ridge so the shift into Manual Arts teaching looked like a great option.

In 1987, I graduated as a Manual Arts teacher and worked in Glenden, a small mining town in

Central Queensland before moving to Mirani State High School (SHS) west of Mackay. Whilst I was at Mirani, we introduced the Certificate II Engineering Program as a vocational pathway for students. I transferred to Mackay North SHS in 1994 co-ordinating the Permanent Part Time Schooling Program at both North Mackay and Pioneer SHS. At this time, we had up to 40 students in Year 11 and 12 working in paid employment one day per week. In my role, I was required to find workplaces for students to work in, as well as run tutorials after hours at each school.

In 1995, I shifted to the Mackay School Support Centre where I worked as a Project Officer for the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) creating local workplace committees to facilitate student work placements across a range of locations, including Mackay, Charters Towers, Mt Isa and the Sunshine Coast.

From 1996 to 1999, I worked as the Senior Schooling Head of Department at Urangan SHS in Hervey Bay before moving to Rockhampton to become the Deputy Principal of Glenmore State High from 1999 to 2008. From 2008 to 2010, I took a secondment working as the CEO of the Gladstone Australian Technical College. My role was to write the forward strategic plan and transition the College into Gladstone State High School. At the start of 2010, I was promoted to Principal at Mirani SHS and have continued in this role ever since.

It's always interesting to look back on your career with the wisdom of hindsight. For many years, I never purposefully intended to become a Principal – however, at various times through my career when I was frustrated about the leaders I worked for, my wonderful wife would say, *“If you don't like what your boss is doing, don't whine unless you're willing to do their job better”* – and she was right, of course – so here I am now, forever trying to do the job of Principal better!

#### **4. Early Career: Advice To My Younger Self...**

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today?**

A: Work hard, work late and learn from everyone. Don't be insular in looking for ways to improve your school. Learn from business people and organisations that are outside education – study what works best and adapt to suit your context. Many great ideas about teamwork, customer service, data management, dashboards, marketing and communication from a diverse range of industries can easily be adapted to an education context – often bringing a whole range of additional innovations and benefits.

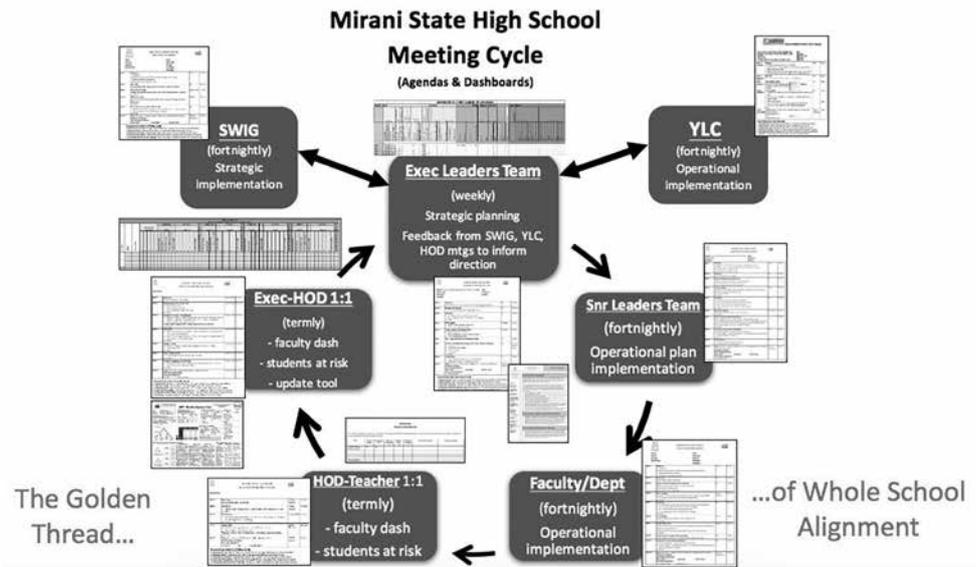
Build your networks and remember if you want to move up the ladder – don't expect people to miraculously see your worth and the effort you put in – you must also seek opportunities for others to see your value. Take opportunities to get involved in boards and committees and actively build relationships with other community agencies. Remember advice – whether good or bad depends on the perspective of the person who gives it and the person who receives it. Challenge your ladder of inference – learn how to see the biases and limitations of your own thinking!!!

#### **5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes...**

**Q: How did your career progress to the role you have today? Have you had any setbacks which ultimately created subsequent success?**

A: Everybody I know has had knock-backs and been told on more than one occasion *“that you're not good enough”*. Not only do you have to have the goods to be good enough, you also have to have the resilience to weather the storm and keep going until the stars, moon and tides align to give you the opportunity you deserve. Chin up, keep going and have faith!

In school leadership, you will generally not have a problem with most people despite your differences and personalities if you are doing what you believe is *“best for the kids.”* I have found that there are



two very different phases of leadership required to improve a school over time. In the short term (as “the new broom”), a higher amount of direction and management is needed which then shifts to a much less directive mentoring and coaching approach in order to maintain growth over subsequent years.

A career Principal must also change their leadership approach as they move from a small to large school. The leader’s ability to create a vision, systems of meetings and reporting, bring staff on board and delegate is especially crucial for building high performance cultures in larger schools.



### 6. On Building High Performance Schools

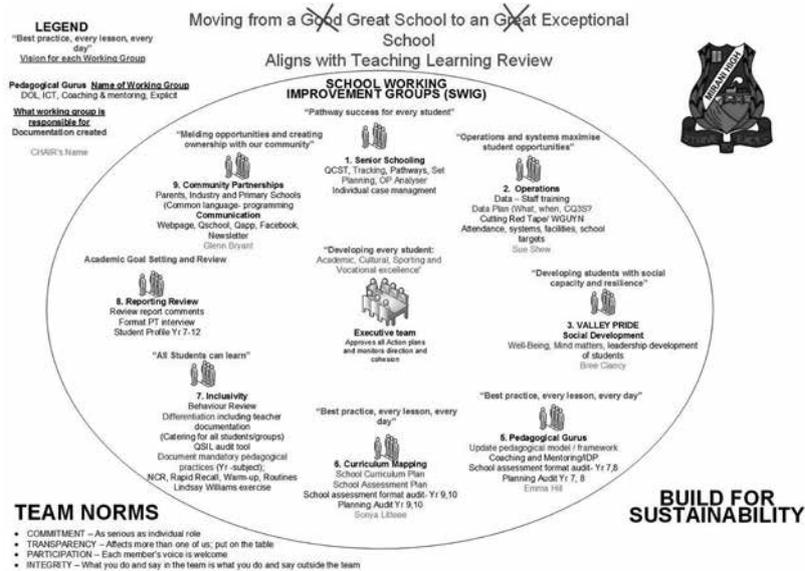
**Q: What have been some of the successes and challenges in building a High Performance School? How do you create High Performance Teams throughout the school? How do you get teams working effectively – both within faculties and collaborating across the school? How do you use meeting cycles and dashboards to maximise staff and student performance and wellbeing?**

A: Firstly – I don’t have the skills that some staff have. Delegate, acknowledge, support and create the structures and environment for them to excel. This “Golden Thread” of alignment is a very important aspect of leading a High Performance School. I spend a lot of my time working behind the scenes building and tweaking our performance reporting systems, meeting cycles, agendas and dashboards,

communiques and newsletters – all to make the school environment easier for staff to excel – to make it easier for everyone to know everything they need to know – to be constantly “in the loop”.

This “Golden Thread” of alignment is a very important aspect of leading a High Performance School. And “up to date” giving them more time and energy to focus on their students and their teaching.

Secondly – The leadership team has to know each other well enough to know our individual strengths and weaknesses. This ensures more effective communication and the full engagement of the intellectual capacity of our entire team. This then flows onto all staff engaging in knowing each other better and enhancing communication accordingly. Team Profiling has been an exceptionally useful



process to quickly identify positive and negative team dynamics and collaboratively develop our “above and below the line” team behaviours and protocols to call each other on negative behaviours.

Thirdly – everyone must know their hedgehog – the specific core purpose while they are in a particular team. As most people belong to multiple teams in a large school – their professional teaching team, faculty team, school improvement group, year level or house team – differentiating their role and purpose in each of these different teams enables them to maximise their performance amidst complex and at times competing roles and agendas. They must know the purpose of each team, have clear and consistent meeting, reporting and communication protocols to maximise the limited time and energy available. Time is precious but don't undervalue the purposeful conversation to connect and give value to others.

Finally – Make sure that your systems and processes are documented, understood and enacted. Staff engagement in data must be targeted and poignant to them. Very sharp and have meaning. It is too easy just to put up data. Data walls must inform action. Make your team systems and documentation accessible in multiple electronic and hard copy formats for easy reference to remind and reflect upon as well as enable the fast-tracking of the on-boarding process for new staff.

## 7. Influential Leaders and Mentors

**Q: Who do you think of when you hear the words “Influential School Leader”? Have mentors played a significant role in your career? What characteristics do you find most helpful in a mentor?**

A: Easy – Nancy Williamson #1 and Frank Hayes #2. Nancy was Principal of Glenmore SHS. An amazing leader who took the most challenging school in town and created a great school. She taught me that a tight leadership team with the same vision and values can create a culture to change a school and community. Frank had a colourful history initially working as a trainer in the army/commandos, before becoming the training manager at Roseberry Mine in Tasmania. Frank then worked in the TAFE sector eventually working with me as a contractor in the school support centre. Frank taught me some very valuable lessons about systems and working with industry leaders. One little gem was the practice of sending the thank-yous to industry leaders after stakeholder meetings.

The best mentors have been flexible in their approach with me – happy to be blunt and direct with me when I needed it but also circumspect and reflective as well. Many have become deeper friends over time.

Mentors I seek out vary depending on the issues I am wrestling with. I seek them out when needed – often putting a lot of effort into locating the right

people – many people underestimate how hard it is to find good mentors – and just how important having the right mentors can be.

## 8. Strange But True...

**Q: What have been some of the more memorable and unusual moments in your career?**

A: I'll never forget meeting with a long-gone person of significant political importance who had just finished a public speech promoting the idea of school-based apprenticeships. After the speech he privately told me, "There will never be school-based apprenticeships." Whilst he reinforced my healthy level of skepticism in the political process it strengthened my resolve to try ever harder to make the most of the resources in my schools to meet the needs of the students in the local community context. In the words of Roosevelt, "*Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.*"

## 9. Personal Inspo: Favourite Books & Quotes

**Q: What are your most gifted and/or recommended leadership books to others? What message about schools and education would you put on a gigantic billboard that everyone could see?**

### Books:

- *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson – it will happen to you.
- *Work Smarter: Live Better* by Cyril Peupion.

### Billboard:

- Create memories today with your child.
- Turn technology off.
- Together: read a book, visit a museum, go for a swim...
- Life is short, value your family!

## 10. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you 'stay the course' during lengthy periods of change and uncertainty?**

A: Family comes first – always! No-one from your old school will be with you on your death bed although a googolplex may be at your funeral!

At school – Focus on the students. What is in their best interests?

Developing as a leader – Talk to your networks and seek support and advice. You will be surprised that there will be many more than you expect that will support you although they may not do it publicly. You may feel overwhelmed but remember the Pareto principle – Focus on the 20%: You just reduced your workload by 80%.

## 11. Sliding Doors: Into The Future

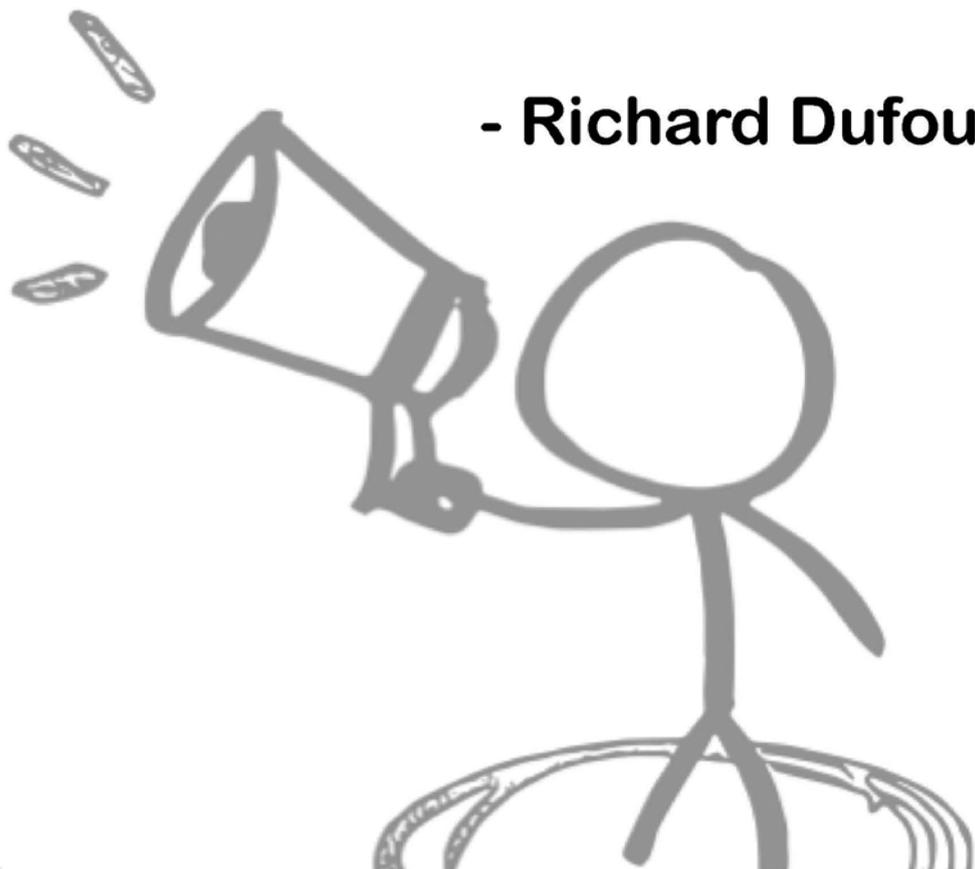
**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure of the education system?**

A: Change is inevitable with technology making access to knowledge simple and changing societal expectations. It is critical in making students understand that if they are not paying for the service, then they are the product that is being on-sold. We oldies used to worry about our credit rating; our students now worry about their social ranking and the use of big data. We have to ensure our students can navigate successfully the digital world.

Technology has enabled the geopolitical world demography to change quickly both globally and locally. Students must understand their situation, critically analyse, evaluate, identify causes, recognise the viewpoints of others, and then synthesise their position in the midst of a flurry of presented media. An example of this is our political system which was set up for 1901 and was possibly not designed for our current population distribution. There may be a major re-think of curriculum with a major focus on a lean and agile mind set as computer algorithms become more complex imitating human thinking.

**“Creating a collaborative culture is the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives, the first order of business for those seeking to enhance their school’s effectiveness...”**

**- Richard Dufour**



*“I am a big believer in Dylan William’s quote, ‘If we create a culture where every teacher believes they need to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better, there is no limit to what we can achieve.’”*

– Tracy Egan,  
Principal, Mango Hill State School

## Leadership Shares #4

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# Tracy Egan

## Inclusive School Culture & High Performance Teaching Teams

*Tracy Egan is one of the most dedicated and committed school leaders I have met. Her unwavering determination to create a High Performance School is built on having a clear vision and purpose, strong systems and processes, dashboards, and a deep understanding of team dynamics.*

*As the foundation Principal of Mango Hill State School, she has shown significant courage and determination in building an inclusive school culture where each child is able to reach their potential. While she has incredibly high expectations of her staff and students, she also balances this with empathy to truly support staff and students to be their best.*



*In this edition of the HPS Leadership Share series, Tracy opens up about the challenges and complexities of building high performance schools – the leadership lessons she’s learned, the value of revisiting your vision and purpose, having consistent processes and protocols, and the importance of relationships and focusing on each and every student...*

### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Yes, absolutely! Children in our school come from a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures. Their relationship with their teacher is a critical success factor to maximise their development academically, socially and culturally – to strengthen not just the child’s development but also the wider family’s sense of inclusion and value in the school community.

We want all children to have outstanding teachers by choice not by chance and to ensure that every teacher who comes into contact with the child helps

them to succeed – as a “whole child” not just in their “academic achievement”. Supporting children’s wellbeing so they can flourish also greatly enhances other child development issues such as finding their place in the world, developing healthy social-emotional boundaries and strengthening their sense of self-identity.

