

Leading Through the Tough Times: Developing Strong and Resilient Leaders

Ann Brokenshire

**Principal, Te Kura Tuarua O Horomaka, Hillmorton
High School**

***Naku te rourou, nau te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi
With your basket and my basket, the people will live***

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Introduction, rationale and acknowledgements

Over the past few months I have interviewed 14 principals, all who have led their schools through the crisis of the earthquakes in Canterbury of September 2010 and February 2011, and the turbulent years which have followed.

I was interested, not in what the literature tells us about leadership, but in the lived experiences of actual leaders, people I consider to be courageous and resilient. I wanted to know what these brave leaders thought themselves about why they had remained resilient; and what they thought we need to do to ensure that we help to develop future leaders who will have the knowledge and skills to also be able to lead through tough and turbulent times.

Most of the principals interviewed were from secondary schools but two were from primary schools and one from an intermediate school. These three were included to sit as a contrast or comparison to the secondary school experience.

I wish to acknowledge these 14 colleagues for their willingness to share their thoughts and experiences with me, for expressing their vulnerabilities, their successes and the lessons they have learnt, leading through tough times; tough both personally and professionally. For some, the memories of the earthquakes themselves are still very raw, evoking even now, eight years on, incredibly emotional responses. For some, they remain angry at the education system which is predicated on competition and has led to significant inequities, with our most at risk young people suffering the most.

For many principals, leading through tough times was not about the long days and heavy workloads, but about the emotional work we do on a daily basis in a vocation in which we work with and for those who are vulnerable, our young people. Leading staff in schools can be an unenviable task. Helping others deal with their emotions is tiring work but we have all learnt to lead with kind hearts, with an ethic of care firmly embedded in our psyche, and with integrity.

The principals interviewed, have all helped to change the culture of education in our city where we are continuing to build a collaborative culture based on positive relationships, integrity, equity and social justice. We are working to ensure we have a network of schools where we collectively take responsibility for ensuring we have high quality education at all schools across our city. We are slowly changing from a system of competition (which has produced all sorts of inequities) to a more collaborative system, where hopefully, in the future, we will see equitable outcomes for all students no matter their background nor their school.

Each of these principals has an important story to tell, and I have tried to capture these in their narratives. I pay tribute to and thank these resilient and courageous men and women.

I also thank my Board of Trustees for giving me the leave to do this work, and to my Senior Leadership Team who so ably ran the school in my absence. Thank you to Jo Hunnikin who was Acting Principal over Term 2.

Executive Summary, Findings and Implications

Each of the principals interviewed experienced the same events, namely the devastating earthquakes of 2010 and 2011, but each experienced them differently. While each principal has remained resilient and has lived with courage, they are each unique and how they managed to lead through such traumatic events and beyond is also unique. There are however some striking similarities in their wisdom and advice, and I have done my best to capture these universal truths, but I encourage you to read each narrative to understand better the vast richness of advice within their stories.

On leadership

- Much collective wisdom is held within your team. Try, whenever possible, to make collaborative decisions.
- Leaders are themselves fallible. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Surround yourself with people whose strengths complement, not mirror, your own.
- Self-awareness and self-belief, along with humility, are important. Be humble and apologise when you don't get things right.
- Leading our schools is a vocation and a privilege.
- Building cultures based on relational trust and an ethic of care is essential.
- Clear communication is essential. Explain your decisions, no matter on what they are predicated.
- Listen to a range of voices. Listen more, talk less.
- Ensure that you know your own values; these become your touchstones.
- Lead from who you are and have integrity in that.
- Know your 'why'.
- Accountability and support go hand-in-hand.
- Make the decisions needed, putting the students first – education is about the kids.
- Look after your staff, be kind and generous, always.
- A culture of care is essential in times of trauma or crisis.
- Build networks, within your school, and across schools.
- Be visible but this does not mean you must attend everything. You are not a super-hero.
- Whenever possible give authentic leadership and leadership opportunities to others.
- We must have a network approach across our city.
- Work **with** others. You are only part of the solution.
- Make decisions on what is best for your community **and** the community next door.
- Try not to take sides, bring people together whenever possible.
- Culture and strategy are linked but the best strategy won't work unless underpinned by a positive, inclusive culture.
- Remember that no one drops the ball on purpose.
- Schools are relationship intense places; role model being kind.
- Ensure that **you** are open to learning.

Principal well-being and resilience

- Concentrate on areas within your locus of control.
- Don't sweat the small stuff.
- Don't expect things to be always great.
- Collaborate, prioritise and delegate.
- Nurture your relationships with those who love and care for you most.
- A strong home base is essential.
- Role model for others your own self-care. Too many principals do not do this!
- Know in your heart and soul that this work is influential and worthwhile.
- Ensure that you laugh – find joy – this balances the hard work and long hours.
- Establish personal goals: fitness, health, personal organisation, alone time, family time.
- Understand that it takes courage to care. It is not always easy.
- Your own upbringing, what your parents taught you, is important.
- Ensure your own needs are met so that you can help others, and so that you can focus on work at work.
- None of us is perfect. None of us alone. Develop networks. Do not work in isolation.
- Keep the main thing the main thing.
- Celebrate successes.
- Be positive! Have fun! Laugh!
- **Remember, superheroes are not real!**

Further practical suggestions for principal well-being

- Have an annual full medical examination.
- Set personal health and well-being goals; write them down and tell someone who will hold you to account on these.
- Find time away from work to do what you love. Always take time off for at least a few days, if not a week, during each school holiday period.
- Make time for regular reflection.
- Delegate when possible – you can't know nor be involved in everything, and nor should you be. Let others lead.
- Ensure you have mentors and attend supervision. You should not 'go at' this work alone.

Questions used to guide the interviews with principals

Capturing the experiences, wisdom and learnings from those who led our schools through and beyond the earthquakes of 2010 and 2011

Possible questions to guide a conversation

1. First, can you tell me about what happened for you at the time of the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes? (personal and/or professional)
2. How would you describe your leadership both at the time of the quakes and since then?
3. What have you found the most challenging thing in your leadership role from 2010/2011 until now, eight years on?
4. During a time of difficult change and uncertainty what did you do differently? And what has changed?
5. What is the most valuable or significant leadership lesson you have learnt since the quakes?
6. Brene Brown says that 'We know that vulnerability is the cornerstone of courage-building, but we often fail to realize that without vulnerability there is no creativity or innovation. Why? Because there is nothing more uncertain than the creative process, and there is absolutely no innovation without failure.' Do you agree with her? If so can you give an example in terms of your own leadership?
7. Has there been a defining moment for you over these past eight years?
8. What are your attributes and beliefs that still see you leading eight years on? What has ensured you remain resilient?
9. What are you most optimistic about now?
10. If you could distill your leadership ethos into one sentence, what would that be?
11. What are the qualities you think we need to develop in aspiring school leaders to ensure they become strong, courageous and resilient? How might we better equip them to lead through tough times?
12. Culture or strategy? Which is the more important when leading through tough times?

A final word

Being a principal is a challenging vocation. Be kind to yourself. We are all fallible. Be kind to others.

While I have purposely not used leadership theory within the narratives, the following four quotations show us that the words of the principals within this small study are mirrored by others working in the sphere of leadership.

'Integrity is choosing courage over comfort. It's choosing what is right over what is fun, fast or easy. It's choosing to practise your values rather than simply professing them.' Brene Brown

'Good leadership requires you to surround yourself with people of diverse perspectives who can disagree with you, without fear of retaliation.' Doris Kearns Goodwin

'Good work is done with heart as well as knowledge and skill, done with a depth of commitment that brings integrity and courage to the workplace.' Parker J. Palmer

'One of the criticisms I've faced over the years is that I'm not aggressive enough or assertive enough, or somehow, because I'm empathetic, it means I'm weak. I totally rebel against that. I refuse to believe that you cannot be both compassionate and strong.' Jacinda Adern

I am indebted to my wonderful colleagues who were so willing to speak openly to me, who showed clearly that "It's very hard to have ideas. It's very hard to put yourself out there, it's very hard to be vulnerable, but those people who do that are the dreamers, the thinkers, and the creators. They are the magic people of the world." (Amy Poehler).

