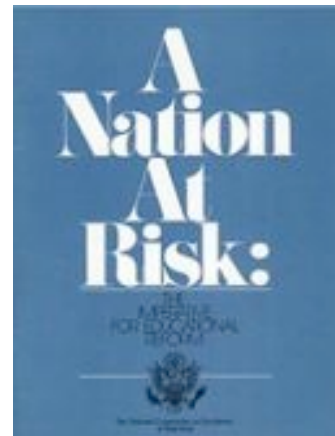


To: Members of the Roundtable
From: James Harvey, Executive Director
Subject: Total Quality Management and Schools
Date: September 24, 2014

Since *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, American public schools and educators have been the object of sustained and relentless criticism, tossed hither and yon by one reform agenda after another. First there were the “New Basics” proposed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Then President George W. Bush laid out six National Goals. When it turned out that Americans had *not* become #1 in the world in math and science by the year 2000, the national goals were quietly left to wither in favor of alignment and America 2000 (President Clinton). A newly elected President George H. W. Bush pushed America 2000 aside in favor of *No Child Left Behind*, a promise that America in the year 2014 would be a land where all the children would be above average.



Finally, President Barack Obama launched an educational Race to the Top in the first months of his presidency, a competitive grant program for states that was heavy on hope but light on evidence. That is to say it demanded that states emphasize assessment of schools and teachers, implement common standards and related assessments, expand charter schools, turn around failing schools, and develop new statewide longitudinal data systems to follow students and improve instruction. But very little research supported the idea that any of these things, or all of them together, would make much difference—or that this was the best way to spend the \$4 billion placed behind the effort.

To question these periodic spasms of Federal reform fervor is not to pretend that all is well in American schools. Every educator knows there are problems. Most parents can identify, with near-unerring accuracy, the best and worst teachers in any given school. In the “best” schools and districts, even laudable mean scores on assessment reports

disguise a troubling and persistent achievement gap between low-income students of color and upper income white students.

But it is to argue that educators have to be in on the takeoff as well as the landing. Experienced educators understand the complex beast that is a school or a district. Political leaders at the national or state level often do not. Pushing a regulatory button or changing a financial input is no guarantee of improved outputs because hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people and processes in the typical school or district are endlessly interacting with each other, with the curriculum, and with parents and students, in ways that defy easy description or facile prediction.

While national and state figures may perform outstanding service in identifying very real school challenges and achievement issues, they are less successful in devising solutions because they work from the top-down. At 30,000 feet, their view of what needs to be done in the classroom consists almost entirely of what they have read and their own experiences, leavened by rumor and alarmist reports of international comparisons.

Another issue comes into play as well. When complaining about reforms that appear poorly designed, even destined to fail, educators run the risk of being perceived as denying the existence of challenges and of being unwilling to respond to them. Many policymakers believe educators don't care, reported Kent Maguire of the Southern Education Foundation at the Roundtable's Summer 2014 meeting in Chicago (right). Nothing could be further from the truth, but perceptions often overtake reality. And, faced with an accountability agenda that is easy to describe and appears to be sensible at first blush, educational leaders need a counter-narrative outlining their understanding of the issues and their willingness to take up the challenge. Enter "schools that learn." As Roundtable member Paul Ash (Lexington, MA) puts it, we need "school systems that learn"—and learn from their mistakes— because the schools we have now were never



designed to teach all students at high levels. And they have reached the limits of their capacity to do so.



Part of that effort, says Ash (left), involves the imperative of restoring educators’ morale in the face of the blistering criticism to which the system and the individuals within it have been exposed. Ash’s work, presented to the Roundtable at its Summer 2013 meeting provided the foundation for this meeting. He called for providing system-wide, effective professional development, instilling a deep-rooted culture of curiosity in the schools, rebuilding staff and faculty morale and trust, and aligning professional development with student-centered district standards.

Ash called this approach *School Systems that Learn*. We can think of it as transforming schools in pursuit of excellence and equity. And one way to advance these concepts is through an approach known as Total Quality Management. This memo is designed to outline the broad dimensions of that approach.

W. Edwards Deming’s “14 Points”

The man widely credited with inventing Total Quality Management, W. Edwards Deming, was hailed for his role in promoting the economic miracle of post-World War II Japan but often overlooked in the United States until late in life. Deming was attracted to a theory of statistical process controls developed at Bell Labs before World War II. The theory was oriented around reducing variation in manufactured products. It emphasized saving costs by building quality into products as they were developed, not inspecting quality into them at the end of the production cycle. Working with another statistician, Walter Shewhart, Deming also advanced the concept of PDSA—Plan-Do-Study-Act.