The journey of childhood development can either be joyously enriched by teachers or inadvertently diminished or depleted. This becomes especially true for diverse learners who may have additional disability, culture or gender-based needs that must be considered otherwise we may unwittingly reinforce or give a message that they are less valued in school or society. As a school leader, I believe



everything we do must be fully inclusive being mindful that the often quoted statement of “every student succeeding” really must mean ALL students. At Mango Hill State School, we have been identified as a school with outstanding data for kids with disability and diversity. We achieved this distinction by having high expectations of our school community and staff to challenge the status quo as well as high expectations of every child, regardless of their background, to find their aspiration and make the relevant adjustments so that all children succeed.

## **2. What Are The Issues That Keep You Up At Night?**

**Q: What are the big issues for education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: I believe the biggest issues in education currently is how we ensure each and every student succeeds – particularly children who have more complex needs in terms of behaviour or disability. How do we maximise inclusive education within finite resources and how do we make sure we balance the focus of our teaching and learning to cater for the

full spectrum of student needs without inadvertently over or under focusing on students at the extreme lower or upper ends of the achievement continuum?

How do we support our teachers to make the adjustments to deal with the challenges of the complexities outlined above – ensuring teacher wellbeing amidst the complex challenges of differentiating to ensure every child succeeds? How do we further build teacher skills and capacity to manage students with complex needs and ensure teachers feel confident and supported in the classroom? I worry more and more about the need to build systems to provide collegial support to our staff, to enhance communication and ensure input from parents to create true partnerships (as they know their child best). I want everyone surrounding a child to be working on the same team to do whatever it takes for the student to succeed.

Inclusion is more than just equality – as not every child “equally” needs the same thing. We work hard at building the capability of teachers to know every student in their classroom. How do we balance supporting them to be their best as a teacher and challenge them to question their ingrained ways of working that may not be best practice whilst being respectful of their skill for complex challenges?



I also think we need to consider how to attract the right people into the career path of teaching – particularly in light of the aforementioned challenges. We need to lift the status of teaching and leading schools – recruiting and retaining high quality staff in complex roles so they can see the absolute joy of working with young children and helping them be their best and succeed. Progression of careers is also a critical issue by supporting new and middle career teachers, and aspiring middle and senior leaders, and helping them to remember their true passion and why they went into teaching.

### 3. Your Brief History of Time

**Q: Give us a snapshot of your career to date? What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into school leadership?**

A: Growing up, I always wanted to be a teacher. I still remember as a child playing teacher with my dolls. As a teenager I enjoyed sport and had some early leadership learnings coaching netball teams.

After finishing High School, I went straight to teacher training at the Brisbane College of Advanced Education graduating in 1989. I started my teaching career in Moura in central Queensland before returning to South East Queensland. After 5 years teaching, I applied for an Educational Advisor role in English as I was very interested in teaching literacy. After working as an Advisor, I was itching to get back to classroom teaching so commenced at Caboolture East State School (CESS). Whilst there I became the Literacy Coordinator – which was a teaching and coaching

role then moved into the curriculum co-ordinator role, then Head of Curriculum. I really enjoyed building the capability of others which created a natural evolution into school leadership roles.

In 2007, I acted as Deputy Principal (DP) at CESS having been at the school for 12 years. This was a big step up for me, despite the fact that I had skills in curriculum, planning and teaching, in the DP role I also needed to learn the skills to manage parent concerns and student behavior so I endured a very steep learning curve. My next role was as a permanent DP at Kippa Ring SS. I further developed my school leadership skills over the next 2.5 years. I was particularly focused on learning new skills to build more effective relationships with parents, manage complex behaviors and strategically set the agenda around teaching, learning and curriculum.

At the same time, my Assistant Regional Director also encouraged my leadership development by sending me to an Emerging Leaders Course which helped me further understand myself as a leader. In late 2009, I was asked to act as Principal of Lawnton SS. This was a fantastic opportunity to put my leadership skills to the test. I was very focused on my relational skills in getting people on side, managing underperformance, developing systems, financial management and quality teaching and learning. I was ready for the challenge and over the next 18 months, I was able to support some significant improvements for staff, students and the local community. In mid 2011, I was appointed as the foundation principal of Mango Hill SS, which is my current role.

### 4. Early Career: Advice To My Younger Self

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today? What advice do you wish you had ignored?**

#### Leadership Learnings:

We're in the people business so you need to bring everyone with you – win their hearts and minds and get them to “buy in” and be a part of the decision making or improvement agenda. We can't boss

people into doing it – relying on a stick or carrot won't get you far. Focus on purpose – connecting with the “why”– they'll do it if they believe. I am continually amazed at the extraordinary efforts of staff when they believe it will make a difference to their kids.

Understanding personality types and strengths is crucial for leadership success. If you're not naturally high on red (relational traits), you must work hard at that. Even if you are highly system focused and action orientated (blue) it can't be about systems all the time. Know thyself – make the most of the tasks and situations that favour your personality and dig deep and persevere with those that are more challenging. For me, it is the Red/Blue challenge – ensuring the systems are great whilst getting the relationships right and persuading and influencing – and developing a shared sense of vision and purpose.

**Advice:**

Be kinder to myself along the way and don't beat myself up about the mistakes – mistakes are there to help you learn and grow. Try things and take risks along the way. Think it through and plan the best you can but don't let your fear of mistakes stop you from taking risks. There are no short cuts and you will always pay dearly for simply taking the easy comfort zone decision. Finally, do what gives you joy.

**Advice to Ignore:**

Some bad advice I've was once told was, “You've got to be hard on kids at first” the treat 'em mean and keep 'em keen idea is total rubbish – we're in the relationship game first and foremost. We need to bring people with us by showing genuine care and concern. Leadership is not a cartoon role play of what a factory boss should be.

**5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes**

**Q: Have you had any setbacks which ultimately created subsequent success? What has become more important and what has become less important to your school leadership in the last few years?**



**A:** One of the recent setbacks in my career was the plateauing and decline of our 2017 NAPLAN data. I was devastated that we didn't get a lift and shed many tears about the results. This was an incredibly good learning because it highlighted that you can't just keep doing what you're doing – you need to be proactive in getting the next lift. It's easy to be a good school, but to be a great school you need to plan strategically – particularly in a large school like Mango Hill.

We worked exceptionally hard in the teaching and learning of reading and we got back into classrooms to have our eyes on the ground and I re-engaged with how I worked with my leadership team. This was such a challenging time but we regrouped and saw a significant improvement in our 2018 NAPLAN data.

My learning in this is that you can't sit back and sook about it. Find out what you're not seeing, have different eyes on the game, plan strategically and **YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN!**

**6. On Building High Performance Schools**

**Q: What have been some of the successes and challenges in building a High Performance School? How do you enable your own leadership team to create High Performance Teams throughout the school? How do you use meeting cycles and dashboards to maximise staff and student performance and wellbeing?**

**A:** Building a clear and consistent culture across every staff member in every team within the school

has been the biggest success factor behind our school's high performance journey.

Taking the time on student-free days to workshop the purpose and vision with the leadership team and then collaborating with staff to further sharpen and strengthen our combined sense of purpose and vision as a whole school was very important. Having teachers buy-in and being part of the vision has been enormously powerful for teachers and strengthened subsequent performance development and improvement processes.

Another important aspect of our school culture was around leveraging diversity – and getting people to understand the complexities of personality and team relationships especially within larger cohort teams and developing ways of working together and protocols for managing unhealthy tension or conflict.

With a clear sense of purpose and vision and a deeper understanding of each other we naturally progressed to goal setting and action planning. We have created a “road map” for the whole school and for each and every team which is displayed on team data walls which we refer to as our “team boards”. These team data walls have become very powerful drivers of performance in our school. At every weekly meeting, teams review their data walls focusing on the school's vision and purpose, ways of working together, progress on goals and targets, and opportunities to stretch what is possible to maximise student outcomes.

By using HPT systems and meeting structures we have accountability right across the school and collectively have a language and consistent way of working. The leadership team worked hard on this consistent model so that all teams across the school have the same vision, meeting structures, protocols, reporting processes, values and language so that there is a strong sense of confidence for teachers because regardless of the what meeting it is, there is consistency across the school.

## 7. Influential Leaders & Mentors

**Q: Who do you think of when you hear the words “Influential School Leader”? Have mentors played a significant role in your career? What characteristics do you find most helpful in a mentor?**

A: Every leader is influential in some way. We can learn from each leader – sometimes what not to do! The traits I look for in a mentor is someone who listens really carefully about what my concerns are. They help sort out your thinking and give you tips about how they've done things. I also look for mentors who have expertise in things that I don't and can provide advice or practical strategies to build my toolkit. Unconsciously, I might not know what is possible so a mentor is able to fill the gap.

When I was a beginning principal, I had a fantastic mentor who I could ask “where to begin and what I should be paying attention to”. She had a generosity of time and was incredibly helpful – even to the point of driving over to my school at the time and talking through some challenging situations, clarifying my thinking and offering advice from her years of experience.

## 8. Personal Inspo: Favourite Books & Quotes

**Q: What are your most gifted and or recommended leadership books to others? What message about schools and education would you put on a gigantic billboard that everyone could see?**

A: There are a lot of leadership books that really resonate for me. In particular, Michael Fullan's work on system leadership and Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset – in particular, building the capability to be in a mindset that we can all be a little better each day.

At the recent Principal's Conference, I was really inspired by the keynote address by Olympian Anna Meares. Her story about improving by only 1 second from one Olympics to the next really resonated with me – to be that tiny bit better each day – if only by a fraction – it all adds up.



I am a big believer in Dylan William's quote, *"If we create a culture where every teacher believes they need to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better, there is no limit to what we can achieve,"* and I have this displayed all around our school – in my office, in the classrooms, and in the collaboration spaces.

### **9. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress**

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you "stay the course" during lengthy periods of change and uncertainty?**

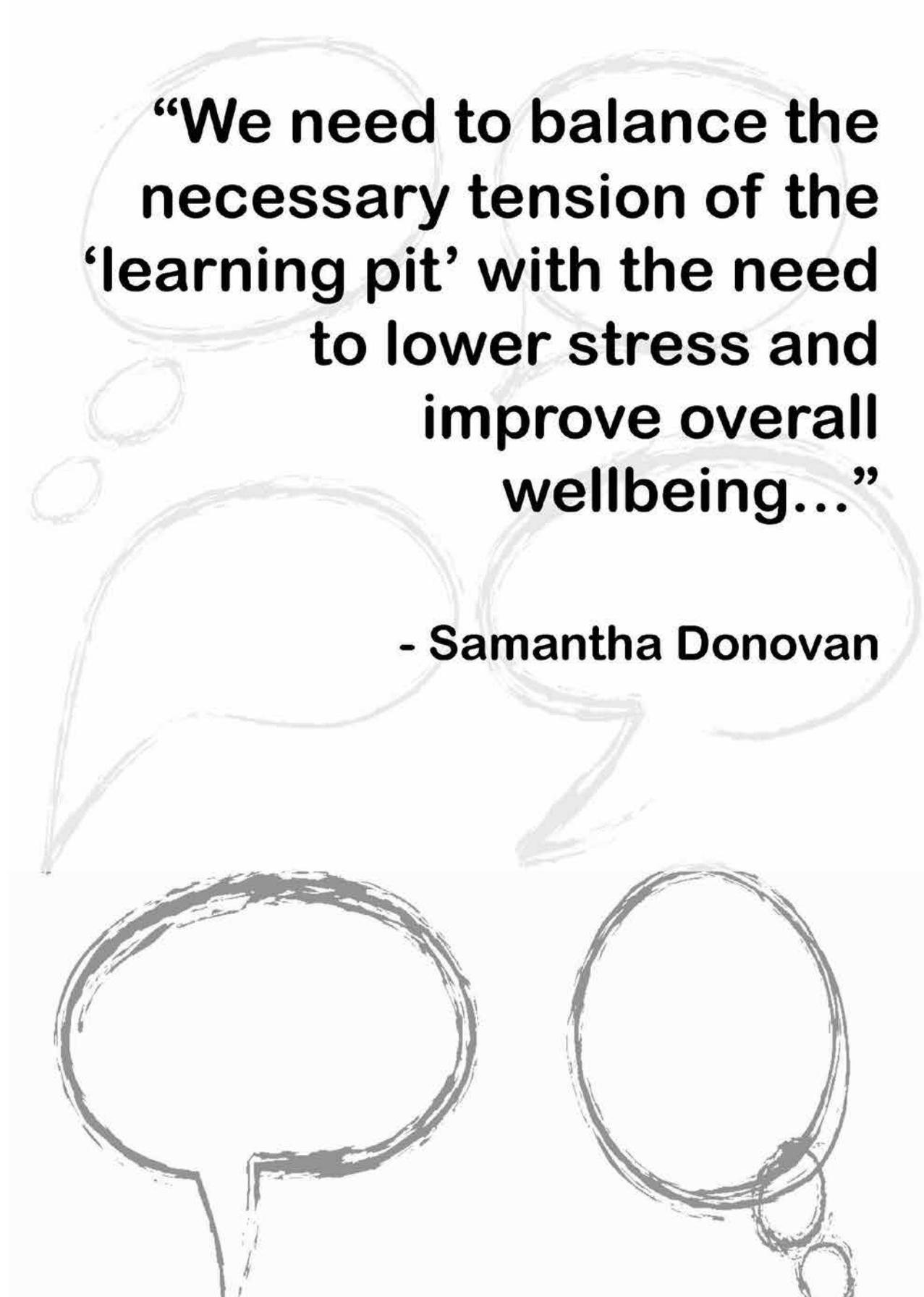
A: I do a number of things to cope with stress. I always try to focus on what I achieved during the day rather than focus on what I didn't do. I also try to have something to focus on and enjoy each day, be that going out for dinner, listening to music, having coffee as well as having something to look forward to – a holiday, seeing family and friends, a weekend

away, massage etc. I try to maintain a positive focus and make a difference each day.

### **10. Sliding Doors: Into The Future**

**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure of the education system?**

A: The biggest key to success in education will be investing in the wellbeing and work demands of teachers and leaders. The more we can hold up teaching as a career of choice where we can attract quality leaders and teachers, the better the education system will be. In addition, our ability to build inclusive school cultures, that focus on each and every student and their individual needs, goals and aspirations, and what we need to do to support teachers to achieve this, will result in strong communities and growth and learning for all students.



**“We need to balance the  
necessary tension of the  
‘learning pit’ with the need  
to lower stress and  
improve overall  
wellbeing...”**

**- Samantha Donovan**

*“Our role as school leaders is to enable confident and capable teachers. Teachers who can positively connect with their students in order to maximise their learning and growth.”*

– Ray Clarke,  
Principal, Emerald State High School

## Leadership Shares #5

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# Ray Clarke

## Building High Performance Secondary Schools

*Ray Clarke is a quiet achiever. A humble man and deep thinker. A patient and caring leader who understands the complexities of school transformation and knows that genuine lasting change is a marathon not a sprint.*

*As the Principal of Emerald State High School, Ray has worked tirelessly on the school's improvement agenda and has achieved some very impressive results in both academic achievement and staff and parent engagement. Carrying the burden of responsibility discretely whilst openly encouraging and praising the efforts of his leaders and teams, Ray demonstrates the humility and wisdom of an extraordinary school leader. In this article, Ray shares his leadership journey and the challenges and rewards of building High Performance Teams across every layer of his school.*



### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Teachers are the engineers of social change. Their teaching practices and values are under scrutiny in every classroom they enter. They are the ones who deliver academic instruction across a wide range of subjects including literacy and numeracy as well as important social messages about anti-bullying and preventing domestic violence. Thus our role as school leaders is first and foremost to enable confident and capable teachers. Teachers who can positively connect with their students in order to maximise their learning and growth.

### 2. What Are The Issues That Keep You Up At Night?

**Q: What are the big issues for education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: Rural and remote education is the issue that concerns me most. Being a Principal in a large rural school, I want to ensure all of our students are receiving the same education as if they were attending a large inner-city school. Our system is making great headway into this issue with an entire Department headed by an Assistant Director General in rural and remote education, however there is still much to be done.

Recruiting of quality teachers for rural and remote settings is still an issue as well as embedding quality



training regimes for beginning teachers in our outer schools. It is a mindset predominated by urban thinking that must be constantly challenged by school leaders at all levels especially Principals.

If we don't speak up for our students in rural and remote, who will? One of the great movements towards a better deal for our students is challenging the mindset that significant financial decisions at a school level should be made on numbers only. Sometimes we, as Principals, have to make them on a needs basis. Just because there aren't enough students to make an important educational activity financially viable, should we give up on it? I feel we owe it to those individual students to find the funding and make it happen. Only then are we offering a quality education to all students.