These 14 wonderful principals are indeed not 'superheroes' but they are among 'the magic people of the world'.

Thank you! Aroha nui.

Ann Brokenshire

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Justin Boyle

Rector at St Bede's College, State Integrated Roman Catholic Day and Boarding Boys' School (from 2002 to present)

'Do the right thing for the right reason and don't worry about the consequences. Kids come first'

Context

At the time of the first major earthquake in 2010 Justin was in the North Island, as was one of his Deputy Principals. It took them two days to get back to the city, but they were then able to make some quick decisions concerning their old brick buildings, ensuring they were safe for use.

In 2011, staff and students were on site, and with boarders it took until 9.00pm for all boys to be collected. The international students remained on site. Justin and his family also live on site. Duty of care was foremost on Justin's mind. Fortunately, they could continue to operate on site once all safety checks had been completed; setting up marquees to help where buildings could not be used. Within two days, Justin and his Board Chair realised that Marian College, a Catholic Girls' School, was unable to return to their school site as it was too badly damaged. They visited the Marian site and within just ten minutes had made the decision to invite Marian College to site share at St Bede's.

Site sharing led to two foci for Justin. One, two schools on one site with leaders having very different styles; and two, some of the buildings were 'red-stickered', deemed too dangerous to occupy, and so working to rebuild was important. There was much goodwill from old boys in terms of help towards the rebuilding. And site sharing was like having two schools working at top speed with the associated adrenaline rush. It was great fun.

Justin has now been at St Bede's College as Rector for 17 years, and as the school's first lay rector. It has been important to allay suspicions that Catholicism would be diluted. Justin has proved both before and following the quakes that the school culture, that of an authentic Catholic Marist school, remains strong. They are living the gospel of servant leadership. The greatest servant being Christ. Justin is strong in his faith, and feels privileged to serve the school and its community.

Post-quakes, Justin ensured that the strong culture continued and the school was rebuilt physically. Insurance fell \$16 million short, and so attendance dues were tripled. Justin was adamant that this increase would not exclude any Catholic boys no matter their families' financial situations.

During the years after the 2011 earthquake Justin faced great challenges to his leadership, eventually persuading the Board of Proprietors to approach the rebuild as a 'greenfield approach'. He also faced other challenges where he took a strong stance on the poor behaviour of a small group of boys and subsequently their parents.

Justin has a good team around him; a mix of ages and experience. He believes that it is essential 'to always do the right thing for the right reason. Don't worry about the

consequences'. For Justin, modern learning is not about the physical spaces, but about classroom relationships, with his leadership being 'on the ground, being visible'.

His faith is very much a part of Justin's leadership, and he has learnt to always look behind others' behaviour, both boys and staff. Since the quakes Justin has learnt 'to go into the firing line but then stand back consciously, pull back before making a decision, to wait one sleep and two meals'. His advice is that no matter what, keep calm and keep your sense of humour.

On vulnerability and courage

Apologise when you get things wrong, but trust your instincts. Role model Catholic reconciliation.

A defining moment

Many moments have seen Justin's leadership mature. He believes he is 'an average man', but he is not intimidated by surrounding himself with people better than him.

Eight years on; Justin's advice

- Nurture your relationship with your partner and those who are closest to you. Justin credits his wife as being the resilient one.
- Ensure you have good mentors.
- Mentor young teachers and middle leaders.
- Ensure that you have a work life balance.
- Convince teachers that ours is the greatest job in the world. Actually it is a vocation. We can positively influence and this is a real privilege. It is a way of life.

Ann Brokenshire (The author's own narrative)
Principal: Hillmorton High School 2003 until the present
'Equity, social justice and an ethic of care – these drive me'

Context

Our school was fortunate, sustaining minimal damage in both the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes. For me this was a blessing as in 2011 my home sitting on the cliff above Redcliffs School, was completely destroyed, 'red stickered' within days, meaning we could not enter it at all, and eventually placed within the 'red zone' meaning that the land could not be built on again.

The house was the final work that my father, an architect, had designed. It was a long five-year battle with the insurance company eventually only settling after I involved a lawyer. And thinking back now I realise clearly that in times of crisis, having a strong team around you, as a leader, is absolutely essential. Having in place a collaborative, caring and warm culture, sustains us through crisis.

One of my deputy principals at the time, Graham Leslie, had always told me that one can cope in any situation at work if your home base is strong and vice versa.

Having strong support personally, allows one to have the strength to lead in times of crisis. This is when 'upfront' leadership is essential, reassuring staff and students that we will get through this together. In times of crisis being visibly strong gives strength to others.

Following the earthquakes many people left Christchurch, and so school rolls across the city dropped, leaving more places in the high decile schools, perceived as more desirable or somehow 'better'. Many of these schools filled up with 'out of zone' students, leaving the mid and lower decile schools facing more significant drops in student numbers and this leading in turn to higher staff redundancies. The schools in the damaged eastern part of the city faced the most significant roll drops, with many people having to leave their red zoned houses and the area, and those with high social capital leaving to attend the less damaged schools. This effect on the schools in the east which faced the most difficulties, highlighted the inequities in our schooling network, making the differences much more obvious.

It is the values of equity, social justice and an ethic of care which drive me as a principal.

Finally, after eight years of work, a new culture is developing across secondary schools in our city. The majority of schools have agreed to maximum rolls and we have worked collectively to put in place more equitable enrolment schemes for state secondary schools. This has resulted in a far more collaborative culture across the secondary network, with principals, while working hard for students in their own schools, now being more willing to consider how their actions might affect neighbouring schools.

While in the past I have felt angry at the actions of some of my principal colleagues, I'm now more optimistic that by developing a collaborative culture based on equity and social justice, we can develop an outstanding education system across our city where every school is considered a 'good' school, not just those in the more affluent areas. Competition has taken its toll on too many and now needs to remain clearly where it belongs – on the sports field. This is what our young people told us when the Ministry of Education brought school

student representatives together, to express their views, in the years immediately after the quakes. It's taken the adults quite some time to catch up.

On leadership and resilience

I agree with the narratives that my colleagues have shared with me as part of this research and these are included in the executive summary.

Working with people from diverse backgrounds and with a range of experiences and ways of doing things is not easy. Developing relational trust is imperative but also sometimes very difficult to achieve within very diverse teams. It can be exhausting. Being willing to develop the skills and to actually have those 'open to learning conversations' is vitally important. We must allow ourselves to be vulnerable, to truly listen and learn, to debate vigorously, to be persuaded and to sometimes persuade, no matter our relative position in the team.

I advocate strongly for developing collaborative cultures and diverse teams, working hard to break down the silos both within the schools and across schools. In this way workload becomes more manageable and shared. It is imperative that as leaders in schools we empower others to also lead. In developing leadership in others, we must give them authentic leadership work, where they have the authority to make decisions, where the principal's task is to mentor and to support, holding our aspiring leaders accountable for their work, just as we as principals are accountable to our communities and our Boards of Trustees.

I see it as the principal's role to develop a positive school culture where students, staff and communities can thrive. This work cannot be done alone and the vision must be shared so that the culture remains intact no matter who is leading. Such cultures must be inclusive, based on equity, social justice and positivity. When we have a positive view of the future, we remain resilient.

Dick Edmundson

Principal Hornby High School 2008 to 2015,

Linwood College 2016 to the present

'Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.' Theodore Roosevelt

'Anything that humbles us humanises us, is a wonderful thing' Dick Edmundson

Context

On February 22, 2011, at 12:51pm Dick was wandering around the school; he vividly remembers the big shake. Teachers popped their heads out of classroom doors then went back in and continued teaching. Everyone was okay; but in a very short time the students' phones went crazy with texts and calls from parents. And then the network died. Dick's work was immediately concerned with the shepherding of worried parents as they arrived at the school. It was sometime before Dick realised the full extent of the earthquake.

The salutary lesson here: 'the event', a huge earthquake, was experienced differently depending on where you were and who you are. We all bring different prior experiences to new ones. 'Context is King.' Dick was fortunate, his family, his home, and his school were okay.

On leadership, Dick's philosophy

'Anything that humbles us, humanises us, is a wonderful thing'. Dick is clear that in leadership we must have sufficient self-belief to be humble, to not feel as if you have to prove yourself. He believes in inclusive and collaborative leadership, making sure we get the best out of others, but at times we do have to lead from the front, especially if we are child-centred. Ideally we also want the adults' needs to be met, but if this is binary then we must go with the child.

