

## Exercising school leadership as the Chess Master

'See the whole board – that's the key' – President Bartlett in a scene from the *West Wing* series drawing on the chessboard analogy. The joy of fiction is that you can retake if it doesn't work out right – not so when confronted daily with the many decisions that have to be taken so what to do? The many leaders we have worked with would in summary say the following - never stop looking for ways to improve the exercise of leadership, keep fresh, stretch yourself, relish the development, the contribution, the difference...*because becoming a better leader makes being a leader better.*

In our current work with the NAPD, Curam is looking at how concretely and creatively leaders can be resourced to achieve and enjoy that better experience of being a leader. Curam's innovative approach is to provide a Toolbox – drawing on the experience of, at this stage, hundreds of school leaders in Ireland and beyond – of what works. Our workshop at the NAPD conference last October explored these ideas and approaches and we have drawn from that and subsequent engagements in the process of a session that integrates the reality of day to day leadership, innovative approaches and practical application.

It is in the meshing of reality and reflection and ideas that our practice can be creatively and constructively critiqued – we offer and receive new perspectives on common issues. In our upcoming series of sessions we will focus on and expanded ten core elements in the Toolbox, elements that enable attending to the current while keeping a strategic eye on the '*whole chess board*':

**1. Conflict Resolution Skills** - The difference between conflict management, resolution and transformation – taking the stress out of conflict, maximising your skills in the area of conflict.

**2. Integrating the professional, personal and practical** – what this is, how it could help – who do *really* you talk to – who tells you the truth – how to mind yourself

**3. Vision** – having this with you at all times – how to vision with your feet on the ground, what is vision, how it can be practical, how it helps with decision making – what great leaders have in common is a vision that inspires, drives and guides

**4. Creative thinking** – how to bring it to your everyday context, skills to develop, stepping *back* to allow you step *in* effectively

**5. Dealing with people** – 'affirmation is the most underused resource in leadership'... how to recognise and build on your own relational skills and how to make up the deficits...

**6. Facts** – the basics in the strategic leadership toolbox – what are the crucial facts, how to enquire into the facts to get the story behind the story in all areas of school life...how facts build strategy and deal with resistance

**7. Finance** – building a viable financial plan to manage the present and prepare for the future – new ways to raise funds sustainably – setting priorities and innovative budget planning

**8. Teaching and Learning** – how to ‘up the game’ in this fundamental area of school life – building capacity in your staff, addressing challenging issues effectively rather than only parking them

**9. Governance** – clarity of expectation at every level – enabling each level to at least meet their expectation, and further, competent accountability at every level that promotes development

**10. Bringing it all together** – charting a compelling, relevant and realistic strategic plan for your leadership, for your school – see the whole Chess board as leader

A principal recently said to us the ‘buzz’ of the job was just great especially when she took to heart the ‘advice’ of **Samuel Beckett**:

*‘Ever tried, ever failed, no matter, try again, fail again, fail better’*

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