### 3. Your Brief History of Time

**Q: Give us a snapshot of your career to date. What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into middle leadership and then subsequently into senior leadership in schools?**

A: I started as a teacher straight from University and have spent 37 years in our Education Department. I am proud to be an employee of the Queensland Department of Education. After my teaching Diploma, I completed a degree in Economics and then a masters degree in Organisational Development. Both were completed part time whilst I was teaching.

I started teaching in North Queensland before moving to Brisbane secondary schools, eventually



ending up at Maroochydore State High School in the mid '90s. Teaching was an enjoyable career, however at the time, there were not as many demands on teachers as there are today. I wanted to move into middle leadership because I thought I could make a difference. Little did I know how difficult that challenge would be some days.

I started as a curriculum Head of Department at Kenilworth SHS then moved into being a long-term Deputy at Sarina SHS and Mirani SHS. I was lucky to have Scott Cage as my Principal who gave me the confidence to have a shot at being a Principal.

In 2011, I was given the opportunity at Capella SHS and never looked back. I had some definite ideas about quality curriculum and pedagogy that I wanted to implement at a whole school level and Capella allowed me to do it. Capella also taught me how to manage a community.

Then I moved to Emerald SHS and have been blessed by working with some terrific educators and leaders on a daily basis. Here I learned how to lead large staff numbers and set up long-term leadership structures through the High Performance Teams program.



#### **4. Early Career: Advice To My Younger Self**

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today?**

A: My key leadership learnings were that our youth are human beings and they are bound to make mistakes. We can be there either to punish them or help them learn from their mistakes. Sometimes I saw myself as a Deputy trying to prove myself right or defending myself against a student or parent allegation of what I said or what I did. What I missed is that it's not about me, it's about the students and getting them to work effectively in the school.

With leading staff, I learned it is crucial to give them clarity in what you want them to do and strong

structural support to allow them to do it easily. Coupled with that is an incredibly deep belief that what you are telling staff to do will provide success (i.e., do your research and know your stuff).

I wish I had ignored the advice of some teachers who seemed to talk for most of the staff meetings or for the entire duration of a subject meeting. We really needed High Performance Teams (HPT) meeting protocols back in those days when meetings would go until it was dark.

#### **5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes**

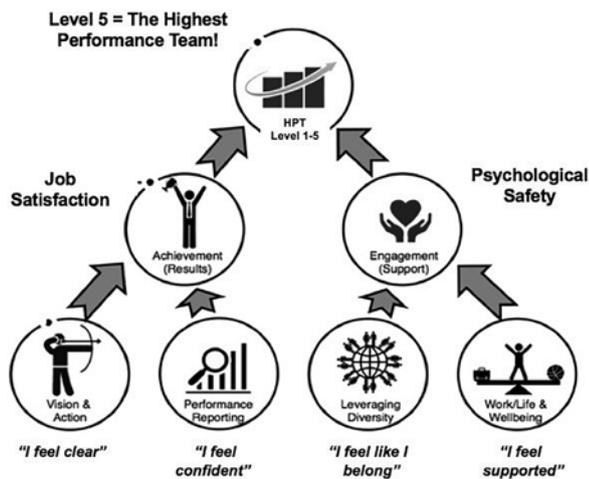
**Q: How did your career progress to the role you have today? What has become more important and what has become less important to your school leadership in the last few years?**

A: These days for me, leadership is about understanding the staff, students and community then applying a differentiated approach to working with them. When it comes to building leadership capability with my middle leaders, I take a flexible advisory approach. If they are a new Head of Department (HOD), it's about supportively managing and directing them. If they are an experienced HOD, it's about coaching them to bring about new insights and pathways for growth. At the end of the day great schools are about developing great people. Administrative deadlines come and go, it is the classroom teaching and learning experiences that are at the forefront of our focus.

#### **6. On Building High Performance Schools**

**Q: What have been some of the successes and challenges in building a high performance school? How do you create High Performance Teams throughout the school?**

A: For the past few years, the main non-negotiable I maintained at Emerald SHS was that we were implementing the High Performance Teams (HPT) strategies in EVERY team – and that eventually everyone would participate, no exceptions. We started with the senior leadership team of 13 classified officers and by the end of the first year, we had everyone, even the doubters, saying “I believe in this”.



My job was to give clarity to our strategy, so we developed a key leadership structure document that was tied to our 4 Year Plan. By the second year we made all HODs lead faculties developing faculty specific data walls and HPT meeting agendas. Every HOD had clear roles and expectations and every faculty had clearly defined targets. We even had target achievement days each term, where the HOD, line manager and Principal would review the faculty’s progress.

Our focus was leadership through the executive leadership team to SLT then to faculties. We insisted on reviewing the HPT readings at team meetings and supported it through coaching and 360-degree feedback. We developed faculty specific action plans, team norms and behaviours. We made every aspect of being a High Performance Team explicit and clear on team data walls (see below). The focus was on clear and concise and supportive communication. Yep, we still have the stop watch out for meetings!

All faculties now have a weekly team wellbeing pulse as well as a whole school pulse, which we review at every SLT meeting. The school pulse data has been brilliant in creating a sense of collective ownership and engagement in improving our wellbeing.

The most significant uplift occurred after the roll out of HPT was embedded at the faculty and teacher level. It was here that we achieved massive traction in improved performance and wellbeing across the school.

In the past two years, our data has risen significantly in both OP1-5, OP 1-15, A-C percentages and in the School Opinion Survey. I have no doubt HPT was the key element that enabled us to have a deeper level of common purpose and the structures we needed to improve our quality teaching and learning – and ultimately lift our wider school performance.

## 7. Influential Leaders & Mentors

**Q: Who do you think of when you hear the words “Influential School Leader”? Have mentors played a significant role in your career?**

A: My past three coaches all taught me something. Shelley Lewis showed me how to keep a school community calm so that students and teachers can focus on learning and teaching without distractions. Scott Cage taught me about strategy and how to chart the “The Big Picture” and Ray Johnston taught me how to coach – through his excellent Principal coaching sessions. They all modelled clearly what to do.

## 8. Strange But True

**Q: What have been some of the more memorable and unusual moments in your career?**

A: I was a first year teacher on a school excursion group that scaled the Gillies Mountain range near Cairns as part of an outward-bound expedition in 1982. Wouldn’t be allowed to do it these days but it



## Team Pulse Review & Actions

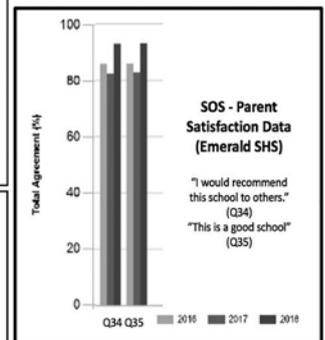
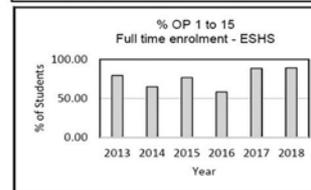
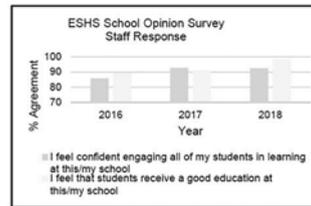
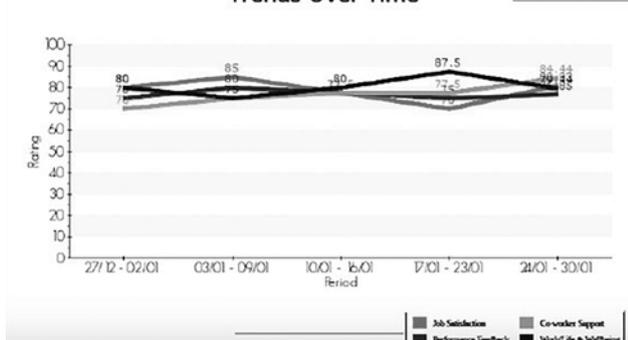


Team Name: Emerald SHS

Date: Jan 2019  
Participants: 35

KPI	Pulse Question	Current	Previous	Example Improvement Strategies	Discussion Notes & Actions
KPI 1: Vision & Action	Job Satisfaction (sense of achievement and enjoyment at work)	78.69%	76.75%	Regular review of core purpose, 1 and 5 year vision and values. Re-aligning team and individual action plans.	
KPI 2: Performance Reporting	Performance Feedback (regularly giving and receiving feedback with co-workers)	76.87%	69.4%	Clear KPIs in role descriptions and team charters, use of data walls to chart progress and individual and group meeting protocols focusing on accountability and improvement.	
KPI 3: Leveraging Diversity	Co-worker Support (how well the team is getting along together)	76.89%	73.06%	Regular team profiling to understand risks of personality clashes, clear above and below line behaviour charts and protocols for difficult conversations among peers.	
KPI 4: WorkLife & Wellbeing	WorkLife & Wellbeing (level of satisfaction with worklife and personal wellbeing)	80.39%	73.93%	Regular short team building activities, use of ice breakers in meetings, training and awareness among team on worklife strategy and resilience.	

### Trends Over Time



was a life altering experience and to do it with senior students was fantastic.

## 9. Personal Inspo: Favourite Books & Quotes

**Q: What are you most gifted and/or recommended leadership books to others?**

A: I found Wayne Bennett's book *Don't Let the Music Die* really influenced how I worked with people. The other great reading is Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

## 10. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you "stay the course" during lengthy periods of change and uncertainty?**

A: I prefer to talk things through, exercise via some karate training to give my mind time to process everything and then return to refocusing on the big picture with everything in a better context.

## 11. Sliding Doors: Into The Future

**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure of the education system?**

A: Literacy and numeracy levels will still influence the outcomes of our students. However, for many of our future students, it will still be those special teachers at their school who will have helped make the most profound differences in their lives.

*“We are entering a new era in the way school leaders engage with each other. Just as teaching has become de-privatised and no longer hidden behind classroom walls, the work of Principals in leading school improvement is becoming a collective responsibility with colleagues in neighbouring schools.”*

**– Trudy Graham,  
Assistant Regional Director, CQ**

## Leadership Shares #6

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# Trudy Graham

## Principal Forums, Social Capital & Collaborative Empowerment

*Trudy Graham is a deeply considered and deeply compassionate education leader. With a lifetime of wisdom accrued through teaching, middle leader and principal roles, Trudy now work as an Assistant Regional Director supporting a large number of principals across a diverse network of schools.*

*I have worked with Trudy for many years and admire her quiet determination and her patient and persistent approach to increasing the strength of collaboration and level of vulnerability and support among principals within her local networks. In this article, Trudy shares her leadership journey and insights into raising the social capital and collaborative empowerment among school leaders.*



### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Yes, absolutely! I love the quote from Christa McAuliffe, “*I touch the future. I teach.*”

I was a senior in high school the year Christa McAuliffe, selected as the first teacher in space, was tragically killed in the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. Her quote has resonated with me ever since. As educators we can make a difference in our student’s lives on any given day. We can change the trajectory of their future lives and we influence future generations.

### 2. What Are The Issues That Keep You Up At Night?

**Q: What are the big issues for education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: Right now, I am really worried about our workforce. How do we develop and support high performing people who can sustainably deliver quality education for our learners? Getting this right creates strength in our education system.

Attracting and keeping teachers and principals, especially in regional, rural and remote areas is a challenge right now and is only going to get more difficult as the population of Queensland grows over the next decade.

Hand-in-glove with this issue is the wellbeing of teachers and Principals. Societal changes, growing

demands and technology are impacting on the health and wellbeing of educators.

I believe we as educators need to become more connected as humans, not more isolated. By working together, we can support and learn from each other to grow professionally stronger. Now, more than ever we need to find ways to create deeper, authentic connections with our colleagues.

### 3. Your Brief History of Time...

**Q: Give us a snapshot of your career to date. Where did you study? What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into middle leadership and then subsequently into senior leadership?**

A: Age 5: It all started with 'playing school'. My kid sister and any number of toys were my students. I was always the teacher. Mrs Burchard, my year one teacher spotted my potential early and informed my mother, "She'll be a teacher when she grows up."

Age 17: There were tears. My entrance into tertiary institutions in Queensland was unsuccessful. Though, the consolation prize was spectacular. I studied a Diploma of Teaching interstate at Sydney College of Advanced Education.

Age 20: I was appointed to my first teaching position in Proston. Two years later I transferred to Roma Middle School.

Age 24: They called me crazy. With not quite 4 years of teaching experience, I accepted my first Principal position to Burketown in the Gulf of Carpentaria; one of the most isolated and remote parts of Queensland. I loved it. Studying by correspondence, I completed my Bachelor of Education from the University of South Australia while I was there.

Age 30: After three-and-a-half years as Principal in Richmond (P-10), I was promoted to Waraburra SS in Gracemere. Establishing the Learning and Development Centre to train teachers in the use of ICT for learning; delivering 16 practicums to 186 teachers across Central Queensland was a highlight.

Age 34: I accepted the position at Allenstown, where I spent my longest period of seven years as Principal, before moving to Mount Archer SS.

Age 45: With 21 years of experience as a school principal, leading five schools in rural, remote and regional Queensland, I was appointed into the ARD role in Rockhampton.

Right now: I support, challenge and coach school leaders in 29 schools across Central Queensland to bring their best game for teachers and kids.

### 4. Early Career: Advice My Younger Self...

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences?**

A: One of my early lessons was from *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Be Proactive. Early in my career I found myself with the same undesirable outcome after similar repeated interactions with another person. I changed my response and got a different result. It really emphasised how important it was to be conscious of my choices.

At 29, while Principal in Richmond, one of our vibrant and respected teachers died suddenly and unexpectedly from a brain aneurysm. While dealing with my own grief, I found myself leading the school and extended community through a very sad and tragic time. When I signed on as a Principal I never imagined I would need to deal with such a difficult circumstance. As tough as it was, it made me a stronger leader and a better human being. Sadly, there have been more student and teacher tragedies since then and I now find myself supporting other principals dealing with similar issues.

### 5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes...

**Q: How did your career progress to the role you had today? Have you had any setbacks which ultimately created subsequent success?**

A: Honestly, I've never had a career plan. I've taken each role and relished the challenge it has provided me, acquiring knowledge and skills along the way. Then I've looked for the next challenge.

### Strategies To Address Principal Wellbeing (Source P. Riley)

#### What governments can do

2. Concentrate on the fundamentals (collaboration, creativity, trust-based responsibility, professionalism and equity)

#### What employers can do

3. Take the moral choice of reducing job demands or increase resources to cope with increased demands. Better still do both. This will help to increase social capital in schools.

4. Trust rather than rule educators. Leave the mechanisms for producing the best educators to the educators. This will also increase social capital. Long term increases in social capital helped Finland become the world leader.

#### What schools can do

8. Increase internal social capital. This is best achieved by studying those schools that have achieved high levels already in spite of the current conditions...

9. Increase personal capital (social, human and decisional) At the individual level this means increasing possibilities for development and exerting influence over the work based on sound values and moral judgements.

11. Ensure your passions are harmonious. This means to be in control of them. For example, love your work but do not let it dominate your life. A way to determine if passion is harmonious rather than obsessive is to monitor energy levels.

12. Take responsibility for your personal work-life balance. Only you can know what is reasonable for your long-term health and wellbeing.



There have been times though, when I have been comfortable and contented in my work and a gentle nudge from a supervisor or mentor who has seen potential in me, has prompted me to consider what I might do next.

Each time I have taken the next step, considerations for what was best for my family has also been significant.

There have been disappointments where I didn't get the job that I really wanted. But in hindsight the way things have worked out are better in the long run. For me, it has become intriguing to watch how people's careers unfold. After a disappointment, an opportunity presents that they could never have imagined and they end up in a position that far exceeds their original expectations. I often tell people not to stress about what the next position

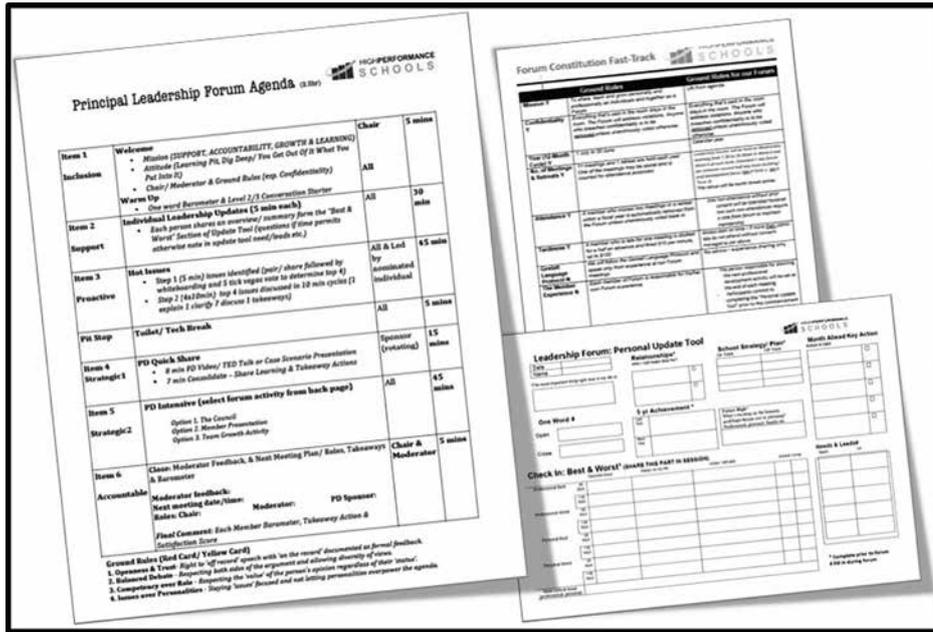
might be. It's amazing how things fall into place. You never know what is just around the corner.