Dick remembers receiving sage advice reminding him that in teaching every adult has an organisation they can belong to which will advocate for them; but the child doesn't, and so if the adult's and child's needs are conflicting, then you must stick up for the child. It is hoped that one has 'credit in the bank' with the adults, in case of unpopular decisions. Lived experiences, particularly when things have not been easy, humble us and make us better leaders. Dick's own early education was not easy; (he has mild dyspraxia, and had a stutter.) He faced other major challenges too, while still in his twenties.

Dick can also empathise with parents when called into school; he was called into school by one of his son's high school assistant principals.

Life circumstances make Dick a truly empathetic person.

Challenges

Post-quake, the most challenging thing for Dick was his move to from Hornby High School to Linwood College. The staff, students and the community of Linwood suffered a double whammy. The earthquake had had a huge effect on Linwood, situated in the east of the city

the area most severely damaged in the quake; and at the same time, for various reasons, the school lost the confidence of its community. There had been leadership changes in the year before Dick started at Linwood.

What might you have done differently?

At Hornby pro social organisations became more important; some families could no longer afford to live in the area, caused by rising rents in that part of the city which was relatively unscathed by the earthquake. With hindsight Dick believes he could have acted earlier on the 'hard to move' staff.

At Linwood, Dick feels now, after three and a half years at the school, that he has spent too much time as a 'super Dean', that he has neglected the strategic plan and ensuring that staff are aware of and accepting of the direction in which he is leading the school.

When asked however, about which is more important when leading through tough times, culture or strategy, Dick is adamant that strategy won't work without culture and that with culture we get a better strategy.

I contend that Dick has spent the last three years wisely, developing a culture of care and rebuilding relational trust; both important for any strategy to work.

Leadership lessons

- We must have a network approach across education and our city.
- We should act on whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, and this will benefit everybody.
- The more visible our leadership, the more we can connect and collaborate.
- We should not take sides but bring sides together. Dick's proviso on this is while wanting to and making an effort 'to have everybody in the tent', this is sometimes not possible when one person's right to be 'self' unfairly impinges on the others' right to an education.
- Dick is adamant the first job of the principal is to 'not make things worse for the school next door'. We need an 'and and' approach, making decisions on what is best for our community and the community next door.
- In short, do no harm, bring people with you when you can, the needs of the child come first.
- And to quote "Theodore Roosevelt; 'do what you can, with what you have, where you are'.

On developing leaders

- Put them in situations which enable them to grow.
- Tuakana Teina - I can achieve more with others, than I can alone.
- Coach middle leaders so that they are better able to have coaching conversations with their teachers.
- If there is a chance for the principal not to be involved, then take it. This gives the principal the opportunity to empower and to coach others.

Phil Holstein

Principal Riccarton High School 2006 to 2014

Burnside High School 2015 until the present

Caring is a hard thing to do well, it is not a soft approach

Context

In the 2010 earthquake both Phil's home and school were relatively undamaged but in the February 2011 earthquake, his home being in the east of Christchurch was damaged, as was the area surrounding his home. Phil still remembers how strange it felt driving from what almost resembled a war zone in the east to the safety of Riccarton High School, which was in the relatively unscathed west, each day.

On the day of the 2011 quake the top priority was keeping students and staff safe and then getting them home. Riccarton, being a relatively small school and having the Christchurch City Council taking over the shared library space, site sharing with another school was not on the agenda. Phil felt somewhat guilty that he wasn't able to help other schools during this difficult time.

While Phil's leadership style has not changed much since the quakes, his philosophy of 'people centred leadership' has been reinforced. It was important to know others' circumstances and how they were impacted, to ensure that he listened and was empathetic. In Term Two 2011 he had already booked a trip overseas, as part of his sabbatical leave. His Board of Trustees persuaded him to go; the school was okay.

Phil has realised since 2011, how as leaders, we must role model so many things, and particularly in terms of addressing one's own well-being, role modelling for staff, students and the community is important. It gives others 'permission' to do the same as their leader. Phil is extremely humble and this can sometimes feel like self-doubt but Phil sees this as both a strength and a weakness. Phil acknowledges the importance of his wife's support in all aspects of his leadership.

Phil's leadership is very much 'values based' and moving to another school, Burnside, in 2015, Phil knows how much context matters in leading schools. He knows that staff are happy when valued, respected, supported but also challenged. Phil sees a major part of his leadership being that of supporting staff but also challenging them when needed. The quakes have taught us to try to understand what is behind the actions of people; students, staff and whānau. He is finding it more difficult at a larger school to get the staff moving forward together and yet he also sees the importance of individuality and allowing, even welcoming, staff challenge. Alongside leadership, Phil also believes that followership is important.

Since the quakes Phil sees the challenge for some high school teachers to ensure an ethic of care for the students comes first. He believes that they should use their subject as a tool to educate broadly, rather than just teaching the 'subject'. Students inspire Phil daily, and he

comments that we all have a lot to learn from them. He is optimistic about our future because he sees how our young people look after each other and how positive they are.

Phil allows himself to be seen as vulnerable although aware that the softer skills such as showing care and empathy can be seen as a weakness by many people. He now realises that you can't please everyone. Phil is most impressed by our Prime Minister, Jacinda Adern, role modelling an ethic of care and empathy while remaining strong.

Phil is quick to apologise if he feels he hasn't handled something well and he believes it takes courage to care, to be vulnerable. His mentors over the years have taught him much about himself, and he appreciates their willingness to share their knowledge with him.

Defining moments

Phil found 2018 a tumultuous year, and has been determined to respond better to issues, always retaining a positive outlook. Even as an experienced principal, Phil continues to learn and he attributes his resilience in the job to the support of both his wife and his mentors. They are his rocks.

Phil comes from a family background where he was taught that if you work hard, good things will come. This has been reinforced by his mentors and their involvement, and his own, in coaching high-performance sport. Phil is an avid reader, and particular about the psychology of sport. He learns from those around him. His own son, working in talent and institutional change, has taught Phil that to get the best out of others, one must manage oneself first.

Phil talks about having the 'courage to care.' The recent terror attack here in Christchurch shows that we must take a stand. 'Caring is a hard thing to do well, it is not a soft approach.' Caring and leadership mean having those brave conversations while maintaining the other person's respect and dignity.

Advice for aspiring school leaders

- Establish personal goals so that you continue to enjoy the leadership role - fitness and health, personal organisation.
- Find enjoyment, you must have joy in the role to balance the hard work and long hours.
- Take the job seriously but don't take yourself too seriously.
- You can't change everything at once, and you can't make others happy. Accept this.
- See ways to improve your own leadership; it's a series of incremental steps.
- Leadership capability is about self-awareness and seeking to be better. Be honest with yourself.
- It's okay to be confident. Self-belief is important.

Culture and strategy cannot be separated but seek to understand people first, as people are at the heart of the matter.

Sue Hume

Principal Avonside Girls' High School February 2010 until the present

'The tough parts were really tough, layers upon layers of complexity'

'Super heroes are not real and not sustainable'

Context

On 4 September 2010 at 4:35 am the magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck. Sue's home was shaken up badly and Sue was left thinking about how her school had fared. They were closed for six school days assessing damage and making things safe. The school lost power and water supply for some days. The tennis courts were no longer usable; there was multiple superficial cracking throughout the school buildings but nothing structural. As a new first-time principal Sue was asking herself how one deals with this, what will the impact on student learning be? How does one support staff? Repairs were made to paths to make the site safe and over the summer break the tennis courts were repaired for the new year, 2011.

On 22 February 2011 at 12:51 pm a magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck. Most of the Avonside teachers were at a paid union meeting in the town hall, but about 70 students were at school with a few teachers and the support staff. Sue herself was working at her desk, she was thrown out of the chair and managed to get her head under her desk, as things were thrown around the office by the earthquake. They assembled outside but she went back in to get pen and paper. The floor looked like a rollercoaster and Sue realised then that they wouldn't be able to use the building. Outside, geysers of liquefaction threw mud into the air. Eventually Sue got the students away to their parents. Much later, driving home through the devastation, Sue had an overwhelming sense that this was too big and that they wouldn't have a school to use for a significant period of time. Information technology was not a current strength at the school; they were mid review. Sue had paper contact details for staff but not students. There was an overwhelming sense of concern for staff, students and families. 'How could I check on my students and their families?' Many Avonside students lived in what would become the heart of the 'red zone', devastated by the earthquake.