American industry adopted some of the concepts behind statistical process controls during World War II, but largely abandoned them amidst a post-war global demand for American manufactured goods.

Deming's remarkable career took him from the Bureau of the Census (where he developed statistical processes still employed in the decennial Census) and the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, to the Department of Agriculture and the staff of General Douglas MacArthur in post-World War II Japan. MacArthur was seeking help to develop a Japanese census. It was in Japan that Deming delivered a series of seminal lectures to Japanese engineers, statisticians, and business leaders that led to the Japanese economic miracle of the 1970s. The quality of Japanese goods went from being a laughing-stock of low-end trinkets in American five-and-dimes in the 1950s to exemplars of high quality, complex manufactured goods. These goods, including motorcycles, automobiles, and electronics, shook to their roots established American manufacturers ranging from General Motors to RCA and Panasonic. Donald "Pete" Petersen, Ford Motor Company chairman, president, and CEO in the 1980s, told the Business-Higher Education Forum in 1987 that

Deming's 14 Points

Here are Deming's 14 points in abbreviated form:

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service.
2. Adopt the new philosophy. Western management must awaken to the challenge, learn their responsibilities, and take on leadership for change.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality. Build quality into the product in the first place.
4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of a price tag. Instead, minimize total cost.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service, to improve quality and productivity, and thus constantly decrease costs.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Institute leadership. Supervision of management is in need of overhaul, as well as supervision of production workers.
8. Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company.
9. Break down barriers between departments. People in research, design, sales, and production must work as a team.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for the work force [and the request] for zero defects. The bulk of the causes of low quality and low productivity belong to the system and thus lie beyond the power of the work force.
11. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride of workmanship.
12. Remove barriers that rob people in management and in engineering of their right to pride of workmanship. Abolish annual or merit ratings.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement.
14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job.

Deming's concepts emphasizing quality and management's responsibilities for problems on the assembly line helped turn Ford around in that decade.

In *Out of the Crisis* (1986), Deming famously outlined 14 principles, one of his best-known legacies (previous page). Several things are striking about this 14-point list. First, it ranges far and wide over an array of concepts that undergird any complex organization: constancy of purpose; accepting responsibility; eschewing inspection of the final product as a quality control measure; demanding leadership, training, and teamwork; eliminating slogans; restoring dignity and pride in their work to front-line employees and managers; and involving everyone in the transformation effort.

Second, whatever one thinks of the details of the assessments required under *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* (and the purposes of these assessments), it is highly likely that the demand for assessment responded to something that was badly needed, continuous measurement of how well we are doing. But the urge to assessment addressed only half the challenge. In the absence of a set of complex and subtle principles, such as those laid out in the 14 points, accountability became an end in itself, with tests threatening to become more important than the education they set out to measure.

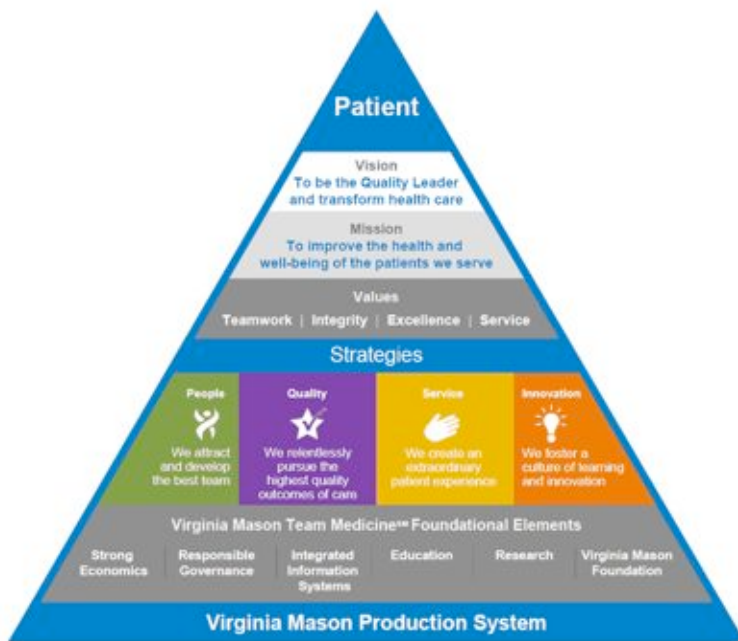
Third, one of the points, "Drive Out Fear," reminds us that the tendency of managers and employers to think in terms of McGregor's Theory X (employees are naturally lazy and work-averse and need to be controlled by hierarchy) is alive and well in a lot of organizations. Deming's insistence on involving all employees in achieving organizational transformation is a Theory Y thinker at work (employees are self-motivated and eager to contribute).