## 6. Building Capability in School Leaders

**Q: What have been some of your successes and challenges in improving the capability of school leaders to enable them to build high performance schools?**

A: One of the biggest challenges I have been working on is increasing the social capital between school leaders within my region through School Leader Forum Groups. Social capital is the collaborative power in the group. Education thought leader, Michael Fullen described the value of social capital as "getting the group to lift the group". When you look at our Department we're really big on human capital, professional development and building people's capabilities but the structures and systems in place to actually build social capital is where the biggest challenge remains.

Social capital is very important for Principals as Phil Riley's research highlights the incredible challenges impacting upon Principal wellbeing. In his report, Phil provides 15 recommendations to improve Principal wellbeing – four of which directly reference social capital. Half of them, and they're the half that I've picked out and highlighted in pink, reference the type of work that Forums create.



Developing the Central Queensland School Leader’s Forum Strategy has been a key initiative to address Principal’s wellbeing. It provides mutual support – a community of support among peer leaders addressing many of the issues highlighted in the research. Our leadership Forum’s purpose is: “By working together, communicating with each other, developing our people, reviewing our performance we’ll ensure our schools are among the best in the world”.

After several years participating in our School Leader Forum Groups, I’m most proud of the level of collaboration that has been nurtured between school leaders. It is something that I value greatly and missed during my earlier years of principalship where relationships with Principal colleagues ebbed and flowed and the depth of support and care was not as deep as it can now be through the Forum process.

I believe we are entering a new era in the way school leaders engage with each other. Just as teaching has become de-privatised and no longer hidden behind classroom walls, the work of Principals in leading school improvement is becoming a collective responsibility with colleagues in neighbouring schools. Within schools we build expert teaching teams, across schools a consortium of leaders will share accountability for all schools improving.

**Q: How do you enable new school leaders to fast-track their leadership learning journey to minimise performance risks and maximise the benefits to staff and students?**

A: In some respects, I believe leadership learning can’t be fast-tracked. Growth in leadership comes from experiential learning, reliant on large doses of self-awareness and reflection. Learning with and from others is indispensable in leadership. Having people around you who can coach, mentor or be a critical friend is essential. This is where I can support new school leaders, but I also believe it is essential they connect with colleagues. As leaders, I think we underestimate how vital shared experiences and mutual support are in our work and don’t prioritise time and space in our busy lives to make this a priority. I think if we did the benefits would be tenfold.

**5. Memorable Moments...**

**Q: What have been some of the more memorable moments in your career?**

A: In 2008 I was presented with a Ministers Award for School Leaders and Teacher Excellence in recognition for development of innovative ideas and solutions for education into the future.

## 6. Personal Inspo: Favourite Books & Quotes

**Q: What are you most gifted and or recommended leadership books to others? What message about schools and education would you put on a gigantic billboard that everyone could see?**

A: I was recently asked to recommend some authors or titles to increase personal capabilities as a leader and educator. These books have made my top five because they had relevant lessons that I applied to my work at the time I read them. I also find myself still sharing messages with others and referencing these texts.

To be clear, these are leadership books that apply across any field. They are not specific to education, but have leadership and personal development concepts that are pertinent for educators.

*Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* by Simon Sinek (2011). I read the book, watched the TED Talk and even did the online course. You'll also find some other great stuff on Simon Sinek's website. Start with this book to get a better understanding of why it is important to know what you stand for and what drives you. He has a follow up book, *Find Your Why: A Practical Guide for Discovering Purpose for You and Your Team*. Simon Sinek also wrote *Leaders Eat Last*. This one is on my Want to Read list. It has great ratings and reviews.

*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey (1989). This book is the quintessential self-improvement text. I recommend it as a leadership text because the hardest part about being a leader is the work you do internally on yourself, not externally with others. I first read this book in the mid '90s and had light bulb moments. I re-read it again late last year (more than 20 years later and with a whole lot more life and leadership experience) and I took more lessons from it.

*How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie (1936). Two words – A Classic. I bought this book early in my career when I was struggling to have difficult conversations with people I was supervising. I had to address growing issues, but

wanted to maintain a positive relationship. This book had what I was looking for. Keep in mind it was published in 1936, so you'll find the language rather formal, but it's full of sage advice. It is #19 on *Time Magazine's* List of 100 Most Influential Non-Fiction Books.

*Good to Great* by Jim Collins (2011). Don't be put off by the big American corporations that are the foundation of Jim Collins' research for this book. I have applied many of the ideas in leading schools. I've also heard other presenters reference theories from this text, so chances are you have, too. The flywheel effect, hedgehog concept, and getting the right people on the bus all originated from *Good to Great*. For the record, I still aspire to Level 5 Leadership.

*Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown (2018). I've just started to listen to *Dare to Lead* as an audiobook. I like to think Brené Brown is reading this to me, personally, as I exercise. One chapter in, and it's brilliant. I have made notes in the audio app but I need to acquire a hard copy. There will be pencil notes in the margins and sticky notes hanging out the sides when I am done. There so many great quotes... here's one of my favourites about schools:

*“What we can do, and what we are ethically called to do, is create a space in our schools and classrooms where all students can walk in and for that day or hour, take off the crushing weight of their armor, hang it on a rack and open their hearts to truly being seen. We must be guardians of a space that allows students to breathe, and be curious, and explore the world, and be how they are without suffocation. They deserve one place where they can rumble with vulnerability and their hearts can exhale. And what I know from the research is that we should never underestimate the benefit to a child of having a place to belong, even one where they can take off that armor. It can, and often does change the trajectory of their life.”*

– Brené Brown

## 7. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you “stay the course” during lengthy periods of change and uncertainty?**

A: I have found keeping a journal to be a brilliant strategy to not only manage times where I might be feeling overwhelmed but also keep me grounded about the many positive things that are happening in my life as I tackle the challenges that everyone of us must face.

I am also a firm believer in regular exercise and jogging is a great releasing activity for me.

I have also been fortunate to be part of a School Leadership Forum group which has been a great source of both support and accountability.

## 8. Sliding Doors: Into The Future

**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to the success of the education system?**

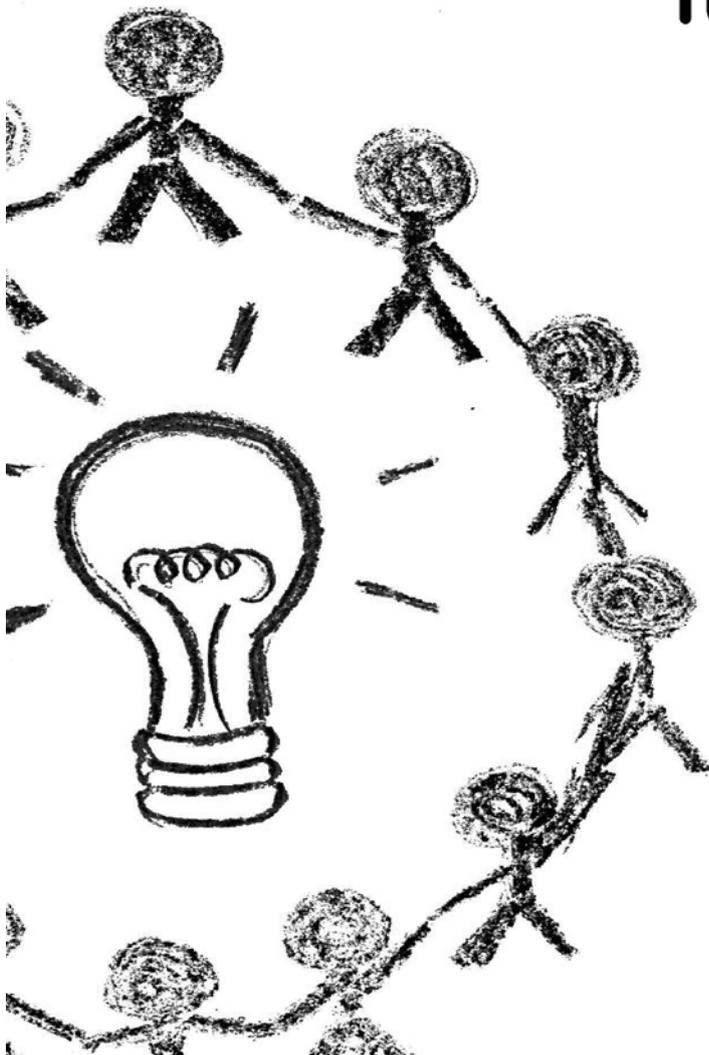
A: The strength of the teacher-student relationship will be a critical point of stability which in turn will enable faster adaption to an increasingly faster paced state of change in the world.

Concurrent to the emphasis on teacher-student relationships will be the increased level of peer support and professional development of school leaders across neighbouring schools.

Thus the future success of schools hinges upon our ability as system leaders to develop and support high performing school leaders and teachers who can sustainably deliver quality education to each and every student.

**“It is ultimately about having a genuine regard for students - ensuring that our staff have the confidence and competence to enable all students to achieve their full potential.”**

**- Kay Kirkman**



*“Every minute we spend in teacher development has the potential to reduce the time spent reactively on crisis management.”*

– Jorgen Neilson,  
Principal, Kin Kora State School

## Leadership Shares #7

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# Jorgen Neilson

## Building a High Performance School

*Jorgen Neilson is an extraordinary school leader. His sharp mind and strategic approach to school leadership is equally matched by his incredible empathy, warmth and connectedness with staff and students.*

*Jorgen's unwavering determination to do "whatever it takes" to ensure each and every child succeeds sits at the heart of his efforts to build a High Performance School. By ensuring all staff are a) clear on their vision and purpose, b) supported by strong systems and processes to promote quality teaching and learning, and c) can leverage the diversity within their teams, a culture of high performance is created enabling every student and every staff member to flourish.*



*As the Principal of Kin Kora State School in Gladstone, he has managed to balance his supportive and strategic leadership responsibilities to build a warm, friendly and inclusive school culture whilst maintaining a strong focus on student improvement and teacher development.*

### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Absolutely – 100%! There is a real increase in the need for shaping students for the future – both our need (societally) and their need (personally). Obviously, the need to have good people who can operate critically, collaboratively and with moral conscience is imperative. Sadly, it is sometimes also imperative to get “in the way” of some students who may be on a negative progression – to help change their current trajectory, moving from potentially troubled lives to become contributing members of society. I think that the opportunity for this type of impact happens because:

- Social development needs are increasing, meaning the learning has an impact on rate and quality of community participation – not just on the individual level of retained knowledge and skill.
- The workforce(s) that our students will engage with are undergoing rapid change with the need for knowledge being surpassed by the ability to fluidly use soft skills.
- These skills, particularly Creativity and Problem Solving require resilience. Also the ability to collaborate effectively is a balance of confidence to speak up and the consideration to allow broad perspective. (*Sounds easy, right!*).

## 2. What Are The Issues That Keep You Up At Night?

**Q: What are the big issues for education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: The movement from cookie cutter learning to differentiated practice, in terms of the needs of students and the context in which they learn. This is a complex task which requires a workforce willing to take the hard road.

More contextualised learning has better outcomes for students but comes at the expense of not using the “out of the box” solution and the workforce impact in both time and skill are challenges. This really tests staff resilience levels, and requires them to be supported enough to take risks. My challenge as a Principal is to build teams that are both supported and courageous enough to get the learning right for each and every learner.

Given this, wellbeing of staff becomes paramount, along with establishing a culture that we do “Whatever It Takes” for the students. This also adds pressure to the workforce, but yields rewards. My challenge here is to support teams as much as possible so that the necessary ‘hard road’ is the one we travel on the most. My mentor and friend, Paul Wood once said to me that developing capability is about, “*Make best, most.*”

“*Make best, most!*” is where we as school leaders identify, clarify and share the great practices occurring in our classrooms. Where we make progression towards these great practices the norm for all teachers. Any other work, reactive work, is necessary *but every minute we spend in development has the potential to reduce the time spent reactively on crisis management.* The work of a school leader can be a rewarding process, or a vicious circle depending on where our time is more concentrated. My challenge is to support my leaders to focus on systems and processes as much as possible so that we maximise our impact on the teaching and learning for students. If I can get my leadership team to spend half of their time solving the “story” of an issue and the other half on the “system” that led to it, the balance returns.

## 3. Your Brief History of Time

**Q: Give us a career snapshot. What work roles did you have prior to becoming a teacher? What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into leadership (which schools did you work in along the way)?**

A: Work roles: Early on, I had lots of jobs that, looking back, were all about dealing with people. Retail worker, Outside School and Vacation Care, Hospitality. The full spectrum of people, some at their best, and others not so flash – but this was good grounding for working with children and staff in schools. I have never had a position where I was in complete control of the work that came my way, another helpful grounding and commonality with my work in schools.

I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do for a career when I was in high school, and then (because I couldn’t find a work experience area that really appealed) I was given teaching as an option. I really enjoyed it, and then submitted my preferences for teaching.

I had a great start to teaching – I was fortunate to work alongside a mentor I still consider to be one of the best teachers I have worked with, my mate (the crazy Kiwi) Eryca Rawiri. She was my mentor and teaching partner when I arrived in Emerald. Looking back, she used a simple strategy of ‘gradual release’ to ensure I could plan and deliver what was needed, and was always there to lend a hand and support me.

I worked as a teacher for 4 years before I looked for my first Principal role. My Principal at the time said to me that I was ready, he said it was because I was starting to see and question “what and why” when I did things. I really think that I was being a pain in the you know what! He was great to encourage me to take the first step, and made sure I had experience across the curriculum before I went to a one teacher P-7 school.

My Principalship / Leadership story so far...

- Small Band 5 (1 teacher) – Mistake Creek SS
- Medium Band 5 (3 teacher) – Goovigen SS
- Small P-10 school – Alpha SS

- Small Band 8 Primary – Emerald North SS
- Large Band 8 Primary – Denison SS
- Principal Coach – supporting various size schools < Band 8
- Large Primary Band 10 – Kin Kora SS

#### 4. Early Career: Advice My Younger Self

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today? What advice do you wish you had ignored?**

##### Key Learnings:

- When something feels bad/stresses you – it is demanding attention or response. Delaying or leaving it only makes you churn and stress on it for longer. I remember the first time I needed to discuss a performance issue with a staff member. I waited for 3 days to have the chat. The first day it was because I wasn't prepared mentally, on the second day there was another issue causing me to re-plan and by the time the third day came I was that wound up, it was a train wreck of a conversation. Hindsight being 20/20 – calling and addressing the issue early may have prevented the second issue, and my communication would have been better without the hassles of the subsequent days passing.
- Trust your judgement, this includes judging when you haven't got a clue and need to ask. The fact that we read people all day, every day means our brain searches for patterns and prediction – it can detect and highlight to you when something is wrong. Go with it!
- Keep your professional colleagues close – they are the best support for wellbeing and professional collaboration. I live about 15 minutes away from where I work. The drive in or home is used to connect with someone in my professional peer network. It is important because while we have teams in our schools there is still only one Principal – and it is a chance to get a colleague to offload to you instead of their families (or their own staff). I appreciate it and I know that my Principal colleagues do to.