In order to access school electronic files which were not available, the senior leadership team returned to the school site some days later; they used a crowbar to get into the server room, took the servers and delivered them to the IT company, so that they could access contact details for the students.

The senior leadership team gathered at Sue's relatively undamaged home to make progress on contacting families and planning the way ahead. Already Sue's mother, her aunt, uncle, cousin and their three children had had to move out of their own homes and were all living at Sue's house.

The senior leadership team worked long hours at the dining room table ensuring collaborative decision-making, setting up lines of communication to keep people informed.

Initially the Ministry of Education spoke of a range of possibilities for the school; there were 300 places for girls in Dunedin, and places in other schools in Christchurch. But Sue argued that they needed to have the girls with staff who knew them. The Minister of Education, Anne Tolley, visited the school site, and Sue advocated that the state girls' school education needed to remain an option for girls on the east side of the city. She was fighting for the continuation of her school. 'Any solution had to enable us to be with our kids.'

Sandra Sidaway from Burnside High School phoned Sue and suggested site sharing following a meeting at the Ministry of Education. This was a very welcome suggestion and a pivotal breakthrough in the period of uncertainty following the earthquake. And so this became the reality for a year. During this site-sharing time 12 different options were put on the table for Avonside Girls' High School's future. Site-sharing was a temporary arrangement for 2011, and not a viable long-term option. Eventually agreement was reached to place temporary buildings on the Avonside site following the demolition of the historic buildings. In Term One 2012 they returned to the original site to a school of prefabricated classrooms. Sue commends her staff who had worked so hard to ensure that girls returned at the start of 2012 to a welcoming and ordered environment, despite being a prefab temporary set up. She also noted that the project team preparing the site had been amazingly positive and had worked very hard to ensure that the site was ready for students to return to for 2012.

Challenges

The impact of the earthquake was unkind not just in terms of physical damage. Many families had to leave the area or the city; their homes were devastated and so Avonside's roll dropped dramatically. The school faced staff redundancies and the loss of management units for three consecutive years. This was a challenging and difficult aspect to manage. It weighed heavily on school leadership to on the one hand acknowledge huge staff support through difficult times, and then make a number of staff redundant and remove management units from staff to meet the reduced allocation of units. The remaining staff were loyal, not applying for jobs in better-off schools. After two years of uncertainty about the school's future, an announcement was made by the Ministry of Education in 2013 that the school did have a future. They would be co-located in a new school on a new site with Shirley Boys' High School. As a school, while happy that their future was assured, they also faced much grief again with an historical attachment to the broken site.

While the new campus for Avonside and Shirley has a new name, 'Orua Paeroa', 'the place where the easterly blows', each school has kept its own name. Sue has ensured that the Avonside identity shows our bi-cultural heritage using both Te Reo Māori and English names for the school. Parts of the old school, including some of the salvaged red bricks, are used in the landscaping, and historical photographs along with an excellent collection of New Zealand art adorn the walls of the new school.

Leadership Lessons

The most valuable lessons throughout the crisis, the unknown future and the building of the new school on a new site is 'know your why' and Sue reinforced this with both words and actions – 'what is the best for our girls?'

In preparing for the new school, a strong vision for learning was re-developed. Sue wanted staff to try things out. The philosophy promulgated was that 'we are all learners, we learn from failure, no criticism.' Sue encouraged staff to try new ways of teaching and learning in their four prototypes prior to the new build. The staff had the courage to try things, to talk and to share 'what works' and 'what doesn't work'.

Resilience

'The tough parts were really tough'. 'Through the layers and layers of complexity' Sue attributes her resilience to:

- Her home base, a supportive husband who made no demands on Sue's time, accepting that her job had to come first.
- Her personal commitment to her vocation; Sue wants the best for the girls.
- Team work.

The eight years from 2011 until now have proved to be both a challenge and a privilege. "It's about the people who have worked together to make it happen; the staff wanted the best for the kids and what we have achieved we have done together. Support from the board, particularly the two Board Chairs over that time, has been invaluable, as the school has grappled with all the challenges the earthquakes have created – from devastation, demolition to new beginnings in a temporary school, to new beginnings in a co-located new build setting."

The future

Sue describes the new school environment as 'a taonga, a real investment in our kids and our community'. 'We can now get away from all the distractions and concentrate on our kids, the teaching and learning for their futures.'

Future leaders: advice

- Remember why you're doing what you're doing, be courageous and make the decisions you need to make.
- It's about the students. Put them at the centre of your decision-making.
- Look after your staff so that they can do what is needed with and for the students
- Work with people. You are just a part of the solution.
- Support is there, within your own teams and beyond.
- Don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help. No-one expects you to have all the answers.
- Super heroes are not real, and are not sustainable.

Bruce Kearney

Principal Kaiapoi High School September 2011 until the present

'Good people, good skills and knowledge and a good heart, can make a difference for students and schools'

Context

Kaipoi High School was hit badly in the September 2010 earthquake but not in February 2011. There was a positive increase in the roll after 2010, as parents were concerned about sending their kids over the Waimakariri River to the city for their education. They wanted to keep their children close. At that time the school had a poor public perception; that it was rough, and offered more vocational trades courses rather than academic ones. Financially the school did not appear well off. The buildings looked more like a prison than the school.

Bruce was appointed as principal from September 2011, and states that he had no idea what he was coming into prior to his appointment. He had been head of a large faculty of 25 staff and had had just six weeks' experience as an Acting Assistant Principal at Cashmere High School. He did have other experience, having worked in foreign currency and he had been in the army for some time. Fortunately, the Board had appointed, in Bruce, a principal who enjoys the challenge and admits that as it is in his 'nature to be turbulent'.

Leadership

Bruce's leadership, being new to principalship, was forged through the crisis. Bruce is a hard worker but the layers of complexity and the massive workload left him feeling more exhausted than he had anticipated. He was dealing with master planning, followed by a large building program, one of the first for many Canterbury schools following the earthquakes, working with parents and the community to change the perception of the school, a senior leadership team that was not cohesive, a student suicide, and large increases in student anxiety levels.

Initially, Bruce wanted some quick wins; he worked on some small things – a new fence, a new uniform, high expectations of students to evoke pride.

Bruce found staffing issues more of a challenge than the earthquake rebuild project where with hard work progress was made. 'It is the people issues, developing relational trust, which are personally and professionally exhausting.'

Bruce has a tremendous sense of humour, attested to by his many principal colleagues, and at first he felt he was unable to be himself and he didn't allow his sense of humour to shine – he had to prove himself first. Eight years on he is now 'himself', realising that it's too exhausting not being one self.

Bruce does not believe that any principal has all the knowledge, energy or capacity to act alone. He has worked hard to truly delegate giving autonomy to others, but still ensuring that he supports and holds staff accountable. This recognises others' strengths and develops leadership within them, within the school.

Leadership advice

- Be yourself.
- Know that what you do is important and will impact on young people's lives, but our decisions do not kill people.
- We are caretakers, when away, the school does carry on.
- Take a few risks early on – throw everything at it.
- Ensure your integrity is intact – actions must follow words. Integrity is everything.
- Well thought-out risks can lead to high rewards.
- Ensure that you develop a good relationship with your Board of Trustees – this underpins all progress.

Defining moments

The school roll has grown from 400 to 900 with the catchment increasing from 40% to 65%. The public perception of the school is now positive. The community now holds high expectations for the school (on the back of seven years' work!)

At the recent Open Night, Bruce was not wearing his name badge, and was asked by a member of the public who he was. Bruce stated that he has been very well known in the community so his ego was destroyed – 'as it should be' he said. 'It's now the school that is important not Mr K!' Bruce is, and rightly so, proud of his school's achievements since 2011.