Finally, the vision laid out here of an organization that continuously improves because it refuses to blame front-line employees for organizational inadequacies, offers an attractive way to look beyond blame, finger-pointing, and present shortcomings to a future in which everyone in education is oriented around providing every single student with an education that is both excellent and equitable.

In Pursuit of the Perfect Patient Experience

As the 21st-century dawned, the Virginia Mason Medical Center, an 80-year-old non-profit was in trouble, according to a compelling book about VMMC’s transformation by Charles Kenney, *Transforming Health Care: Virginia Mason Medical Center’s Pursuit of the Perfect Patient Experience*. For the first time it was running in the red. It was undercapitalized in a city with two larger competitors. It was troubled by the implications of two landmark reports from the Institute of Medicine—*To Err is Human* and *Crossing the Quality Chasm*—painting a picture of a national health care system that was wasteful, often providing inadequate care, with medical errors accounting for nearly 100,000 preventable deaths annually.

Within ten years, the Leapfrog Group named VMMC as one of two Top Hospitals of the Decade, the other was the University of Maryland Medical Center, Baltimore (UMMC). The two hospitals were cited for their strong public commitment to, and success in, reducing medical errors and other innovations in patient safety and quality. Leapfrog Group Board Chair David Knowlton described the efforts of the two hospitals as "extraordinary in every sense of the word." Knowlton said, "These two hospitals chose to blaze that trail long ago by committing themselves to change, accountability and transparency. They have done the work that others must now undertake."



How had this remarkable transformation been effected? According to Kenney, Gary Kaplan, a new CEO and 20-year-veteran of internal medicine at VMMC, became convinced the hospital had to change and that, although the crisis seemed to revolve around

finances, the real issue was clinical quality. Moreover, although everyone agreed with the conceit that VMMC’s approach was patient-centered, in reality it was physician-driven. That insight led to a strategic plan that produced what Kenney describes as a visual reminder: a “pyramid with the patient at the top—above doctors, nurses, administrators, board members, budget considerations—above *everything and everyone*.” The point was that quality, not finances, would drive transformation at VMMC because Kaplan believed “providing high-quality health care would solve the financial issue.”

Easier said than done. Most organizational goals, writes Kenney, are “ten parts rhetoric and one part reality.” How to get from here—a troubled hospital, operating in the red, driven by the professionals within it, and respected but not thought of as particularly distinguished—to there—an exemplary hospital, operating in the black, focused on the quality of patient care and nationally recognized as one of the “finest providers of health care anywhere”? That became the challenge. The response came in the form of a germ of a new idea, namely exploring the possibilities that the principles of the Toyota Production System could be applied to health care. The complex journey that was involved included: eliminating waste, lean management, exploring the Toyota Production System, overcoming skepticism and resistance, visiting Japan, learning about *kaizen* (continuous, incremental improvement), and exploring the collaborative nature of work within the medical center and with vendors.

Throughout the VMMC story, several things are emphasized again and again. This is very difficult work. It’s a journey, not a destination. Nothing comes easy. It takes time. Above all: If the top leader is not committed to this, don’t even begin. Without strong

Aren’t You Ashamed?

Japanese teachers (*senseis*) worked with VMMC staff during their visit to Japan to push the Americans to new insights. One day, a *sensei* pointed to an area of the medical center floor plan and asked what it was. He was told it was a waiting room for patients.

“The *sensei* asked more questions, learning there were dozens and dozens of waiting rooms throughout the medical center—and most crowded much of the time.

“The *sensei* reacted . . . as though he was deeply offended by this news. ‘You have one hundred waiting areas where patients wait an average of 45 minutes for a doctor?’

“He paused and let the question hang in the air, and then asked, ‘*Aren’t you ashamed?*’ ”

From Charles Kenney, *Transforming Health Care*, pp. 21-22.

leadership, nothing will change. The sort of leadership required demands courage to overcome inevitable setbacks and disappointments and deal with, and win over, skeptics and opponents. “At Virginia Mason,” says CEO Kaplan, “we still have many challenges. We’re almost ten years into a journey, and as far as I’m concerned, we are just getting started.”

Uplifting Leadership

What would you do if you took over a giant, international manufacturer that was operating so far in the red it was putting at risk the jobs of tens of thousands of people all over the world? Or, if you assumed the leadership of a small, poor, developing nation, and wanted to bring it to the forefront economically? Or you took over a tiny, undercapitalized football (soccer) club in England and aspired to bring it into the Premier League? How would you turn failure into success? Create something out of almost nothing? That’s a set of questions Andrew Hargreaves likes to pose.