##### Advice to Younger Self...

- Get it clear, check it, check it again – and then start! **Clarity** is so important as soon as you need to rely on other people to get the job done. Looking back, when my instructions have been a little ambiguous the outcomes are not as strong. Get clear on what is needed, what it will look like, where the support is, and where it will be monitored. Then things start to happen.
- The way you respond to situations needs to depend on the **context, not the person**. I remember looking at the performance data of classes in a cohort, and being amazed when a class, whose teacher was widely regarded as having great outcomes for students, had some particularly troubling data. I remember thinking that it can't be right – saying things like “there are never issues in that room” or “are you sure the calculations are correct?” After closer inspection, I found that there were a few students in the room who were really influencing the status quo, and the teacher who was usually on top of things was feeling upset about the prospect of asking for help. The result was the learning suffered, so did the teacher. The lesson here is two-fold.
  - a. If you are unsure – check it yourself, don't assume.
  - b. The work is complex – so the support needs to be clear, accessible and abundant

I have fallen for this before, and now look at the outcomes first, then make the decision - Coach (stretch good performance), Mentor (support to move from good to great), Manage (help the person remove obstacles).

##### Advice I wish I ignored...

Not sure if it was advice, or my mis-read on the leadership messaging – I went through a time where I over negotiated things – in an effort to see people “happy” with next steps or decisions. This led to me spending too much time “wheeling and dealing” and ultimately left people frustrated if

I couldn't fulfill their wish lists. Now I know it is much more appropriate to be clear on the intent of any transaction

- Direction – I need you to do this please.
- Discussion – your thoughts are required before I decide.
- Decision – for us to decide together.
- Information for you – then you take forward or action.

### 5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes

**Q: How did your career progress to the role you had today? Have you had any setbacks which ultimately created subsequent success? What has become more important and what has become less important to your school leadership in the last few years?**

**Setbacks:**

Leading an improvement agenda explicitly... following on from the advice to myself (above) I have learned that ambiguous plans lead to mixed results. Thus, I have really focussed in on setting clear improvement plans in my schools. I remember a time where I set my plan, but didn't have great checks, supports and monitoring. The result was that there was improvement, but there were much bigger gains in areas I had not placed focus. Looking back, it was a little too vague, so people were giving genuine effort but no gain for their work. It was a frustrating time for everyone.

After that year, I made it my business to ensure that the plans are simple, which has resulted in a much more focused execution of improvement agendas ever since. I remember working in a project on school improvement where the co-ordinator said to me *"the main thing is to make sure the main thing always remains the main thing"*. It gave me a laugh because we had needed to do just that...

### More / Less Important To My Leadership In Recent Years:

	<i>Less Important</i>	<i>More Important</i>
1.	Being right – pressure of credibility felt by a new Principal to be able to give the right answer, or solve the problem on the spot.	Time – most valuable asset. Decisions on how we use time is the other important skill – efficiency in problem solving, collaboration, fierce guarding of re-work.
2.	When solving a problem - The back story is less important than the solution. When I stay solution focused, I invite more of the same from others.	The solution (what next), and more importantly the structure/system fix for prevention of re-work.
3.	Relationship and image management with supervisor about (self) pressure to perform – needing to have "polished" performance.	Visits and support are directed by me, but open – a warts and all approach. I want an unbiased eye on what is happening at my school, blind spots are easier to see with fresh eyes.
4.	Control – having my picture of the strategy fulfilled – ensuring steps are completed my way.	It is not important how it happens, it's important THAT it happens. I have a deeper respect for the importance of teacher voice. It helps cultivate innovation, and gives context for sharing. It is easier to drive 'our' plan instead of 'my' plan.

### 6. On Building High Performance Schools

**Q: What have been some of the successes and challenges in building a High Performance school?**

<i>Successes</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teams operate in ways that prevent the normal problems of over/under influence; distraction; external issues</li> <li>• Increase robustness of feedback and accountability – culturally appropriate "argy bargy" to be the best teachers we can be.</li> <li>• Outcomes focused evaluations – when I look at my impact it either has worked or it hasn't.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The corporate nod – Authenticity can be a skill development problem, or belief/value and we can fall into the 'nod' pattern when "too busy" happens. Capable chairing &amp; moderators in meetings is the best antidote.</li> <li>• People's acceptance that their wellbeing is as much their own action as it is circumstances and work pressure (countering the victim mentality).</li> </ul>

**Q: How do you enable your own leadership team to create High Performance Teams throughout the school?**

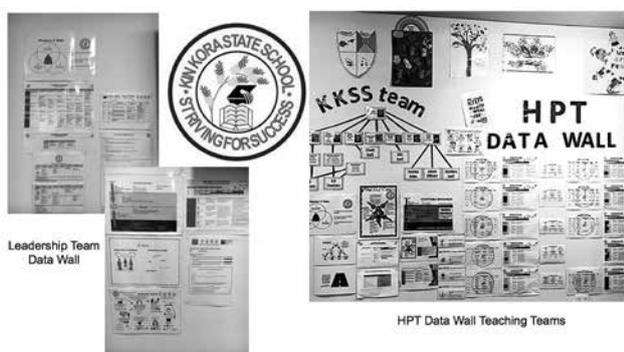
A: I start with the expectation that the practices we use as a leadership team are present and practiced in all teams. Leaders are then supported to intervene with each team based on their level of functionality – Coach / Manage / Mentor.

We also use data and dashboards for all staff, and this is growing so that teaching teams are using their own dashboards.

Common structures and expectations – the easiest win is structures that help the HPT process. We use school-wide and team x team HPT data walls. Our meeting agenda templates align, always sharing key

entry/exit components (e.g. opening / icebreaker / barometer / hot issues / key takeaways, etc.).

We also use the HPT strategies for working together (Team Profiles, Above and Below the Line Chart, Calling Behaviour Protocol, etc). Every teams develops their own specific vision, goals and Level Up plan for higher performance. In our team meetings governance roles such as chair and moderator are routinely shared, which is a great way to share the load but it also gives people insight into the impact of personal behaviours when teams meet, sometimes a dose of one's own medicine can be the best cure!



**Q: How do you get teams working effectively – both within cohorts and collaborating across the school on important school-wide projects?**

1. Training and onboarding. We make HPT structures a part of induction.
2. Clear expectations in all meetings:
  - What are we here to do (purpose).
  - What are the parameters (agreed content).
  - What is the link to the big picture (vision).
3. Setting / directing back to the structures in place – particularly where and how your staff can get support – the Business As Usual (BAU) process is vital here. Perhaps more importantly, the adherence to BAU around staff support is a discipline that needs more practice in many schools. School leaders tend to be very compassionate, and sometimes over reach when it comes to responding to staff need – breaking their own BAU rules for staff support

– which may fix an issue in the short-term, but cultivates dependence in the long-term. As leaders we need to be mindful of the “give a man a fish vs teach a man to fish” principle to build a sustainable wellbeing culture in schools.

4. The use of a cohort leaders / middle leaders structure to ensure perspective is gathered broadly, and responded to. This regular check-in not only meets consultative requirements for schools, but allows genuine reflection that takes into perspective the needs of the whole school. This also allows for succession planning and career pathway development.

**Q: How do you use meeting cycles and dashboards to maximise staff and student performance and wellbeing?**

- Data in 1:1 conversations with leadership team, and then by them with their teams.
- Response to Pulse data – this is getting more and more valued as the role of teacher wellbeing becomes more prevalent. It is the way we respond to needs of our staff – getting them to take ownership over their wellbeing and use us as a resource and support as needed.
- Use the HPT strategy review process to review our school performance and improvement plan implementation once per term – we call this our Board Meeting.
- Making sure our PLC's have ready access to their own team data wall and dashboards when they are reviewing their performance and making decisions.

## 7. Influential Leaders & Mentors

**Q: Who do you think of when you hear the words “Influential School Leader”? Have mentors played a significant role in your career? What characteristics do you find most helpful in a mentor?**

A: Easily, Paul Wood. I first met Paul as the parent of a student I coached. He encouraged me to take on the Principalship, and has been a sounding board,

support and critical friend all the way. He has also been a Principal colleague and mentor, and then my Supervisor.

**Key Characteristics:**

- Very sharp and highly intelligent – but not in an omnipotent kind of way. The sort of person you knew you needed to listen to.
- Unwavering in beliefs – what is important – moral purpose (do what is right), courageous leadership (do what needs to be done) and that people matter (enjoy the ride).
- Always made time for me. A Band 9 high school Principal talking to a Band 5 about P&C issues or broken mowers! I’m sure looking back, that there were about 11.2 million other important things Paul could have been doing for the betterment of his own school, but in that time – he was completely present.
- A good mentor – asks questions and shares insights with the goal of getting you to an answer – sometimes a frustrating process – but the answer is yours to create (although I suspect with Paul the answer was in his head about 30 seconds after I asked the question – an extremely patient mentor!).

**8. Strange But True**

**Q: What have been some of the more memorable “strange but true” moments in your career?**

A: I think one of the more interesting “strange but true” facts about me is that I am not one of those quiet, refined and reserved types of Principals portrayed in films and television shows. The most common feedback I get from people when they ask me about my occupation is: “I can’t believe you are a Principal!” I’m not sure if that means I need to change a little (perhaps be more reserved and boring!), or their personal stereotype of Principals needs to shift to include warm, caring, outgoing, fun-loving types of people!

**9. Personal Inspo: Favourite Books & Quotes**

**Q: What are some of your favourite quotes? What are your most gifted and/or recommended leadership books to others?**

Source	Author	Quote/ Reason
Quote: Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*#@#k	Mark Manson	Quote: “People who become great at something become great because they understand that they’re not already great – they are mediocre, they are average – and that they could be so much better.”
Book: Your Brain at Work	David Rock	Neuroscience is now an established field that is so useful for areas that depend on transfer/communication – I find it laughable at times that teaching – (arguably, the process of taking knowledge and skills and helping someone reorganise it in a way it can be used) IN THEIR BRAIN – doesn’t focus more heavily on Neuroscientific approaches to learning.
Book: Don’t Die With The Music In You	Wayne Bennett  Poem by Dale Wimbrow	The book focuses heavily about Winners and Losers but is ultimately about being the best you can be. There is a poem in the book he cites – “The Man In The Glass.” I think it is important because it is about one of the things in your world that is always authentic – the things you know about yourself, to be happy and proud in that space puts you in what I call “the moral high ground” – where you know that you are on the right track, and that you are seen to be there too.

**10. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress**

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you “stay the course” during periods of change and uncertainty?**

- I hunker down – stop and identify the next steps: a.) Drop the anchor; b.) Find the High Value Target – make a plan where the actions have the likelihood of the most impact; and c.) Execute the plan.
- I find the people who are in there with me, and make sure they are fine. The teams I directly lead are supported earlier than the people they manage down the line, so when stressful times arise more people are able to be supported.
- I check in with colleagues – normally I find they are in it too! (Term “cycles” are funny in schools – we go through similar things at similar times) I either get (a) respected and wise counsel or (b) a validation/normalisation of the incident.

## 11. Sliding Doors: Into The Future

**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure of the education system?**

- Focus on learning, not teaching. It has to be all about the kids – my mantra “our kids are worth whatever it takes”).
- De-demonisation of data. What the data is not as important as what you do with it (this will make it easier to own).
- Robust and true collaboration. Everyone wants to work together – “work smarter not harder”; “share the load” etc. The trick is that collaboration is also about getting people onto the same page. At times this means everyone has to move (their position) a little, not just moving to the dominant view.

*“‘Making a difference’ is really about enabling our students to lead successful lives in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world of the 21st Century.”*

– Jan Carr,  
Assistant Regional Director,  
Cairns/FNQ

## Leadership Shares #8

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# Jan Carr

## School Transformation & Student Needs in the 21st Century

*Former Principal of Gordonvale State High School and now Assistant Regional Director, Jan Carr is an insightful, compassionate, humble and future focused extraordinary school leader (and has a great basketball shot!). Exemplifying the “marathon not sprint” approach to school transformation, Jan has successfully delivered upon multi-year school transformation projects, enabling her middle leaders and teaching teams to level up to a higher standard of performance, boosting student (and staff) outcomes whilst evolving the school’s teaching and learning agenda in line with the rapidly evolving needs of 21st Century students.*



*As a school leader, Jan is a quiet achiever – always looking for ways to empower and enable others – providing opportunities for growth and advancement, regularly giving others the leadership spotlight. Jan’s deep sense of humility and modesty about her astounding professional achievements meant I had to do a lot of convincing to get her to share the insights and wisdom in the article that follows – where you’ll read of her deep sense of connection and compassion with students and staff and her powerful grasp on the challenges facing schools in the 21st Century...*

### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Teaching inherently is a moral profession. As school leaders, we must fully understand and support the teachers in our schools, enabling them with the tools and strategies they need to fulfill the moral purpose of education – equipping young people to become caring, productive and responsible members of society.

In my experience, most teachers enter the profession of teaching with a moral purpose – “to make a

difference in the lives of students”. Whilst we often think of this in terms of student improvement, stated more directly, “making a difference” is about enabling our students to lead successful lives in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world of the 21st Century.

How we do this, is no easy feat. It is an expectation that the school engages in continuous change as the “educational system” actively searches for ways to prepare students for the future. What we do know with certainty is that we cannot adequately prepare students for the society that exists today or will exist tomorrow, if we continue to prepare them for the society that existed yesterday.



*“I think the teaching profession contributes more to the future of our society than any other single profession.”*  
– John Wooden

Do teachers make a difference to the lives of their students? Absolutely, 100%. There are literally hundreds of stories related by teachers (as individuals or in collaboration with other professionals) as to how they have supported a child’s wellbeing and growth and made a difference.

As a high school principal, I have lost count of the number of hours, a member of my welfare team or myself have spent seeking accommodation or professional health support for students who had self-placed to live in either an unsuitable environment or chose, for whatever reason not to live at home. These are the students, who, as adults come back to thank you and to share their success stories with you. These are the stories that give credence to the notion, that “one caring adult within the school, can make all the difference to a child’s future success in life, beyond the classroom”.

When I reflect back on my years of teaching, the closest I believe I came to really preparing my students for the demands of the 21st Century world beyond the classroom was in the delivery of a social science (geography) subject at Trinity Bay State High School in Cairns, called GIS. (Geographical Information Systems). The 30 students within

this class, albeit all high achievers screamed to be extended, pushed to the limit. To do this, I set myself a challenging goal. One, which within 12 months, changed a group of highly achieving competitive teenagers, bored with the contemporary didactic delivery of teaching, into a group of self-respecting individuals, who valued the collaborative input of the team and who together could create innovative solutions. In so doing, they collectively unlocked the potential of partnerships.

The student groups worked closely with many organizations including the Cairns City Council, Tableland Farmers, CSIRO, Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, as they completed authentic projects over the course of the year. Projects included the mapping of tree kangaroo habitats on the Tablelands. Farmers contacted the students through email or phone to provide the spatial co-ordinates of tree kangaroo sightings. Students would map this and with a cycle of inquiry (using GIS software) dig deeper to ascertain if species location was an attribution of soil type, vegetation type, topography, human settlement, etc. The outcome was the construction of tree kangaroo and small mammal over passes to support the movement of the animals across roads that dissect the Far North Queensland rainforests.

Another group of students studied the effects of acid sulfate soil on Trinity Inlet, exposed after the clearance of vegetation for housing and sugar

farming. Students wanted to know if the construction of a bund wall would deter acid sulfate run-off and set about recruiting the “external experts” who could provide the deep knowledge they required as they delved intensely into their work. This work provided great information to the local environmental groups, as well as the Cairns City Council.

These are just two of the many great examples of student-centered work that thoroughly engaged the students. By working together to seek innovative solutions, students were constructing meaning. Students soon learnt that collaboration should be dynamic. They could recognize the different strengths and talents each person within the class could bring to the projects and change their roles depending on those attributes. They shared their information and findings with “real world” organizations and people and understood the value of “shared knowledge and understandings”. They used a new technology with consummate ease for real world problem solving and applied these new learnings with confidence to new situations. Their learning had true context.

I often see these students, all now very successful adults, in the supermarket, or at the local sport’s oval on a weekend. And every time, they instantly draw the conversation back to their time in the GIS class and speak glowingly of the fun they had in their own learning. It is so encouraging to hear their stories, albeit a little romanticized over time I am sure, but as each in turn relate their personal learning stories from this class, I cannot help but feel, as their teacher I had, to some degree, a pivotal role in shaping their futures.

## 2. What Are The Issues That Keep You Up At Night?

**Q: What are the big issues for education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: In a nutshell, it is responding to the leadership challenge of meeting the needs of all students! Are we meeting our Far North Queensland Vision for Education Queensland of “#Whatever – it – Takes” to ensure that every student is succeeding?



Whilst we are approaching this work as learners – building on what we presently know, what we wonder about based on identified emerging trends, what the research is telling us, and what we make of evidence from our own and others experiences and practices, our FNQ inclusion snapshot highlights that we still have a lot of work to do.

Ethnicity and postcode continue to be the most reliable predictors of educational achievement in this country at a time when our nation is becoming increasingly diverse. Our young people are transitioning into and out of schools and formal educational institutions with vastly different skill sets, experiences and levels of access to external resources and supports.