Resilience

We all have fundamental beliefs and assumptions; 'we are often blinded by our own prior experiences'. Bruce has not had to search for tools to support himself through crises, as he is resilient. He learnt in childhood with a harsh father but a loving mother, that no matter how bad it gets he can get through with hard work.

Optimism

Bruce believes that 'with good people, good skills and knowledge, and a good heart we can make a difference for students in schools'. He is however also pessimistic that the right people are not always applying for the right jobs. Principalship attracts certain types of people; 'what we need are the architects of education'.

Aspiring leaders

Provide challenge within the school – risk and support. We all grow best through experience. Embrace the autonomous approach – give people autonomy but supply a safety net. Give others the opportunity to lead, to fail, to self-reflect. Make them accountable – ensure this is an expectation.

Culture and strategy

Culture and strategy feed each other: the best strategy won't work without culture. Understand strategy; it is not about compliance.

John Laurenson

Principal Shirley Boys' High School (1996 – present)

'Laughter keeps the spectre of cynicism at bay'

Context

The 2010 earthquake caused minimal damage to Shirley Boys' High School and John's home. 2011 was completely different. John was in Wellington at the airport and soon heard and saw on TV the news about the severe damage in Christchurch, following a large earthquake. On returning to Christchurch the next day John discovered his house was broken down the middle and his school was badly damaged. John's house was in what became the 'red zone'. His car was wrecked as was his wife's car. He used a bike. He soon established a command base in the undamaged house of one his Deputy Principals. The homes of approximately 200 of his boys and 15 of his staff were wrecked. The mother of a 10-year-old boy had died in the CTV building. Things were grim. John got a school van and visited his boys' families in their homes. He didn't sleep much. Many families left Christchurch.

John knew that they wouldn't be able to occupy their school site for some time and eventually they ended up site sharing with Papanui High School. They were established in an old assembly hall. All the staff together and 'that turned out to be a boon as we were all together'.

John describes himself as somewhat of a maverick. Over 23 years as principal he has learnt to manipulate structures and meet the needs of individuals. He will not ask others to do what he is not willing to do himself. He leads by example.

Following the earthquake, John separated himself from his principal colleagues, the needs of his school and his kids were more important. John states that he was on a personal crusade. He lived within the red zone with those of his community who stayed. He spent long hours at school arriving in the small hours of the morning to do all the necessary administration. He spent the school day in classrooms, around the school, with his people. He led from the front and by examples, holding regular assemblies. He was fixated on his own school and it's multiplying needs.

John came to loathe the Ministry of Education and what it stood for. 'Our system is wrong, predicated on competition, leading to a predatory environment, dog eat dog, the law of the jungle.' He became somewhat bitter, but not about the kids and the teachers but about the system. He started to go to The Press. John absolutely loves teaching and what it means. 'Education is not broken, it's the system and the earthquakes put this into a sharp focus.'

On reflection, John thinks he made some errors of judgement and 'would do miles of things differently.' He could have lightened up, and maybe he should have been more involved in the development of the new school, but at the same time John sees his role is that of developing people and other leaders. He believes in servant leadership. He is adamant that leadership is a calling, not a 9:00 to 5:00 job. 'You need to be totally committed and love what you do, based on loving kids. The emotional stuff is important; it's important to provide maturity and stability.'

Resilience

On asking John how he has managed to lead this way over the past eight years, he replied that he simply could not have done it without his wife, his 'heart and soul are in her hands', and that support is crucial. They did not leave their broken home until 2014, leaving the day before his neighbour, who was the last to leave the red zone. John's wife, three sons and three grandchildren help John to laugh. This is important.

Leadership, the future and optimism

In leading and teaching in our schools John is aware that the work is emotionally draining. We are vulnerable and it's easy to begin to put up barriers. In terms of well-being, we must be conscious of this; emotional energy dissipates when there is stuff coming at you all the time. 'As staff put up barriers this leads to the spectre of cynicism which sits in the corner of every classroom. We can guard against this which is why we have to focus on well-being. Laughter keeps the spectre of cynicism at bay.'

John recalls that his parents were ordinary Kiwis and instilled in him the belief that 'if you're going to do something, make it a little better than it already is'. 'Play the long game because in the end you will make a difference'.

John remains optimistic about the future; 'you can't be a teacher unless you're optimistic, and one must realise that you control what you can and within your own environment.' John works to instil this and his students, encouraging social action within their own environment.

John is realistic about leadership. The long hours are not sustainable. You must be optimistic about the future and love the game. One must accept that 'running a school is a little bit like having a tiger by the tail, you can't stop the tugging and the snarling'. 'One must love the kids to become a leader and also have the ability to make hard decisions'.

In developing other leaders, John believes in putting those who are aspiring into positions of trust and then allowing them to make decisions, but being there to help them through the consequences of their decisions. 'We must give others the authority and the support to make big decisions.'

When leading through tough times 'its culture that's important. Show them where we're going, roll up your own sleeves and provide support. Never underestimate the value of telling stories.'

Lee McArthur
Principal of Hoon Hay School 2009 to present
'Lead with kindness and inclusivity'

Context

The 2010 earthquakes in some ways prepared the school for 2011. 2010 was easier, as it happened during the night. In 2010 the first priority was to check on staff and students. Everyone was okay. The next task was to ensure the school was safe before reopening and 'back to normal.' The difficulties in both quakes was the conflicting advice received by the school.

In 2011, the school was open with 500 students and staff on site. Lee's initial thought was 'what a nuisance' thinking this would be a repeat of the 2010 earthquake and having no idea of the extent of damage. Leigh went into her calm leadership mode and all went like clockwork until the news of the devastation in town was discovered. It was time to make balanced sensible decisions as Lee and her team worked to ensure all children were collected.

Some staff lost friends, Lee lost an acquaintance, but the children and their families were all safe. For some staff their homes were 'munted' and one, eight years on, remains unresolved.

For Lee as a leader, the importance of saying 'yes' to staff, always acting with kindness and without question in all staff situations, is reinforced time and again. Staff need to know that their leader understands the trauma they are going through. As a more experience school leader, Lee gives credit to her strong and stable staff.

Lessons learnt

- Never underestimate diversity in a team. Mature heads are important.
- Always bring the leadership team together, knowing that collective wisdom will give surety to any decision.
- Try to create a team of wise heads, people who are willing to offer alternative points of view.
- Collective wisdom cannot be underestimated, and so do not make many decisions in isolation.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. (Lee's rural background comes to the fore.)
- Don't expect things to be always great.

Lee has learnt to advocate even more strongly than before and is confident enough to be offside with the Ministry of Education if needs be. She is quicker now to cut 'to the chase.'

Leigh remains concerned about her staff. 'It's getting harder each year to meet the growing needs of our kids in the classroom.' Post-quake, our children are more anxious, more vulnerable and not as resilient as previously. But Leigh still enjoys her job. She has an awesome staff, very stable, and they have fun. This is important.

Lee is confident, realistic but not pessimistic. With the range of difficult issues our children arrive at school with, Lee believes that reduced class sizes is an absolute must. Right now is a pivotal moment in terms of industrial action.

'It is essential for principals to lead with kindness and inclusivity always.'

Christine O'Neill

Principal at St Thomas of Canterbury College 2007 to 2017

Principal at Christchurch Girls' High School July 2019 -

'A culture of compassion and care, a relational culture, is essential before strategy can work.'

Context

In September 2010 at the time of the first major earthquake, Christine was in London seeing her very unwell daughter. She saw the quake from the televised world perspective. It looked as if the whole of Christchurch was on fire.

February 2011 was a different story. Fortunately, St Thomas' was not badly damaged as Christine's personal life was in disarray. Christine and her partner lived in the central city in an old workers' cottage. It was within the cordon and you could not enter that cordon in the central city after 6 pm at night. In addition to losing everything but soft furnishings, a series of serious personal events followed; leaving Christine sometimes heading to school each day feeling as if she was on remote control.

Initially the primary focus for Christine and her team was on relationships and a pedagogy of care. Without a high trust culture, you can't get anywhere. The earthquakes help to embed this culture at St Thomas of Canterbury College.

St Thomas' welcomed Catholic Cathedral College, whose school was badly damaged, to site share with them. The two schools' staffs work together sharing food and professional learning, in addition to physical space and resources. The shortened day changed thinking, staff were challenged by the intensity of the experience teaching from 7:30 to 12:00. Learning happened with less time, not more, and the kids did better academically.

