

Moving Yourself from Education to Transformation

Michael Wren*

Psychometric Assessment, Mental Health Care, Brisbane, Australia

***Corresponding Author:** Michael Wren, Psychometric Assessment, Mental Health Care, Brisbane, Australia.

Received: May 17, 2019; **Published:** July 11, 2019

In the Old comic strip, The Wizard of Id, Rodney, the Knight, enquires of the King 'What is the most important personal characteristic a person must have to be King?' After a significant period of contemplation, the King responds, 'A fast mind'.

School leaders might answer the same question with an equally ironic but far less light-hearted response, "Taking good care of yourself". While not necessarily a personal characteristic this commitment to personal wellbeing, seemingly requires more thought than it should. Australian Catholic University researcher, Dr Philip Riley points to the stress of the expectations placed on school principals (Beusaert, 2017; Devos, *et al.* 2016; Dickie, 2018; Maxwell and Riley, 2017).

These expectations derive from multiple sources including, students, staff, parents, the local school community, themselves and even other principals. His research identifies some of their coping mechanisms, which often fail to address the underlying issues, and suggests these contribute to their eventual burnout and even premature exit from the profession (Maxwell and Riley, 2017). Here the irony is that whilst providing intentional and sensitive care for students, staff, parents and the community, school leaders often set a low priority for their own physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Australian principals are not alone in this struggle with international research identifying similar patterns of behavior in many other countries (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017; Lambersky, 2016; Poirel and Yvon, 2014). Over the last 20 years there has been a refined response to the needs of those who accept the role of school leadership. More recently, comprehensive training programs, workshops, conferences, intervention services, research and articles, all aimed to educate our leaders in recognising and responding to the growing need for information. Many are excellent and well-intended, but, as a broad statement, little has changed.

Information and inspiration are not the answer

When the training and education struggled to deliver the outcomes needed, there came the motivational speakers, who rising from their own adversity, have succeeded and overcome the mountain of obstacles and burdens they had to endure. These stories inform and provide examples, enthuse and encourage their determination to try harder and to do things 'better'. The attempts to educate people and incorporate self-care however can become an additional burden and stressor, not the cure. It is important to recognize the value and importance of educational and motivational opportunities. They play a fundamental role in prompting people to think and act, to value and care for themselves. Now more than ever we can be informed and inspired to actively engage in our own health and wellbeing. We have never had better access to high quality services. However, at the same time we face skyrocketing levels of depression, anxiety, stress, self-harm and suicide.

In his book *Twelve Rules for Life*, Jordan Peterson instructs us to "Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping" (2018, p31). What might happen, if you were to think of yourself as someone who deserved and needed to be cared for, attentively and thoughtfully?

However, this is easier said than done.

Education is not transformation

Transformation, as a label, can be applied quickly even when there seems little evidence that any significant change has actually taken place. Genuine transformation is rare and hard earned, often the result of some serious effort, over time. This is often accompanied by the increasing development of some deep self-awareness, humility and a metanoia that once experienced, cannot be easily forgotten or ignored. Once the hard work of transformation is done, the outcomes are surprisingly easy to incorporate into our lives, to make lasting change. For example, when scientists discovered the world is not actually flat and revolves around our sun, it changes everything. You can become an active, contributing part of a universe that now looks entirely different. Once experienced, it is unlikely that you would want to return to an ignorant, self-centered existence. Whilst education and motivation are essentially external drivers, transformation is something that wells up from deep inside us. It is that slow unveiling of some fundamental truths that alter our perception of ourselves and therefore the world in which we exist.

It is sometimes very difficult to describe. It is a deep knowing that we are now not what we once were - somewhere, somehow, something has changed. We cannot make someone transform, we cannot timetable, schedule, teach or evaluate how far someone has come, or if they are regressing. Sometimes it may appear that we are in fact regressing. This may well be a part of the process we go through - as we let go of former ideas, attitudes and behaviours - until we have incorporated a stable alternative. People use the labels 'epiphany' or 'revelation' to describe the insights and realizations that come from these transformational experiences. The transformative process is unique and individual, different for each person and specific to their exact need. It is not a process you can teach or demand, but it is a process that can be recognised when the opportunity comes.

The Guardian Project, and the survey tool ProScan offer support to those engaged in the process of their own transformation. As we look towards the future, we can expect challenges which will, if we allow them, change us. We can engage with the process expecting that we will learn something so valuable it will significantly alter the way we manage and lead others through their own transformative processes. We are then in a wisdom position - able to model, advise and recommend training, education and information tailored to their exact needs, informing and resourcing them in their own journeys. Guided by their own experiences, they in turn become the mentors for those around them, inviting others to trust in the process.

Volume 8 Issue 8 August 2019

© All rights reserved by Michael Wren.