As schools become more “consciously” immersed in the inclusion agenda, leadership is placing equity-based approaches and inclusive strategies at the forefront, meeting students and their communities where they are, making sure that they have access to the people and the resources that can help them, and keeping focus on every student’s right to excellence in education and access to opportunity.

Delivering on “equity” and “inclusion” are indeed the big issues and the emerging challenges. It is vitally important that we (system drivers, school leaders and classroom practitioners) build on all our positive gains and past advances in policy, practice and structure that are fast gaining traction such as “universal design for learning”, “personalized learning” and new models of shared accountability. Equally important is the transformative leadership required to confront the complex concepts of equity and inclusion, where there is no clear solution or single correct answer and where what was done in the past does not necessarily hold many answers for what now we must all do in the future. We have indeed a new learning agenda.

### 3. Your Brief History of Time

**Q: Give us a career snapshot. What work roles did you have prior to becoming a teacher?**

A: I loved my schooling years. I was blessed to have great teachers all the way throughout my primary and secondary school years. As far back as I can remember, I have always set my career goal on becoming a teacher. (My siblings made great pupils!)

My first appointment as a secondary school teacher (social science/English) was at Mackay State High School. After 4 years, I moved down the road to Rockhampton State High, where I stayed for 10 years.

My husband and I moved to the Cairns region in the nineties, where my next school appointment was at Trinity Bay State High as Head of Department, Social Science.

In 2010, I applied for and won the substantive Deputy Principal role at Gordonvale State High School, a band 10 school, located 30 minutes south of Cairns. I became Principal in 2012. In 2019, term 2, I moved into the role of Assistant Regional Director.

### 4. Early Career: Advice My Younger Self

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today?**

#### 4A Key Learnings...

#### 1. Start every leadership team-planning meeting with a blank sheet of paper.

Allow all team members to have maximum input – do not be in a hurry to develop the plan. Use a model of inquiry and school data to keep the focus and maintain a momentum. Early in my leadership, I would spend hours and hours preparing “the plans” to then share with my teams and teachers. The next whole of school annual improvement plan; the next whole of school professional development plan; the reading and writing framework; a standard

of practice and so many more. For what? My team did not have ownership, as they were not the co-designers, co-planners nor did they feel the co-implementers.

My hours of effort and time, reduced to dust-laden artefacts on staffroom shelves.

#### 2. Take a real interest in your staff’s wellbeing.

Ensure that across the school, just as every student requires a caring adult, every adult has a genuine caring colleague. Spend time in staffrooms during breaks really getting to know your staff, to acknowledge, and value their contribution to the school, no matter how small.

Make time to celebrate staff achievements and school wins. Be open and honest in feedback and call the behavior for what it is. Whilst many may not appreciate the candid feedback – in time, they will.

#### 3. Never take anything personally – move on – get over it!

As leaders, we must appear calm and resolute in every situation. In times of crises, all eyes are on us. How we react will come back to bite us. An adverse reaction to a school incident may spark a regrettable verbalization of an ill- thought or an accusing phrase. When school leaders are united and calm – the school climate is calm and teachers and students perform at their best.

#### 4. Never commit assuicide.

How often do we assume that this staff member is lazy or that Head of Department has no clue or that when all leaders at a meeting nod their head that they understand, we register – “great” and wrongly move on. We need to challenge assumptions and beliefs by heightening the level of professional dialogue with a clearly articulated focus. We need to use agreed processes and tools to surface individual beliefs and we need to foster a culture of no blame by using evidence-based tools and practices.

## 5. Eliminate the distractions.

Schools harbor literally hundreds of distractions each day. Distractions beat staying on task and remaining focus, often. To support teams to stay “on-task” and remain “on-focus” I found it important to pre-plan – to predict the potential distractions, for example, the dynamics of the team (relationships and capability), time, resourcing and eliminate them.

### 4B Advice to Younger Self...

*“Among the types of thoughts that affect action, none is more central or pervasive than people’s judgements of their capabilities to deal effectively with different realities.”*  
– Bandura

Firstly, put your hand up for any leadership role within the school, no matter your years of experience. Become a year coordinator. Volunteer to lead the organizing committee of a school event or spearhead a new project team within the school. Actively participate in training in reform initiatives such as Positive Behavior for Learning (PBL) or Essential Skills for Classroom Management (ESCM) or Profiling or Inclusive Education.

Be a member of any school or region organized Community of Practice (CoP) to really learn about key student issues and how to effectively share ideas in collaborative practice. Make a conscious decision to be part of your school community and contribute in an honest way so that you are “growing” and others are learning from you, valuing your input. Be genuine to the cause and not to self-promotion. Ensure the timing is right – when you are ready for the next upward move in your career.

I moved very slowly into my first leadership position as a Head of Department, in reflection, maybe too slowly. I was not very confident in my abilities. Right throughout my leadership journey, “others” tapped me on the shoulder and gave me the confidence to give leadership at the next level a go. I am pleased they did – I have no regrets.

*“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.”*  
– John F. Kennedy

Secondly, connect with a mentor and be proactive about seeking candid feedback, so that you learn from the experience of others. Be very grateful to the people in your life, be they members of your own family or colleagues, or that coach or mentor who have supported and will support you in your leadership journey. Be genuine in your gratitude, as people always remember how you made them feel.

*“The pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”*  
– Winston Churchill

Thirdly, possess a positive attitude. Complaining never helped rectify any issue or concern. Follow the articulation of the concern by offering a possible solution. To be an effective leader, you need to show how you are an agent for positive school climate. In everyday school life, there are plenty of frustrations and disappointments and no one ever singularly possesses all the answers but individuals thinking together will provide the insight required to ensure the next positive lift.

## 5. On Building High Performance Schools

**Q: 5A How do you enable your own leadership team to create High Performance Teams throughout the school?**

A: I believe that high performance teams are the foundation of every high performing school and the only way to expedite the process for giving the next lift in results of motivated and capable staff members. However, it was important that as principal I really understood the developmental needs of my leadership teams and of the individuals who collectively made up the teams.

I learned early in my principalship that all leadership teams need clear instructions, tasks designed with clarity of purpose, and support (human, physical or financial resourcing) to generate viable and innovative solutions. The depth of leadership

experience of the team members determined how much input I provided.

Team members also need time to collaborate with agreed norms to ensure self-worth and collective efficacy.

**Q: 5B How do you get teams working effectively – both within cohorts and collaborating across the school on important school-wide projects?**

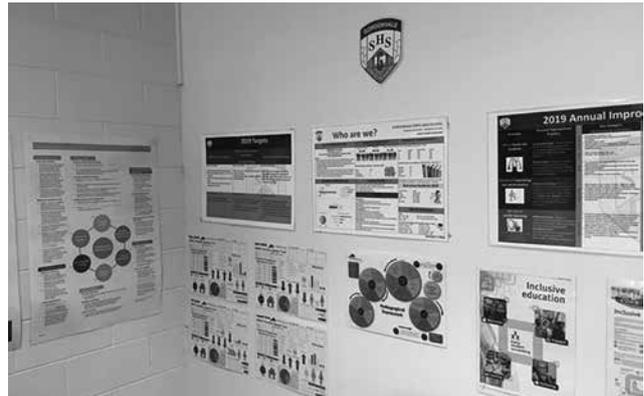
A: I set up a number of teams across the school each charged with specific roles and responsibilities such as student behaviour teams; teaching and learning teams; literacy team; student welfare team, etc. The focus work of each team directly aligned to our school's priorities, supported by current data trends and realistically achievable targets. The teams would report to the whole staff at various whole staff meetings and key representatives of each team would meet with an executive team member or myself each week. The key to our team's success was strong follow through, observing the steps within the model of inquiry, and quality systems or processes with full loop communication.

**Q: 5C How do you use meeting cycles and dashboards to maximise staff and student performance and wellbeing?**

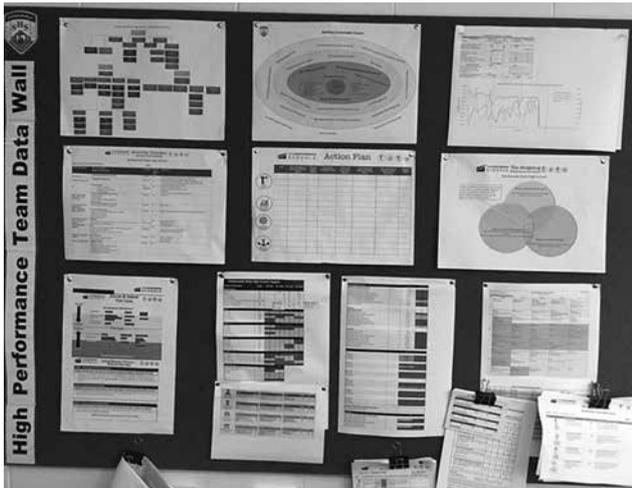
A: At the start of 2018, The "High Performance Teams (HPT)" program, provided our school's leadership team with a number of evidenced-based strategies and tools to support our drive towards the creation of high performance teams throughout the school. A tool that had a profound impact on our leadership team's ability to collaborate effectively was the use of the HPT meeting structure (4 parts context, one part process – "an hour of power"). The deep dive template tool and the HPT pulse survey tool are complementary resources to the HPT meeting structure.

High performance teams need quality meetings. The HPT meeting recipe provided just that – a quality meeting with:

- Clarity of purpose to help define the agenda topics.



- A welcome and warm up:
  - To confirm the school and team's mission and values.
  - To appoint a moderator.
  - To do a one-word barometer to gauge readiness and mood; and
  - Complete a quick icebreaker to make everyone feel safe and comfortable and to know each other a little better.
- Team member updates or exception reporting where members who have something new to report make comment.
- Hot issues are an important part of the meeting as it allows members to discuss issues of concern. A consensus of hot issues is undertaken by a quick pair and share between members, followed by noting on the whiteboard the agreed issues and finally allowing all members voting rights by placing 5 ticks against the topics they believe are of relevance and of concern. The process is complete when the most hotly regarded issue is outlined, clarified, discussed and addressed.
- Senior leader presents a briefing with questions and answers.
- Planned deep dive session built from a probing question is considered and supports the team to share quality ideas and solutions and establish the next steps and new pathways for the presenter.
- HPT pulse check to check in on all members to maintain and improve wellbeing at work



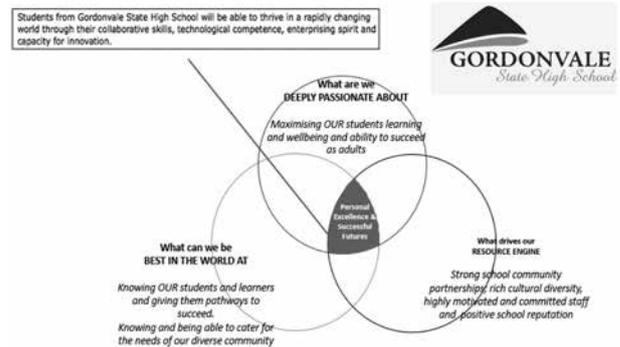
and any notable personal news or events of celebration or matters of concern whereby other members may be able to provide additional support.

- Wrap up to the meeting by all members sharing their barometer and takeaways. The moderator finally provides feedback on the meeting and feeds forward in terms of who will fill the role of moderator and chair and deep dive topic and presenter in the next meeting.

Our Heads of Department now replicate the meeting structure in their weekly faculty meetings. It now means that highly productive meetings are occurring at each organisational level within the school. In addition, the meeting structure provides a further means of observing staff well-being collectively, through the weekly faculty HPT pulse checks.

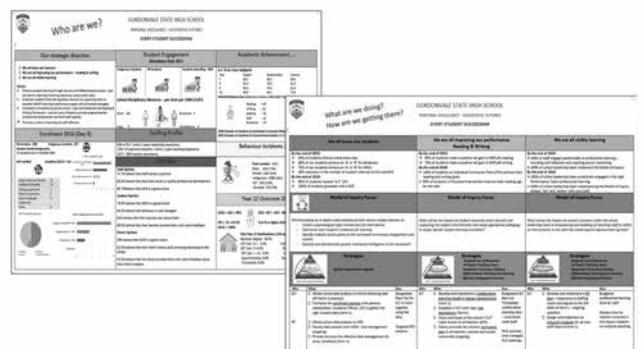
Another important learning from HPT was the creation of our leadership team's data wall and monthly dashboard. Having our school vision, purpose and targets clearly visible continually reminded us of our core purpose and the quantitative and qualitative outcomes we were trying to achieve and what goals and targets we needed to set.

Our hedgehog diagram highlights "Personal Excellence, Successful Futures" as our key driver. We have a passion to maximise our students' learning and wellbeing and ability to succeed as adults, expertise in knowing our learners and being able to provide our students with multiple pathways



to succeed and a resource engine fuelled by strong community partnerships, rich cultural diversity, highly motivated and committed staff and a positive school reputation.

Our "Who are we", "What are we doing", "How are we getting there" snapshots (see below) grounded us. Our dashboard displayed all our meeting minutes, our HPT pulse checks, our mentoring and coaching check-ins, our organisational chart and line management tracking and our above and below line behaviours in addition to status reports on our community reference groups that supported our school community partnerships and our student welfare progress. This data has certainly driven engagement in our whole staff, faculty and leadership meetings. By being clearly visible in our staff common room and main meeting room, the data displayed has become a fixed agenda item in all meetings. Our student welfare progress reports updated by our Deputy Principal, provides targets and status for suspensions/attendance and social/emotional health. These lead indicators emailed monthly to all teaching staff are valued.



## 6. Strange But True

**Q: What have been some of the more memorable moments in your career?**

A: It is impossible to identify one anecdote that best exemplifies my most memorable moment as a teacher or as a leader. I can honestly say that my career is overflowing with memorable and proud moments such as:

- Whole school or year level parades – I love them. I would always spend a lot of time in the preparation of something engaging to relate to 850 students and staff. I would search for the right quote, the right character, or the right analogy to present, something that was pertinent to the moment. I remember one parade very fondly where I shared the story of Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani girl who inspired the world after surviving a Taliban bullet to the head, the girl who stood up for education. Not a sound resonated through the student body – only my voice was audible. The students, thoroughly captivated as this young girl's life unfolded before them. Many came to see me after the parade and inquired as to what they could do to support her. I find it very interesting how easy it can be to engage adolescents.
- Time walking around each lunch hour speaking to students and priding myself on remembering many of their names is certainly very memorable. So many conversations on so many topics and levels.
- Time spent discussing with leadership teams the scope and deliverables of their next project. Time spent supporting students in the preparation of arguments for their interschool debating challenges, or public speaking competitions or constitutional conventions. All fond memories, of teenagers at their best. Even last night in my new role as Assistant Regional Director, I presented awards to a number of very capable students in the Secondary Schools Energy Tanks Visual Arts evening. The 119 pieces of work were unquestionably mind blowing. The depth of creativity and level of



complexity that these students displayed in their work was awe-inspiring. Such an amazing, memorable and thoroughly enjoyable evening, shared with students from a cross section of secondary schools, their parents and their teachers.

It sounds corny, but for me, teaching and educational leadership is not about one specific proud moment. It is undeniably all those actions, all those moments, no matter how big or small within schools, a learner's face portrays the pride of achievement.

## 7. Sliding Doors: Into the Future

**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure of the education system?**

A: The focus must be on equity. Unless clearly defined through purpose, rapid technological and scientific change may widen existing inequities, aggravate social fragmentation and accelerate resource depletion. For our students and educators, this has enormous ramifications.

It heralds an unrelenting focus on ensuring that all students are equipped with the 21st Century skills that will enable each individual to access material resources (jobs, earnings, and housing), health, civic engagement, social connections, security and life satisfaction. Our education system has indeed a critical role to play in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that allow individuals to positively contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future, twenty years from now. Students will need to know how to create

realistic and purposeful goals, work with others who may have different perspectives, solve problems and identify multiple solutions.

One important skill identified by the OECD, to future-ready our students is the skill to exercise agency, a sense of responsibility to participate in the world, and in so doing, influence people, events and circumstances for the better. For our education system and for teachers this means that we will need to personalize learning environments that supports and motivates each student to nurture his or her passions, make connections between different learning experiences and provide opportunities for students to design their own learning projects in collaborations with others. Literacy in particular digital and data literacy and numeracy must remain crucial foci, as should physical and mental well-being.

The preparation of today's students for 2040 will require broad and specialized disciplinary knowledge such as how to think like a mathematician, historian or scientist. Equally important, they will require a broad range of skills such as cognitive and meta-cognitive skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, learning to learn and self-regulation); social and emotional skills (empathy, self-efficacy and collaboration); and practical skills and physical skills (using new information and communication technology devices).