Site sharing was a rich and harmonious time. Staff talked more about themselves helping to develop a high trust culture. They were prepared to show their vulnerabilities. They showed the tears and various other emotions. They helped each other when some, previously perceived as strong people, fell apart. Teaching and learning for both the staff and the students felt as though they had received 'jet fuel injections' daily.

When Catholic Cathedral College left to go back to their own site, the boys, staff and parents, wanted to continue with an early start to the day with the finishing time of 2:30 and this continues today, eight years on.

Challenges

There were very difficult and challenging issues around the condition of a large block in the school which had to be urgently vacated. The ongoing rebuild issues contributed to Christine's exhaustion.

There were other challenges too, and initially the senior leadership team lead actively from the front, having difficult conversations on things such as cultural responsiveness, leading in the use of Te Reo Māori, showing their vulnerability and courage simultaneously.

Eventually Christine left the school, burnt out and somewhat disillusioned, particularly in terms of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. Fortunately for education, Christine went on to work with many principals, carrying out appraisals and helping Akaroa Area School as a limited statutory manager on behalf of the Ministry of Education. She feels refreshed, passionate about education, and will take up her new position as Principal of Christchurch Girls' High School in July 2019.

Leadership lessons

- My house is your house
- A culture of care is essential in times of trauma or chaos, which, if in place can lead to a time of great creativity.
- Don't leap in with creativity and innovation while people are still vulnerable.
- When possible collaborate and share both within and outside the school.
- De-territorialisation has huge advantages.

There were many special and difficult moments for Christine as she led the school, with her senior leaders. These moments often involved loss. Four brothers, all students at the school at the time of the quake, lost their father during the quake. Later, a teacher died unexpectedly. Both Christine and one of her deputy principal's suffered from severe forms of cancer, both surviving.

The staff learnt to speak about their own vulnerabilities, led by those in formal leadership roles.

When Christine left the school it was very different to the one she had gone into. She left feeling at peace; her career had meaning and value. She was moved when the boys performed a haka at her farewell, and also by the staff farewell video - a special, hilarious, crazy dance, which reflected their close relationship and the huge amount of fun and hard work they had had together.

Christine is resilient, and she puts this down to her natural optimism and positivity. She believes that life is good and exciting. She exhibits intellectual curiosity, she likes change and was willing, in her role as principal, to expose her staff to new experiences. She is most optimistic about our young people themselves. They are not apathetic and have wonderful energy which they are using to enact change.

Advice to aspiring leaders

- Embed your practice in your values and make ethical decisions. Be authentic, your values are your touchstone.
- Equity must be a driver for change.
- Take a restorative stance even when the stakes are high. Allow this to be a platform for pedagogical change which is democratic and collaborative.
- Develop a deeper understanding of social justice.
- Build a strong team around you where you can discuss everything and anything. This allows you to be resilient, it provides a protective factor.
- Debate strongly.

- Ensure you have support, family and your partner become your rocks.
- Share, be vulnerable, in terms of the personal and professional.
- A culture of compassion and care, a relational culture is essential before strategy can work.

‘One can command for a long time but not lead once.’

Harry Romana:
Ko Nga Puhi te iwi
Ko te Mahurehure te hapu
Ko Whakatere te Maunga
Ko Moehau re Marae
Ko Waima te Awa

Principal Mairehau High School from October 2004 to present
‘Pena no koe akua nei ra koe’ ‘Wherever you go, whatever you do, be yourself.’

Context

Harry is a fluent speaker of te reo Māori and is often called on to speak on behalf of other secondary principals, acknowledging the importance of tikanga Māori in our collective work.

Harry was most affected in the 2011 earthquake. He was at school, although most of his teaching staff was at a paid union meeting in the town hall. He remembers being on the phone at the time and watching the buildings and the ground moving violently. The phone went dead. Harry checked on staff present along with about 30 students. He focused on those with him first. He was last to leave the school that day. Contact with the Ministry of Education in Christchurch was not possible, but Harry did manage to contact someone in Wellington, and he advised that he was closing the school. His immediate concern was ‘how are my people, and how can I contact them?’

Changes in leadership

Harry acknowledges that he has gone back to his ‘cultural grass roots.’

Au myself
Whānau family
Whanaungatanga community
Whakawhanaungatanga regional

Prior to the earthquakes, Harry admits he wasn’t good at looking after himself. His wife realised this and took him to the task. He no longer takes the family for granted and is much more self-aware, more productive, better engaged. His leadership direction has changed. Losing a close friend on February 11, 2011, has given Harry a renewed sense of empathy, both personally and professionally.

With the support of his wife of 32 years, Harry has gained a determined inner strength, underpinned by his family values. He has role modelled the adage ‘Don’t ask me to lie for you’, and his own children appreciate this teaching. Harry’s values and beliefs are deeply rooted, and although tested at times in his role as principal, Harry will not compromise these values of honesty and integrity. And every decision he makes, he must be able to look at himself in the mirror.

Since the quakes, Harry has been more open with his staff, able to share his sorrows, frustrations and failures. 'Creativity comes from deep within ourselves', and Harry likens leadership to being a farmer planting the seeds, growing the seeds, and nurturing the seeds.

Harry remains optimistic about the future of Mairehau High School despite being one of the smallest state secondary schools post-quake. Although we remain in a challenging environment, Harry is determined to find equitable solutions for his students and staff, for his school. To Harry, his whānau incorporates not only his immediate family but also his students, his staff and the immediate school community.

Advice from Harry

Have a clear understanding of one's own values and lead from these. Ensure that you can live with your own decisions.

Taitu'uga Geoff Siave

Principal, Shirley Intermediate School, Te Kura Takawaenga O Oraka, from 2006 to present

'Keep the main thing the main thing'

Context

Prior to the earthquakes of 2010 and 2011, the student roll had been growing steadily since Geoff was appointed principal in 2006. They had been adding one class each year and had reached a roll of 300 students. The school is situated in the badly damaged eastern suburbs of the city. Post-quake the roll has decreased and now stands at approximately 160.

On February 22, 2011, Geoff and two of his staff, were attending a seminar at the Hagley Netball Centre, close to the central city. Immediately Geoff and his staff got into the car and started driving towards the school. The traffic was soon gridlocked, so Geoff and one of the others got out and started to run the 6km towards school. They ran through Cathedral Square, and our iconic cathedral spire had fallen in the quake. Geoff was certain then that people would be dead beneath the rubble of the spire. The irony is that no one was killed in the collapse of the cathedral spire, but 185 people did die as a result of the earthquake.

They ran in the centre of the road because the rise of liquefaction meant the central hump of the roads was the driest part. Traffic was at a standstill, and someone in a car recognised Geoff and yelled out 'the school is okay'. On arriving at school Geoff knew they were focusing on the right things – their students. They gathered the students in a safe area, outside and away from liquefaction and the staff formed a circle around the students, protecting them. Thinking strategically, Geoff opted to venture indoors for a jacket and fetched the school megaphone. The administration team had brought out the school roll and phone lists (which were printed out each week). Later, a couple of staff members retrieved the school's sports team's tracksuit tops as it was a cool day. They accessed several boxes of the fundraising chocolates. (Thankfully these were written off as damaged by the insurers).

Throughout the afternoon parents arrived, in various states of distress, and checked their child off the list. As the number of children reduced, some staff were permitted to leave - this was done according to the self-perceived needs of the staff members themselves; those who felt they really needed to go were allowed to go. There were always more than enough staff members on hand for our children. Around 6.30pm, five and a half hours after the first major earthquake, most children had been uplifted. Staff volunteered to drive the remaining children home. For some this took two to three hours.

Geoff remembers a moment around 5pm when a staff member handed him a mobile phone, realising that Geoff had yet to check on his own family. It was an emotional moment and still invokes an emotional response today, eight years on, such is the lasting impact of the earthquake we experienced that day, putting our own personal circumstances aside to focus on the children in our schools.

Leadership

Geoff says his journey post-quake, has been up-and-down; at times feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, broken. The Minister of Education proposed that the school should be closed. The stress caused to families, staff and communities is well documented and remembered by all involved - especially by those carrying the biggest impact of the proposals and of the eventual decisions - the principals.