These were not fanciful questions, but genuine issues as Fiat Motors of Italy verged on bankruptcy in 2004; Singapore, nothing but a “group of small tin sheds” in 1965, examined its future, and Burnley FC, one of the smallest football clubs in a tiny community that was one of England’s poorest, turned its attention to reaching the next level.

*Singapore River, an “open sewer” in 1950, transformed into pristine waterway by 2010
(Credit: Straits Times, 2011)*



First, let’s look at what they didn’t do, says Hargreaves, Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education at Boston College’s Lynch School of Education. They didn’t aim to

be number one. They didn't race to the top. They didn't set targets from a distance and insist that people be pushed into delivering results in a hurry. That approach encourages people in any organization to game the system and even cheat. These are "downer" strategies, argues Hargreaves, co-author of *Uplifting Leadership*. What organizations intent on excellence need is uplifting leadership that supports people as they strive for excellence

“Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't say, ‘I have a strategic plan.’ ”

Andrew Hargreaves

Uplifting leadership in sports, business and education, according to Hargreaves, is made up of four essentials:

- **An inspiring destination or dream.** “Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't say ‘I have a strategic plan.’ He inspired people with a vision of a United States that lived up to the better angels of its nature. Fiat didn't set out to match the American Big Three, it set out to sell small, fuel-efficient cars in a North American market that didn't understand it was looking for them. It wound up saving not just Fiat, but Chrysler as well.
- **Second, find your own path.** Forge a distinctive path forward of your own. See opposing forces as an opportunity, not an obstacle. Give away your best ideas because, like Singapore, you'll find you have to invent new ones.
- **Third, seek sustainable growth.** Most of the education organizations studied by Hargreaves improved at a rate of about 2 percent a year. It's steady, genuine, authentic, and not based on cooking the books. But over 10 years you get 20% growth and it sustains itself. (Sue Hackman, former director of standards for the English Department for Education told the Roundtable the same thing when we visited her in London in 2012. “I'm a big believer in the 1%-a-year improvement approach,” she said. “Politicians want 5%, but systems can maintain a 1% gain while larger and more spectacular gains are often illusory.”)
- **Finally, metrics and targets are important.** The best organizations had shared targets that everyone in the organization owned together. In Tower Hamlets, London, according to Hargreaves (the poorest community in Great Britain, which

the Roundtable also visited in 2012), learning targets were set together by local people, not thrown at the school from a distance.



Concludes Hargreaves (left): “Do not drag yourself down by focusing only on the numbers, how high you can get, and how quickly you can get there. Uplift yourself by thinking about your community and what you can do for the people in it. Then you will unlock the secret of how to do a lot with a little.”

An ancillary report from Hargreaves and a Boston College colleague, Henry Braun, urges American schools to use data and accountability policies in the successful ways now seen in high-performing countries and in other sectors of U.S. society. In *Data-Driven Improvement and Accountability*, Hargreaves and Braun conclude that the use of data in the U.S. is too often limited to measuring short-term gains or placing blame, rather than focusing on achieving the primary goals of education.

The Hargreaves-Braun report explains how the current system of student data collection more often than not creates “perverse incentives” for educators to narrow the curriculum, teach to the test—and allocate their efforts disproportionately to students who yield the quickest test-score gains, rather than those with the greatest needs. Paradoxically, accountability winds up impeding improvement while providing incentives to “game the system.”

Hargreaves and Braun offer two key recommendations:

- Base professional judgments and interventions on a wide range of evidence and indicators that properly reflect what students should be learning.
- Design systemic reforms to promote collective responsibility for improvement, with top-down accountability serving as a strategy of last resort when this falls short.

The Roundtable Meeting

These will be among the issues the Roundtable explores at its Seattle meeting, October 10-12. Dr. Henry Otero of Virginia Mason Medical Center will give us the benefit of his insights and experience with “lean” at VMMC. Via the wonders of modern telecommunications, Andrew Hargreaves will lead us through “Uplifting Leadership.” And will hear about Total Quality Management from W. Edwards Deming’s grandson, Kevin Edwards Cahill, accompanied by David Langford.

At this meeting, you can also learn how some of these concepts are being implemented in government. Wendy Korthuis-Smith and KayLyne Newell from the office of Governor Jay Inslee will discuss the Evergreen State’s “Results Washington” effort. You will also hear how other superintendents got started, dealt with the challenges, and persevered in pursuit of the perfect student experience. We will hear about local efforts that consciously or unconsciously applied these concepts to schools, with presentations from Gary Cohn (Everett Schools, Washington), Beverly Mortimer (Concordia, Kansas), Karen Woodward (Lexington, South Carolina), and Patricia Davenport, co-author of *Closing the Achievement Gap*. Finally, Leslie Boozer (Fontana Schools, California) will lead a discussion of what it all means and where we might go next with these concepts.
