WE BECOME A COHESIVE HIGH PERFORMING TEAM

As I drove home and reflected on the days events I could not help but wonder what in the world could have gone so wrong as to divide a school staff in such a way that they were willing to do really bad things to each other. AND even more disturbing was that they truly believed that their actions were not affecting the children. When I talk about doing bad things, I'm not just talking about not speaking to each other, or verbal abuse...I'm talking about damaging cars, vandalizing rooms, reporting to the media, coercing parents to take sides, and anonymous 'tattle-tale' calls to the central administration office. The staff was divided on one strong issue and in the mind of each person you were either with them or against them. Any action by one person was then viewed as an act of sabotage against the other side.

My colleagues and I had experience working with teams that were in conflict, but intuitively, we knew that this situation was far beyond the point where our 'tried and true' methodologies would work. We needed something that would take the blame away and focus the staff on the issue, not each other. We needed a miracle!

I called David, a friend and colleague whom I knew I could count on to offer insight and specific suggestions. David reminded me of our recent training based on the Theory of Constraints and suggested I try using the Thinking Process tool to guide the staff in achieving the ambitious target of settling their differences and working together to achieve a common goal.

I was new to TOC and was not very confident in my ability to use the Ambitious Target tool but as I called my partners to tell them of the changed plans, I could still hear David saying: "The tools work, trust the tools." We started the session with a discussion leading towards the staff acknowledging the problem and accepting that it was everyone's problem. It was not difficult to get consensus on the current reality "We continue to be a divided staff". In an attempt to move them towards developing an Ambitious Target we asked: "What would reality look like if this were not true?" "We would be a cohesive team," was the response. Eventually they settled on **"We become a cohesive high performing team"** as their Ambitious Target and everyone raised obstacles to the target.

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Obstacles to the target:

- Lack of communication amongst staff.
- There is back stabbing going on.
- Some are trying to sabotage others, pressure them in when they're not involved.
- Rumors run rampant.
- Dishonesty is the norm.
- We hurt and are not willing to forgive.
- There is an inability to accept responsibility to apologize.
- We are holding tight to grudges.
- We pressure others to become involved.
- We have little respect for the opinions of others.
- We choose not to understand the perspective of others.
- There is inappropriate communication going on with parents, media, central office.
- Too many bosses.
- Issues become personal confrontations.
- There is no trust among the staff.
- There is jealousy amongst the staff.
- We have a bad reputation.
- Staff is divided.
- Staff members alienated and isolated.

Next we guided participants towards seeing reality, as it could be
if they did not have these specific obstacles blocking them.
They created Intermediate Objectives for neutralizing the obstacles.

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Intermediate Objectives:

- We will communicate honestly and effectively with all.
- We acknowledge others/our pain.
- We are willing to make a positive change.
- We choose to begin the healing process.
- We accept that others have different points of view.
- We will only engage in appropriate parental communications.
- We will accept all members of our team.
- We will accept final authority.
- We will deal with the issues and not the people.
- We follow protocol consistently.
- Team members will have more confidence in each other and others in the organization.
- We will have consistent total support from the Central Office.
- We are supportive of the positive achievements and ideas of our team.
- We have positive press.
- We will operate as a team.
- All staff are part of the team.

The IOs were sequenced according to what must be accomplished first. Then, over the course of the year, they took on the task accomplishing the action steps needed to achieve the Intermediate Objectives.
(Some steps attached.)
The principal credits the TOC process used in the two-day workshop just before school started with the smooth opening of school. Workshops were conducted monthly to encourage and guide the staff towards achieving their Ambitious Target. As a result of the teaming effort the entire school year was free of overt clashes between staff members. This was indeed an incredible achievement considering the previous consultants were sabotaged and literally run out of the school by the staff. Why do you think this process based on the Theory of Constraints is so successful? Could it be that it guides members to systematically develop and agree upon a specific plan? Could it be that it takes into consideration all of the obstacles as seen by everyone even the most skeptical? Or maybe that it removes the blame and teams everyone up against the problem instead of each other? Or, simply that it is a process that values everyone's thoughts, concerns and ideas empowering them to focus on success. It's not a miracle and it's not luck. It is a simple, logical process that empowers people to work collaboratively and confidently toward group objectives.

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Intermediate Objective: We acknowledge others/our pain.
Obstacle it overcomes: We have hurt/pain.

Actions to make the Intermediate Objective a Reality:
- Get to the root of the "problem" that has caused the hurt/pain.
- Let people speak and open up (not sweeping it under the table).
- Develop a Forum
- Use a mediator
- Rules (language, tone of voice, etc.)
- Agenda (one issue per session)
- Time limit (each side has same amount of time)
- No retaliation (confidentiality)
- Whole staff or individuals
- Criteria for sessions
- Dates and times
- Quit forcing people to take sides-"rallying your troops".
- A person who continues to cause hurt and pain needs to realize
    they are doing so and stop

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Intermediate Objective: We follow protocol consistently.

Obstacle it overcomes: Inconsistent protocol

Actions to make the Intermediate Objective a Reality

- We all need to understand exactly what the protocol is in
   every situation.
- We all need to follow through with these guidelines in
   every situation.
- We should all have a printed copy of the protocol from
   the social committee.
- Ask the principal for an explanation if you don't understand
   any part of the protocol.

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Intermediate Objective: We are supportive of the positive
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　achievements and ideas of our team.
Obstacles it overcomes:　Jealousy amongst staff
　　　　　　　　　　　　　Good ideas are not accepted.

Actions to make the Intermediate Objective a Reality:
- Acknowledge accomplishments honestly.
- Reflect on your personal feelings/reactions to others
　　"moment of shining".
- Showcase accomplishments of our school's community.
- Share "warm fuzzies" at staff meetings.
- Use positive feed-back to our school's family.
- No personal attacks.
- Try to think of one positive thing to say to someone everyday.
- Showcase our children's accomplishments.

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Intermediate Objective: We have positive press.
Obstacles it overcomes: - Negative press
                            - Bad publicity
                            - Bad community relationships
                            - Lack of parental involvement

Actions to make the Intermediate Objective a Reality:

- Alert the press to positive things that are happening at
  our school.
- Actively work for a better relationship with the press.
- Display true professional behavior when in contact with
  the press.
- Show respect for the press.
- Work to increase parental involvement.
- Parents will speak more positively as they engage in more
  school activities.