After the school was permitted to remain open “permanently, and on the same site” there were more challenges to come. The school - under Geoff’s leadership - developed a broad curriculum which focused on the whole child with staff running a range of ‘clubs’ associated with their own passions. Geoff himself ran three clubs, Pasifika, choir and acapella singing group. The Education Review Office visited the school and pointed out that while those activities were good, the school’s academic results were low. They surmised that communication with the Board of Trustees and with parents was insufficient. This necessitated an increased - but not entirely unmerited - focus on testing, data-gathering and measuring our collective “success” on a narrower set of academic criteria.

Ironically, just a few weeks prior to the earthquakes, at a principals’ meeting with the Secretary of Education, Geoff had expressed to her his misgivings that the (then-pending) national standards would narrow the school curriculum to literacy and mathematics results.

Where do things like metacognition come into the picture – the whole child? He wants his students to have truly satisfying lives and, while academic success is important, the vision for the school is much broader than this. Leadership of this type can be difficult to achieve with on-going ERO visits to check on the narrow confines of “academic” success.

Challenges

Challenges have been multi-layered.

- The school, being situated in the badly damaged eastern part of the city has been on a downward spiral of roll decline losing 30% in 2011 alone.
- Leading people, each with their own often difficult personal circumstances, post-quake – their own trauma.
- Managing the political aspects; initially being told the school was to close at an event which made Geoff imagine what it must have been like for the Jewish people in Nazi Germany. Eventually, after a draining fight to save the school, the MOE revoked the decision to close the school and, instead, to rebuild the school on its current site. The Education Brief written by the school, was finished early in 2017 but Geoff feels that they are still being fobbed off by the MOE, with very little and only sporadic communication. Geoff believes the school has been treated shoddily and has a low level of trust in the MOE. Does it have another agenda?
- Ethically questionable and harmful levels of “market models” of schooling in which schools pursue the “bigger is better” model to justify expansive marketing. By contrast Geoff believes all schools should have one target market - to provide a great education option for the people for whom the school is the *local* school.

These leadership struggles eventually erode one’s own sense of doing a good job. It is simply exhausting.

Hindsight

The age-old maxims about leadership help:

- Don't sweat the small stuff.
- Realise what you can have an effect on and work on that.
- Keep looking after people 'but try to remember to put your own mask on first'. Principal well-being is important.
- With an overwhelming workload, prioritise, be strategic, delegate.
- Keep the main thing the main thing.
- It can be tempting to do the easiest thing but this is not always the right thing to do.
- Accept yourself as a person with limitations; one can only do one's best.
- There's more than one way to solve a problem.
- No one drops the ball on purpose.
- Every teacher wants to be good at their job. Help them.
- Be true to yourself and to others; speak the truth with love and be respectful of others.
- Remember that every child is greatly loved by someone at home.
- Remember that (by and large) parents act out of a desire to do the best they can for their child - whom they love dearly.

Resilience

Geoff's faith ensures his resilience; he believes he is placed in schools to do a certain job. He has also been buoyed by a family commitment to reignite their Samoan culture. Geoff has recently been honoured with a title and given the name Taitu'uga by his elders.

Integrity and care and love for kids drives principals' resilience. The earthquake has taught Geoff to 'put his piece forward', he has 'to be confident in new ways'. He backs himself, tries to follow his moral compass. He has huge integrity (Ann's words!). 'It's important to realise that vulnerability and courage are linked'.

Geoff is optimistic about our city's future, its aesthetics. The proliferation of modern, aesthetically pleasing cityscapes and creative works of art which are springing up in the rebuilt CBD, has helped Geoff realise the power of art and beauty to lift one's spirits and connection to a world beyond the struggles that poke us in the ribs.

Jeff Smith

Principal Papanui High School June 2011 until the present

'Remain calm in the face of multiple demands'

Context

In the 2010 earthquake Jeff's home was very badly damaged. He was a Deputy Principal at Papanui High School at the time. Jeff soon realised that the earthquake was experienced differently by each person. Staff at school were very understanding of what had happened, however, few really knew of the depth of challenges going on, nor how his house, situated between Halswell and Prebbleton, could be so badly damaged.

Jeff thought the events of 2010 were now behind him, he was looking forward to 2011 and getting back on his feet. The year started with great hope and expectations. Three weeks later, Canterbury and its landscape was to change forever. In the February 22nd earthquake, Jeff was at school, along with the staff and students. The school did not appear to be badly damaged. It was a long process to get all the students home that day, and Jeff wondered if his own son and wife at two other schools, were safe. He shared in the mourning of those that lost their lives, including two past students of the school.

The ensuing pressures were complex for Jeff. He and his family had already lost their home the previous year and initially lived in different houses with relatives. He then experienced the challenges of the rental market, characterised by intense competition for properties and price increases. This new earthquake held up the insurance processes for Jeff; this carried on for several years, as bureaucracy put him and his family under severe personal pressure.

The term the "new normal" brought many changes. The most significant for Jeff at Papanui High School was the concept of site sharing. This was a collaborative decision by the senior leadership team and BOT, and Jeff was a strong voice within the team. The decision was made that Shirley Boys' High School would site share and Papanui requested only that the morning shift would better suit their community. A key decision led to ensuring that the staff of both schools could work on site at any time, by each having their own administration hub, with the students coming in just for their 'shift'. Staff and students from both schools did incredibly well; being understanding and accepting of the situation, they simply got on with things. It was this 'getting on with things' that was crucial in moving forward.

Jeff was appointed to the role of principal in June 2011, while still site sharing and with aftershocks continuing across the city.

After site sharing finished with Shirley Boys' High returning to their original site, Papanui retained a shorter school day with all meetings, still today, occurring before teaching and learning each morning. No formal meetings are scheduled for after school which finishes each day at 2:30. Jeff felt it was essential that what had happened in Christchurch was not used as an excuse for individuals reaching their potential. From great adversity can come great strength. The days remain fast and furious.

Challenges

Jeff is concerned, as are many of his principal colleagues, with the complexity of the principals' role. For Jeff, the greatest challenge concerns trying to empower others, ensuring their leadership growth, while still being personally stretched with what with comes into the school in terms of 'add-ons' to the principal's role, for example; charters, education brief, enrolment schemes, kahui ako, community network meetings etc. This is sometimes made more difficult due to the lack of clarity and transparency in process from the Ministry of Education. Jeff stresses the importance of collaboration as the focal point for progress and not a sense of 'things being done to us'. With the initial disruption of the earthquakes, the increasing need to support well-being, and the importance of ensuring our learning environment meets the needs of all; it is critical the Ministry of Education is always mindful of the particular characteristics of Canterbury, and is openly consultative about this when making decisions.

Leadership

Leadership following the earthquakes, has become increasingly complex. As a new first-time principal, Jeff was excited about his role, and while it was challenging he was able to push forward within a positive framework.

Now, eight years on, Jeff describes staff resilience as a 'cumulative time bomb', 'time can be a great healer but also a great destroyer'. Staff and community issues have become more obvious over the past year.

Jeff asks that the Ministry of Education puts well-being at the forefront of their priorities to support principals. He also acknowledges that he has a part to play in his own well-being. Some suggestions re principal well-being, so that the principals can support staff, students, and community:

- Principals should be required to undergo a fully paid medical check-up annually, and have some form of supervision and/or peer coaching.
- The Ministry of Education plans carefully and considers the timeliness of any new announcements; for example, charters were to change in 2020 and now that has been pushed out to 2023. There are also such things as the rebuild programmes and timelines, which have constantly changed. When the Ministry of Education changes such decisions, our integrity with our Board can be undermined.
- Principals appear to be left to develop their own capabilities based solely on experience: is there another way that we can do this?
- How can we (current principals and the Ministry of Education) better support leadership development? How can we ensure new principals have the confidence to work through processes before being immersed in a serious issue or a traumatic situation?
- More efficient channels could be developed to prepare and advise principals in terms of things such as HR, legal advice.

