



Focus on your goals, not obstacles

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One of my favorite quotes is “obstacles are those frightening things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” It is attributed to Henry Ford, and I find the thought very helpful in difficult times. Consider the nature and meaning of that comment. It is true that we are most effective and productive when we are focused on that which we strive for but have not yet attained. How often do we fret over things we ultimately have no control over, or when examined as part of the “big picture,” really do not amount to the stress they cause?

It is arguably true that we are in a time that presents more obstacles for school boards, superintendents, and all others devoted to public education than ever before. I have heard from board members that with all they are facing politically and socially right now, that it is impossible to focus on broader goals and strategic plans, but I would submit that now is the time to focus on your greater strategic direction. Ford’s words ring as true today as ever. The things we allow to consume our immediate focus can easily become overwhelming in a much greater way than they should.

Certainly, attempts to disrupt your work are real. However, you face the danger that the attention given to the issues of the moment are diverting your attention from that which is most important, the children in your schools.

The best solution is to set your primary attention on broad goals for your district – the big goals that encompass your vision for the future; the goals that are not immediately attainable this semester nor this school year. They provide an overarching umbrella for all the work being done in your schools. If you are doing your job well as a leadership team for your school corporation, your administration can align both the existing work and innovation and growth for the future to your goals. Research clearly shows that ineffective boards have little to no connection to a strategic plan for their organization.

So, what can you do to avoid the kind of obstacles that Ford warned about? First, intentionally refocus on your strategic plan. Spend time with your superintendent and his or her administrative team critically examining the objectives and action plans in place and the related data that measures actual progress and growth. Remind yourself that your vision, mission, and core values are important guiding statements for the work you are doing. Continue to look to the future and dream big.

If you are a board member for a corporation that does not have a strategic plan (that you know of), it’s time to get busy.

The bottom line: your success as a school board member depends on your capacity to remain laser-focused on your strategic goals without letting the loudest voices in the room at any given moment throw you off your course.