The utilization of this broad range of knowledge and skills, mediated by attitudes and values (motivation, trust, respect for diversity and virtue) observed at personal, local, societal and global levels, must not compromise human values such as respect for human life and respect for the environment to name two. In order to acquire the knowledge and skills mentioned, our students must develop the transformative competency of being adaptable, curious and open-minded. They will need to become adept at handling tensions, dilemmas and trade-offs for example, balancing equity and freedom, autonomy and community, innovation and continuity, and efficiency and the democratic process. That is, they will need to become system thinkers, whilst acting ethically.

These transformative competencies are complex;

each competency is intricately interrelated with the others. They are however, developmental in nature, and thus learnable.

We therefore, right now, must ensure that at the heart of our school leadership model sits the construct to improve teaching and learning through shared or distributive leadership practices – we need, as Fullan suggests, to liberate downwards as we mobilize sideways and upwards.

This means that we mobilize teams through intentional collaboration. “The content of the work”, as Fullan states, “is to engage the world, in order to study it, learn about it and begin to help change it (locally and beyond) for the better.” It is only through authentic collaborative learning, that we will engage all our students, especially those students who at present are the most disengaged by conventional schooling, what Fullan terms – the “equity hypothesis” At the same time will unleash en masse the “change agents” who want to learn and make a difference together. In this respect, to future-ready our students, the “new leadership” for school leaders is to participate as learners with their staff, teachers, students and communities to achieve greater and deeper learning that makes a difference.

Our role then, as school principals, in the preparation of our students for 2040, is to develop students and teachers as learned changed agents both individually and collectively.

*“My deepest professional passion is enabling student improvement for every student. I lead with the credo: no matter the barriers; no matter the background; no matter the ability; our kids will be successful!”*

– Matt Newell,  
Principal, Glenmore State High School

## Leadership Shares #9

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# Matt Newell

## Improvement is for EVERY Student!

*Extraordinary school leadership boils down to 3 key things: (1) Being able to do the right work... (2) at the right time... (3) and in the right way. Matt Newell is an extraordinary school leader with many leadership life lessons learnt on the journey from teacher to middle leader to principal.*

*I have been privileged to work with Matt and his leadership team at Glenmore State High School on their High Performance School's journey and have been deeply impressed by his insight, humility, openness to change, and patience in allowing the time and space needed for genuine school transformation to occur. Matt has a deep passion for student improvement. In 2014 Matt and his team won the Queensland Showcase award for the work they undertook in student engagement. In 2015, he had the honour of being selected as Queensland's Positive Teacher of the year. Matt's credo is "no matter the barriers; no matter the background; no matter the ability; our kids will be successful!" In this edition on Leadership Shares, Matt opens up about his leadership journey and his passion for ensuring EVERY student can improve...*



### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Teachers have the most profound impact of any profession. When you think about how many students that teachers have an impact on each day it is astounding. Secondary teachers can impact from 100 to 200 students, this may be in one of their many classes to the students that they may meet and impact through performing one of their many other duties such as playground duty, sporting teams or special interest groups. When this number is multiplied over a teacher's career the impact that teachers have

enters the thousand if not tens of thousands. These impacts can, and do, last a lifetime.

### 2. What Are The Issues That Keep You Up At Night?

**Q: What are the big issues for education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: Issues that I continue to grapple with generally come from student engagement. How do we engage students best in schools? Are our traditional pedagogies and education structures the best way to raise all our students? What can we do differently

to connect our students to learning? I have been fortunate to be given autonomy to work through some of these issues and by no means have I found the right answers to these questions yet. I am sure as the many talented people we have in schools grapple with similar issues, we as a system will continue to shape the way we educate all students to obtain maximum engagement and improvement.

### 3. Your Brief History of Time

**Q: Give us a career snapshot. What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into leadership?**

A: I have been fortunate to be well supported by my school and region to develop me personally and as a leader. After getting back from a Eurotrip, after finishing University, I happened to walk into a Home Economics contract, which turned into a Physical Education position. Here I was fortunate to be mentored by great teachers and leaders who encouraged me to step into Sports Master and Year Level Coordinator positions. Opportunities through the Flying Start Initiative gave me an opportunity not only to bring year 7 into High School (Queensland) under a Pilot program but develop my leadership skills as a Head of Department and Deputy Principal. My school and region continued this support to the Principal position and now a Lead Principal in Central Queensland.

### 4. Early Career: Advice to My Younger Self

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today?**

A: Advice I would give myself as an early career leader is that you cannot do leadership alone and you can't be Mr Fix it!

It is relatively easy to create plans and give it to people to enact. Often however, these plans will sit in folders and fail to get the impact intended in the classroom without involving others. Giving staff a voice to input into the direction and to co-create these plans develops ownership and empowerment to change.



Not having all the answers is sometimes the most powerful leadership tool. This links into not being Mr Fix it. As a young Deputy Principal, I found it easier when someone with an issue or problem came to me to respond with, yep, I know what to do in this situation and TELL or DO whatever needed to be done. Over time I have learnt that staff want to work through these issues or problems with someone and the time taken to listen and understand is much more powerful.

### 5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes

**Q: How did your career progress to the role you had today? Have you had any setbacks which ultimately created subsequent success? What has become more important and what has become less important to your school leadership in the last few years?**

A: I have experienced many setbacks along my career progression and I have been supported to continually develop by leaders in our region.

I have attempted to move “back home”, New South Wales, on a couple of occasions unsuccessfully. With these knockbacks, I have always gone away from this after receiving feedback to look at how I can continue to develop myself and make an impact on students. What I have learnt from this is that our region really looks after its people and values improvement, if that is at a classroom, school or personal level.



## 6. On Building High Performance Schools

**Q: What have been some of the successes and challenges in building a High Performance High School? How do you enable your own leadership team to create High Performance Teams throughout the school? How do you use meeting cycles and dashboards to maximise staff and student performance and wellbeing?**

**A:** The High Performance Schools program has given our school structures to explicitly define and communicate our improvement agenda, develop a leadership team specific data wall enabling our middle leaders to work effectively as a team as well as manage their own departmental teams, and bring a deeper focus of inquiry to key strategic issues.

As a school leadership team, the HPT toolkit to manage our meetings more effectively has been brilliant – giving everyone a voice and control over what is on the agenda, what needs immediate attention and time to go deeper on certain topics. We have had to be agile in this so that our team continues to move forward. We have moved from weekly to fortnightly back to weekly leadership meetings, where we can use one meeting a fortnight to dive into key agenda items for an hour while the other meeting can continue to progress our whole school plans.



## 7. Influential Leaders & Mentors

**Q: Who do you think of when you hear the words “Influential School Leader”? Have mentors played a significant role in your career? What characteristics do you find most helpful in a mentor?**

**A:** There are a number of influential school leaders that I think of locally. Characteristics that my mentors have that are helpful are, approachable, giving honest feedback, inspire hope and clear in their communication. My “man-crush” school leader, would have to be John Hattie. The clear-cut evidence base that he has pulled together cannot be argued with and it’s our role to work out how to get these working in our schools.

Glenmore SHS Senior Leadership Team (SLT)		
<b>Vision:</b> Inspiring growth, positive wellbeing and quality outcomes for all <b>Location:</b> Boardroom <b>Date and Time:</b> / / 2019 (90minutes) <b>Chair:</b> <b>Moderator:</b> <b>Notes/Minutes:</b> <b>Attendees:</b>		
<b>Item 1</b> <b>Inclusion 1</b>	<b>Welcome</b> • Organisation Mission & Values Share • Specific Team Role & Accountability • Meeting Team Purpose & Outcomes • Moderator Cards & Ground Rules	Chair 2 mins
<b>Item 2</b> <b>Support 2</b>	<b>Warm-Up</b> One word barometer, ice-breaker and/or Success & Challenge	All 4 mins
<b>Item 3</b> <b>Proactive 1</b>	<b>Team Member Updates and Report Back from Business Arising</b> Week/A Prior & Week/A Ahead Exception Reporting (2 mins max per team member) Live Notes:	All 22 mins
	<b>Matt N</b> to James Lauren Jason Jax Trish Emma Matt B Demi Karly	
<b>Item 4</b> <b>Proactive 2</b>	<b>Hot Issues</b>	All 15 mins
<b>Item 5</b> <b>Strategic 1</b>	<b>Senior Leaders Briefing and Q&amp;A</b> Live Notes: Deep Dive	Lauren 20 mins

Glenmore SHS Leadership Team Meeting Agenda: 90 mins			
<b>Item 6</b> <b>Strategic 2</b>	School Improvement Strategy	All	20 mins
<b>Item 8</b>	Team pulse Work life balance What is does 0% look, sound, feel like? What does 50% look, sound, feel like? What does 100% look, sound, feel like?	Matt	10 mins
<b>Item 9</b> <b>Support 2</b>	<b>Team Pulse: Culture &amp; Communication Update (Feedback)</b> Wellbeing Update – Team Pulse Survey data review and note of forward actions to promote wellbeing. Culture Update – round table discussion of notable personal news and events among team and stakeholders. Live notes:	All	5 mins
<b>Item 10</b> <b>Accountable</b>	<b>Close (Barometer, Takeaway Actions, Moderator Feedback &amp; next Meeting Roles)</b> Moderator Feedback: Next Meeting Date: Chair: Deep Dive Topic & Presenter: See Schedule in Next meeting folder.	Chair & Moderator	2 mins
<b>Ground Rules (Red Card/ Yellow Card)</b> 1. Openness & Trust- Right to 'off record' speech with 'on the record' documented as formal feedback. 2. Balanced Debate - Respecting both sides of the argument and allowing diversity of views. 3. Competency over Role - Respecting the 'value' of the person's opinion regardless of their 'status'. 4. Issues over Personalities - Staying 'issues' focused and not letting personalities overpower the agenda. 5. Accountable Actions & Clear Outcomes - Being constructive in feedback and offering a solution focused 6. No Devices – Exception Moderator & Chair for Time Keeping & Live Notes/ Minute Taker			

## 8. Memorable Moments

**Q: What have been some of the more memorable moments in your career?**

A: My deepest professional passion is enabling student improvement for each and every student. My credo is no matter the barriers; no matter the background; no matter the ability; our kids will be successful! In 2014 our leadership team won the Queensland Showcase award for the work we undertook in student engagement. In 2015, I was selected as Queensland's Positive Teacher of the year. This led us to be the first of two Queensland schools to implement a FLEXISpace, where Australian Curriculum, Relationships and Inclusion are the keys to success.

## 9. Personal Inspo: Favourite Books & Quotes

**Q: What are your most gifted and or recommended leadership books to others? What message about schools and education would you put on a gigantic billboard that everyone could see?**

A: The book I most recommend is Michael Fullan's *Motion Leadership: The Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy*. In such a short number of pages, he is able to capture processes and tools to lead change. I also



pick up quite regularly Hattie's *Visible Learning* books, clear, data-informed strategies.

If I was to hire a Billboard, the message I would plaster on it is – IT IS TIME. We have been talking about the need to move from an industrial education system to a 21st Century system for what seems decades, with limited to no movement towards this. There are pockets of great practice emerging however the system and some of our traditional schooling mindsets still have a long way to go – to activate and to resource what this needs to look like to keep up with the ever-changing world.

## 10. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you “stay the course” during periods of change and uncertainty?**

A: When I feel unfocused or overwhelmed I do one of two things. If I am still at work, I go and spend time with students in their classrooms or in the playground. Talk to them about what they are learning, how they are finding it, etc. This grounds me and gives me motivation to keep moving forward. If I am at home, after school hours, it is generally some sort of exercise, either going to the gym or playing in the backyard with my kids. Not focusing on work helps to make things clearer and less overwhelming.

Keeping good mental health routines where my focus is away from work, helps me be clearer and sharper when faced with the complexities of a school day. Shifting into the new role as Lead Principal, no doubt, these will be tested.

## 11. Sliding Doors: Into The Future

**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure of the education system?**

A: Twenty years from now the keys to success for the education system will be to become more agile in our response to the changing world. Change management and the ability to shift policy and legislative requirements to remain responsive to meet the demands of our learners will ensure successful futures for our students.

*“Every teacher that challenges the status quo and educates the community about disability is paving an inclusive path forward for our current and future students.”*

– Kate Russ,  
Principal, Rosella Park Special Education  
School

# Leadership Shares #10

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## Kate Russ

### High Performance Teaching Teams in Special Education

*Extraordinary School Leaders have an incredible ability to balance their relational and strategic leadership responsibilities as they manage both the day-to-day challenges and drive school improvement forward. Managing this complex balancing act is not easy – ensuring the ongoing wellbeing of students and staff whilst stretching towards higher standards of learning and achievement.*

*Kate Russ, Principal of Rosella Park Special Education School, is one such extraordinary school leader. As a leader, Kate combines her empathy, warmth and enthusiasm for helping others succeed with a deep understanding of systems thinking and sustainable processes and structures to drive transformational outcomes where every student and every staff member can flourish. In this edition of HPS Leadership Shares Kate opens up about her leadership journey, the challenges and opportunities of the special education context and the power of High Performance Teaching Teams in driving school improvement.*



#### 1. The Butterfly Effect

**Q: Do you believe teachers are having a larger impact in society beyond the classroom?**

A: Absolutely! Speaking from a special school perspective, teachers are constantly advocating within and challenging our communities to remove barriers, both physical and people's attitude to difference, to offer people with a disability more independence, choice and control. They do this through community based instruction, constantly challenging people to communicate and work with someone who has a disability.

Every teacher that challenges the status quo and educates the community about disability is paving an inclusive path forward for our current and future

students! As leaders we have the responsibility to empower teachers to believe they can have an effect outside of the classroom, ensuring they have high expectations for their students and challenge the status quo.

#### 2. What Are The Issues That Keep You Up At Night?

**Q: What are the big issues for special education in the current state of play and what are the emerging challenges on the horizon?**

A: The single biggest issue, that on the surface may seem simple however is much more complex for me from a leadership perspective, is that of student outcomes. So many questions run through my mind constantly that I often fall short in answering... How



do we attract quality staff? How do you constantly upskill and provide support for teachers within quite restrictive time constraints? How do you keep motivating staff to have high expectations, knowing that this requires a lot of hard work and dedication? How do we use the systems that we have, no matter how limiting they are at times, to ensure we are still addressing student need? How do you keep everyone on the same page?

All of these questions are essential if you are wanting to lead a high performance school where everyone can be proud of having high expectations and improved outcomes for students. In theory it seems simple, and there certainly is a lot of research and literature out there about how you can work towards that, but in practice it's a complex and difficult task.

I remember sitting with my coach in my first year of being a principal and posing him a question. Yes, I had lots of operational questions and so much to learn, but the question that grappled me then, and still keeps me awake at night to this day is "How do you instil passion in people?"

It's a personal belief of mine that without this passion and attitude that often requires you to go above and beyond, teaching is a very difficult job that causes much stress and burnout. If you love what you do, you will definitely still have hard days but you do what you do for the students because of that fire in your belly to succeed. That passion generally sees teachers as self-reflective thinkers that want to learn,

challenge themselves and ensure their students get the best education they can possibly have. So as we face constant issues of adapting the curriculum to address the ever-changing needs of our students, within a very demanding job that places huge demands on teachers, how do we assist teachers to approach their job with passion and ongoing enthusiasm to create a workplace that just buzzes with excitement and fun?

### 3. Your Brief History of Time

**Q: Give us a snapshot of your career to date. What work roles did you have prior to becoming a teacher? Where did you study? What were the early teaching years like and what was the catalyst to move into middle leadership and then subsequently into senior leadership in schools (which schools did you work in along the way)?**

A: I left school wanting to be a journalist, but very quickly started first year uni and realised I was never going to fulfil my dream of being a reporter on Getaway, and actually didn't have the personality to go and get a great story from a stranger. I had to decide on my next career move, and had grown up watching my mum have so much love for teaching, so I decided to give it a go.

I started High School teaching at UQ, specialising in English and Special needs as my second teaching subject. This second teaching area was soon to become my passion, and I moved across to Griffith



University where I completed a Bachelor of Education (Special Education).

My first permanent position was at Kuraby Special School, which is where I remained for 6 years. This time was nothing short of amazing, and certainly shaped the type of leader I am today. I find myself constantly reflecting on that time, trying to emulate exactly what we had, and whilst I think I have been in a couple of situations that came close, I don't think I have achieved this yet. Our Principal at the time led from the front with passion, dedication and hard work, and taught me that you keep your head down and do an amazing job for the students, but if something does occur that you feel really passionate about it is okay to challenge and expect answers. The staff were united, and together we had so much fun, going above and beyond to ensure the students of the school were given the best education they could have. Many of us keep in touch to this day, and we all talk about that amazing snapshot in time.

Generally 6 years sees me wanting a new challenge, and I moved to Red Hill Special School. I was beginning to think that I'd like to have the opportunity to influence the direction of a school and work with staff to achieve outcomes for students, and the challenge was certainly offered

to me when I was appointed Deputy Principal after being at the school for a year. Being appointed in this role had its own set of challenges for a variety of reasons, but as I began to work with staff, establish relationships across the school and demonstrate my passion in leadership and working with students with a disability, I came to love this role within the Leadership team.

In 2012, I was a recommended candidate in the Principal pool, and was offered an acting Principal job at Rosella Park School in Gladstone. I took a big breath and a leap of faith and moved to a regional area to take on this role. WOW, it was certainly a massive learning experience, and I definitely learnt to embrace the motto "fake it till you make it!" But 8 years on and I can honestly say it was the best move for me, both professionally and personally. It has been an absolute privilege to be the Principal of a medium sized special school in Gladstone, and would encourage anyone to take up such an opportunity. The networks you have around you are amazing, and I have worked with some incredible staff, both at the school and regionally, students and families. I may be biased, and I certainly see we have a distance to travel as a school to be a high performing school, but we have an amazing community and as I say to the students "The best kids in Queensland", and they believe me.

I am constantly seeking out ways to challenge myself and learn from others, so have also taken on an acting internal reviewer role with the School Improvement Unit, and have sat on a number of regional and state-wide panels. This has been both motivating and insightful, and I see this as a necessary part of my leadership journey.

#### **4. Early Career: Advice My Younger Self**

**Q: What were some of your key early career leadership learnings and experiences? What advice would you give your younger self today? What advice do you wish you had ignored?**

**A:** Whilst I thoroughly enjoyed my role as Deputy Principal and certainly grew as a leader and person, I was still so young in my leadership journey, and don't think my key leadership learnings really

happened until I walked into Rosella Park School. It was a case of not knowing what I didn't know, and desperately wanting to do a good job, keep the staff happy and be proud of our achievements as a school. At the time the school was not entitled to a DP, and we had a part-time HOC that was created as a workplace reform position. I very quickly learnt how lonely a Principal position can be and that whilst you can try to fix everything for everyone, you are just simply setting yourself and them up to fail. But for the first couple of years that's what I tried to do...

The school grew quite quickly, welcoming nearly 40 extra students over the years, which made the site much more complex. With much more experience under my belt now, many hours attending professional development, researching new ways of working, and generally self-reflecting in an attempt to reach that ever elusive high performing school state, I carry 3 quotes with me every single day...

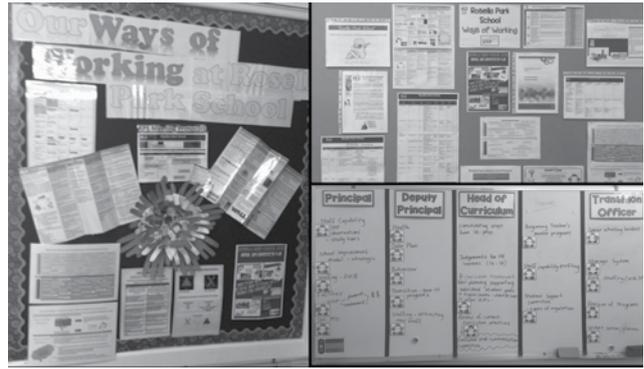
“You cannot own someone else's behaviour”, “The practice you walk past is the practice you accept” and “I am responsible for providing clarity, not ensuring your happiness”.

Do I act on these every single day? No! Some days you just know you don't have much left in the tank, but I know that if I can carry this through most of what I do, this is much more meaningful and successful than trying to please everyone by fixing things and doing things for them.

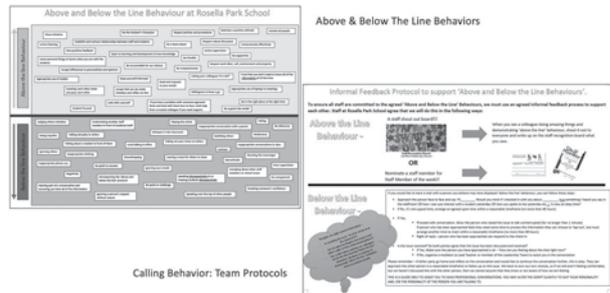
### 5. Later Career: Setbacks & Successes

**Q: How did your career progress to the role you had today? Have you had any setbacks which ultimately created subsequent success? What has become more important and what has become less important to your school leadership in the last few years?**

A: My goal as a leader is to have the respect of the entire school community. As a Principal you often have to make some big decisions that may or may not be favourable amongst all, but I have always said that I hope that whilst people may not agree with the decision that I have made, that they respect me for making it.



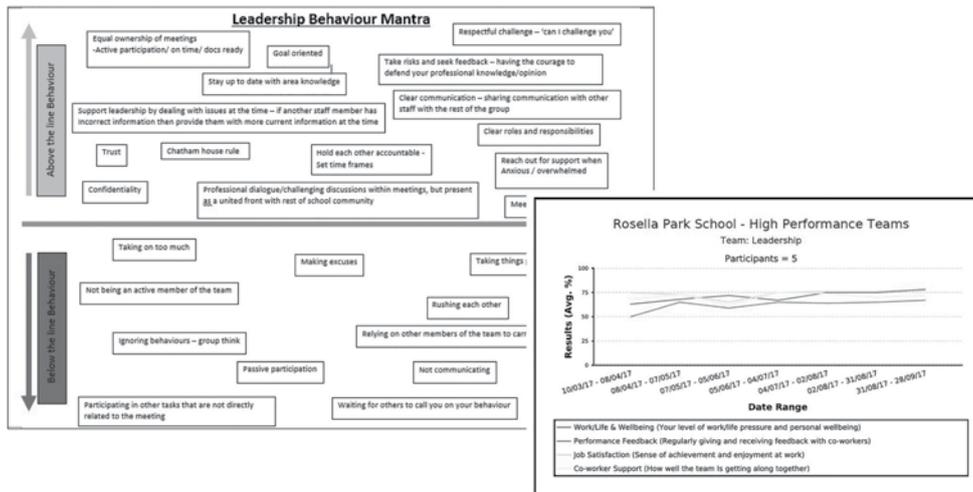
Rosella Park School 'Ways of Working': All Teams



I think if I had to talk about a setback or challenge for me personally it would be people constantly questioning my decision making based on previous experiences or baggage that they bring to a situation. It constantly surprises me just how often I have had to address this, and just how important it is to stay focused and “walk the walk” over and over again. Initially it was about dealing with all of the issues the staff thought had been swept under the carpet for so long, and then it was about challenging the notion of “this is how we have always done it”. Now it can just be that people are stressed and may not have all of the facts before deciding if the decision is the right one in any given situation. What I have learned from this is that you have to stay true to your moral compass and try and be as open and honest as possible, and that at the end of the day you may not please everyone, but if the decision is based on the best needs of the students, then it will always be a good decision.

Over time, as the culture of the school has developed and strengthened, and I have demonstrated my constant “way of working” people do question less, and embrace change a lot easier than they used to, which to me has been a huge personal success. I also now think that if people did stop questioning or

## Rosella Park School HPT: Leadership Team Norms & Pulse



challenging decisions then it would be time for me to move on from a school community, as debate can only bring greater clarity for all, bringing us one step closer to being a high performance school.

### 6. On Building High Performance Teaching Teams in Special Education Schools

**Q: What have been some of the successes and challenges in building a High Performance Teaching Teams in a special education context? How did you build your own leadership team to operate as a High Performance Team? How do you use meeting cycles and dashboards to maximise staff and student performance and wellbeing?**

A: We introduced the High Performance Teams approach to Rosella in 2017, at a time when we needed to streamline processes and ensure we had a consistent way of working at Rosella. We had made some huge gains in the classroom with enacting the curriculum, addressing individual student needs and ensuring we carried out the principles of PBL, but we still required more direction and a set of protocols that ensured we were all on the same page with a clear sense of vision and purpose.

Ownership is an interesting concept in schools, and one I discuss with staff often. I think it is our number one challenge as a leadership team, and definitely has an impact on schoolwide culture. There are a number of reasons why this notion of “ownership” comes

up, but the HPT protocols that we have brought to Rosella have certainly challenged this and given us a much more universal language to use, as well as a set of predictable protocols that makes everyone much more accountable. It is a system that relies on input from all, and is not about the leadership team dictating what will and won't happen.

We have worked hard over the past 3 years to ensure this consistent model is applied in all areas of the school. Staff turnover, reluctance for change and staff fatigue have been definite speed bumps along the way, and we still have a way to go to say that this is embedded practice at Rosella, however there is much more consistency and predictability in our ways of working. Our current goal is to merge the HPT systems and processes with a lot of Lyn Sharrat's work to ensure we are always having conversations that are self-reflective and based on the data. The challenge is to do this within an hour staff meeting a week, however as we plan for 2020 we are currently trying to look at creative ways to make time for intentional collaboration. We cannot move forward as a high performance school with High Performance Teaching teams, if we do not make time to work smarter together!

## 7. Influential Leaders & Mentors

**Q: Who do you think of when you hear the words “Influential School Leader”? Have mentors played a significant role in your career? What characteristics do you find most helpful in a mentor?**

A: I have had a number of people that I see as mentors, that have been very influential and supportive in my leadership journey to date. I firmly believe my growth as a leader can only move forward if I seek feedback and are challenged by people I trust to think deeper about strategic direction and ways of working in my school.

The word trust definitely plays a part in these relationships, as I place myself in a vulnerable position and speak openly and honestly about issues, some very controversial. As a leader you find yourself constantly challenged by other people’s actions, and the reality is that the buck stops with you. If I didn’t have these people to assist me in applying processes and procedures aligned with my moral compass, I have no doubt that I may have made some different and perhaps not so good decisions along the way. Have I made mistakes? Absolutely!! But I have owned these and talked through these issues with this trusted mentor village I created around me.

As I write this I find myself smiling about one person, David Eborn who was a point of contact in the regional office for me. As a new Principal I was constantly having “first times”. I also am a highly emotive person who makes decisions by talking things through. This is hard to do in a school where you are the Principal, and it’s very often not appropriate to talk to anyone else within the school about these issues and decisions. So I would ring David at regional office, and I’m sure ramble for ages. He never stopped me, or shut me down, but just listened then when I had got all of my thoughts off my chest he would validate how I was feeling and then say “now let’s look at the facts”. David was such a wise man who I will forever be thankful to for always being on the other end of the phone for me.



## 8. Memorable Moments

**Q: What have been some of the more memorable and unusual moments in your career?**

A: WOW! Such a tough question! It sounds so cliché, but I do feel blessed to say that I have had so many memorable moments in my career, with most of them relating to something a student has done or said, or the ways in which staff have wrapped support around a child to ensure they are on the best pathway moving forward. The incidental feedback from a parent during a conversation when they aren’t aware they are giving you positive feedback, or a passionate conversation with a staff member about the amazing thing that is happening in their classroom certainly goes a long way to motivate me as a Principal to keep doing what we do.

## 9. Personal Inspo: Favourite Books & Quotes

**Q: What are you most gifted and or recommended leadership books to others? What message about schools and education would you put on a gigantic billboard that everyone could see?**

A: I love learning new ways to enact change and inspire staff to carry out their roles. Influential leaders that I refer to often and re-read their texts over and over again as I constantly reflect on my own ways of working are Lyn Sharratt, Pete Stebbins, Adam Fraser, and Michael Fullan to name a few. When I need to refuel that passion in me, I

find reminding myself of the how and reading of the successes people have had in applying the how very motivational.

I am a firm believer in empowering staff, and see that empowerment is a much more effective way to assist a person to grow than highlighting their weaknesses and mistakes. At the start of every school year I try and present some new material to uplift the staff, in an effort to start the year with a bang. Without fail though, the most motivating clip that I have used, and continue to use is by Rita Pierson and features on TedTalk. In essence she talks about the importance of human connection, with a very clear message that “every kid deserves a champion”.

At the end of the day we can have as much theory and research as we like to refer to, and can have systems and processes in place, but if we don't have a culture that supports relationships across the school community, including relationships with the students, then the fight will always be an uphill battle. Rita Pierson says this in such a way that you can't help but walk away ready to conquer the world. For that reason I would choose to have the words “every kid deserves a champion” across a billboard. To me those 5 simple words can mean so much to every single person involved within the education system.

## 10. The Tipping Point: Coping With Stress

**Q: When you feel overwhelmed or unfocused what do you do? How do you “stay the course” during lengthy periods of change and uncertainty?**

A: Stress is an interesting concept, and effects people in different ways. I can easily recall the most stressful period of my career to date, and to be honest I was not necessarily aware of how stressed I was until I looked back and saw that my behaviour was very different to how I normally behave. I think hiding under my desk to avoid a conversation with a person as I was alone was definitely a sign. But, I placed myself in a position where I had so much support around me. I had people that were my go to for critical information, people who would just listen as my confidant, and people that made me laugh and reminded me to stay the course and keep the focus on the focus. These

people got me through this time, and I can honestly say that I came out the other end a much better leader for it.

How did I stay the course? I have been blessed to work with an amazing Deputy Principal or has always supported me unconditionally, stood by me when times were tough, and constantly challenged me. We trust each other implicitly and I firmly believe this relationship has been one of the factors that has brought us the success we have experienced at Rosella, and certainly helped me “stay the course”. In addition to this, at times when I am feeling deflated or stressed and need to refocus I walk out into a classroom or out during playtimes and interact with the students.

There is always a student that will say or do something that makes me laugh, and it is these times that remind me what I am fighting for. These students deserve the best, and I am in a position to try and influence this the best way I can. I pride myself on saying that every decision I make has to come back to student need first. It is this personal philosophy, as well as the support of key people, that see me deal with the stressful situations in the best way I can.

## 11. Sliding Doors: Into The Future

**Q: Fast-forward 20 years from now – what will be the keys to success or failure of the education system?**

A: I think the challenge of the education system is to constantly provide an environment that supports the continual growth of high performing leaders and teachers to do what they do best. From a leaders perspective, some current systems or expected ways of working do sometimes make it very difficult for us to carry out the creative strategic work that involves staff self-reflecting and working together as we try and work towards becoming the best school we can possibly be.

Whilst a little controversial, I feel that at present the focus or culture across our education system is on the notion that teachers are overworked and that the workload is forever demanding. Yet, as a leader I am constantly challenged by the system to

build the capacity of teachers to be the best that they can be to ensure we address student outcomes. The essential element here is spending time with staff and providing the staff with time to learn and grow from each other.

I am the first to say teaching is a very challenging career and will always be a very supportive Principal who genuinely cares for the wellbeing of my staff, but I do think that sometimes we need to think smarter about our time management, challenge that notion of “overworked” and look at ways to be smarter in the way we carry out the role and support teachers to be the best they can be.



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- High Performance Teams: 10 Team Insights
- Level Up: Building The Highest Performance Teams
- Leading Transformation: Fast-tracking Sustainable Change

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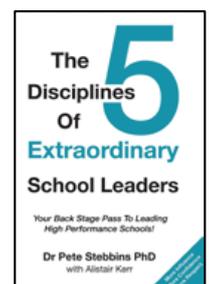
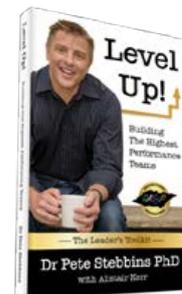
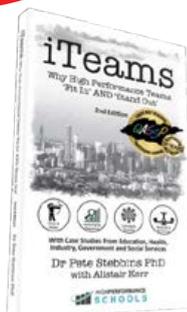


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# Leadership Shares

10 School Leaders Share the Journey  
of Building High Performance Schools

— Volume 2 —



## Local Wisdom, Global Significance!

There are many amazing school leaders amongst us – everyday heroes committed to excellence for both their students and staff.

- Justin Washington
- Tania Angus
- Scott Cage
- Tracy Egan
- Ray Clarke
- Trudy Graham
- Jorgen Neilson
- Jan Carr
- Matt Newell
- Kate Russ



Leadership  
Capability



High Performance  
Teaching Teams



Positive  
School Culture



Dr Pete Stebbins, PhD is Australia's leading expert on High Performance Teams in Education and Director of the High Performance Schools Project. You can find out more about Pete at [drpetestebbins.com](http://drpetestebbins.com) or [HPTschools.com](http://HPTschools.com)