Leadership lessons

- Build trust and use support from both inside and outside the school.
- Principals have a great deal to learn from each other; develop those networks.
- Allow others from within the school to take the lead on initiatives – but always within a collaborative framework.
- Retain responsibility for the big picture.
- Relationship based leadership maximises the best in people for the overall development of the teaching and learning in a school environment.
- The best strategies will be exposed in difficult times if a strong positive culture is not already in place.
- One must believe and trust that you're doing things for the right reasons.
- Finding time for reflection is always important even though very difficult.

Resilience

- Remain calm in the face of multiple demands.
- Be analytical despite the layers of emotional work.
- Ensure you have support of family and friends, outside of the school.
- Accept that this is a vocation not a job.

Optimism

Jeff doesn't use the word optimism easily. He finds it important to 'not get too far ahead as such optimism can lead to false hope'. However, he has been recently elected onto the SPANZ executive, and this will allow Jeff to build on his current leadership and contribute positively to the wider work of principals from a national perspective.

Linda Tame

Principal Lincoln High School (1997 – 2013)

Acting Principal Linwood College (April 2015 to Dec 2015)

Principal Golden Bay Area School (2018 - present)

'He tangata, he tangata, he tangata People are at the centre'

Context

At the time of the 2010 earthquake, Linda and her husband had a house full of people staying including a Chilean exchange student, her first night in New Zealand.

In terms of school, in hindsight Linda believes that they did not review procedures carefully enough following this initial earthquake. No one expected another large quake in February the following year.

On February 11, 2011, Linda was at Lincoln University when the earthquake struck. When Linda arrived back at the school they had been advised by emergency services to not evacuate but as the news of what was happening in the central city filtered through, things became chaotic. Again, with hindsight, Linda believes she should have reversed decisions that had to be made. She and her leadership team were very used to being well organised and in control, but the situation was the opposite. Her team was shaken and Linda admits to feeling particularly vulnerable. Post this second earthquake, they did an excellent job in reviewing processes, but at the time things were challenging. Linda's own home had been damaged, and vulnerable relatives made matters very difficult.

Staff were also affected, with one member losing a brother, and a former staff member was also missing, and eventually named as having died in the earthquake. The Board chair was hugely supportive but there was great pressure from others to reopen the school as soon as possible. Linda and her team were under immense pressure.

Linda recognises the importance of joint decision-making in an emergency. Everyone is vulnerable and collaboration within the senior leadership team is essential.

The most challenging issues since 2011 were twofold: The people stuff and workload. Linda has found this in all three Principal roles that she has had. Relational trust must be developed and community expectations managed. This is important but very difficult work.

Lessons learnt and advice for aspiring leaders

- Except one's own vulnerability. Role modelling is important. Others also feel vulnerable.
- Admit mistakes.
- Work hard to develop relational trust. It is fundamental. Understanding various staff members' perspectives is important. Schools are relationship intense places.
- Role model being kind.
- Be optimistic, see the positives, take joy, talk to the kids.
- Be clear about priorities; these will differ according to context.

- Strip things back and focus on things that are important. Hone in on important things and stick to this.
- Use multiple methods to get feedback from staff and role model this. Feedback is important.
- Tell people why you are doing what you're doing.
- Make time to step in and lead teaching and learning.

Linda remains optimistic. The transformation in Christchurch is better serving our young people. 'Don't slip away from that whakatauki: he tangata, he tangata, he tangata - People at the centre of everything.'

Denise Torrey

Principal Somerfield School 2003 to present

'We learnt to build ships as we sailed them, falling overboard a lot'

Context

At the time of the 2010 earthquake, Denise was not only principal at Somerfield school but also president of the Canterbury Primary Principals' Association, and so had two concerns; her own school and supporting other schools. In both 2010 and 2011 her own school suffered little damage. In 2011 while the schools were closed Somerfield became a hub to which children could come and learn while parents worked.

In 2010 the CPPA sent out their own communications to members and Denise spent a lot of time at the Ministry of Education. She remembers spending time arguing with Anne Tolley, then Minister of Education. She found that NZEI, the primary union supported schools as well morally, but inequities were obvious.

In 2011 Denise should have been going on sabbatical leave but instead worked at the request of MOE to help schools in Canterbury. She found the psycho-social issues exhausting. Wearing two hats was tiring with her own kids and community a priority, but a less complex task than helping other more damaged schools.

Ministry of Education decisions around closures and mergers were poorly timed and set colleagues against colleagues, principals fighting amongst themselves. This added weight to the difficulties.

At the time Denise found herself leading through trauma in its many guises; trying to keep up with schools across the city. Since then Denise has been more able to once again concentrate on transformational leadership which for her means pedagogical transformation, advocacy in terms of the network and coaching other principals. And now vision is really important again.

The most challenging aspects?

The closures and mergers with the associated pressures on colleagues and communities were the most challenging aspects since 2011. There were questions about when these changes should have been made and trying to help principals to lead with dignity was hard work. In an advocacy role, there were barriers in terms of conflicting information and decisions. Denise felt that the Ministry of Education at the time was dishonest and prone to duplicity.

In 2015 Denise had become the president of the New Zealand Principals' Federation, working on behalf of 2400 principals throughout New Zealand. She found this work refreshing but challenging. Being away from Christchurch allowed Denise the space to

concentrate on advocacy and coaching. From the distance of Wellington, Denise was able to reflect on the Christchurch situation and this perspective also allowed for better advocacy. She developed a positive working relationship with the Secretary of Education, Peter Hughes, and the Deputy Secretary, Katrina Casey. Her relationships with the Minister of Education, now Hekia Parata was somewhat more tenuous.

Denise came to believe even more strongly, that working to care for staff meant that they in turn could look after the kids and the community would be alright. She was generous in ensuring staff had time to deal with their personal insurance issues. The same lesson in being generous around time was applied with success during the recent shootings in Christchurch and the subsequent lockdowns.

Valuable or significant leadership lessons

- Find and use your networks.
- Collaborate whenever possible.
- Work with and allow yourself to be challenged by other colleagues to find ways that work for your school.
- Growing people is important – advocacy and coaching.
- Bring people with you.
- Let go of some of your ego.

On courage and vulnerability

Denise is not afraid of officialdom. We had lived through scary and uncertain times. Bravery was necessary as we had to make things up as we went along, but realising we had no answers, left us feeling very vulnerable. ‘Through this we learnt to build ships as we sailed them – falling overboard a lot.’

Defining moment

Principals were called to a meeting in Lincoln, outside the city. They were given different coloured name badges and an envelope with their school’s name on it. Denise called this her ‘Auschwitz moment’. ‘We were all at our most vulnerable. Some principals found out that their schools were to be closed and others that they would merge. Some schools were safe. Things felt completely out of our control. We were powerless – even more powerless than during the actual earthquakes where we could act. For those of us whose school was safe, we were useless to our colleagues. There was raw anger, complete powerlessness and utter vulnerability.’

Remaining resilient

- Having good support at home and at school.
- Denise credits her upbringing for much of her resilience: the family was encouraged to think outside the box, to be brave.

- Denise created 'a safe bubble' for herself: she lives outside of Christchurch and work is not discussed much at home. She doesn't invest in time on social media, this is for self-protection, which is necessary in our roles.
- 'The protective bubble' allows Denise to be empathetic, as her own needs are being met and so she can help others and focus on her school.

On optimism

We have so much happening in Christchurch which is positive:

- The future of our city.
- Good buildings.
- Innovative staff.
- Innovative leaders.
- Good initiatives such as Mana Ake which will lead to stronger communities.

Leadership

- Leadership is about creating a home for the mind.
- Transformation is grounded in pedagogy, equity and empathy.
- Find your touchstones – for Denise these are equity, empathy and relationships.
- Make sure new leaders are connected to colleagues, community and the right people at the end of the phone.
- Concentrate on positive education – be grounded in this to build your own resilience.
- Identify your own positive characteristics and strengthen these – know yourself.
- Realise other's strength and support them to grow.
- Give away leadership; my shoulder is behind yours.
- Don't be upfront all the time.
- Lead the jazz orchestra where you draw others in to be in the light.

Neil Wilkinson

Principal Amuri Area School April 2005 – April 2015

“People always come first”

“Creating a culture where people can thrive, give of their best, enjoy what they do”

Context

During the earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 Neil was principal of Amuri Area School in North Canterbury and not affected by the earthquakes. At that time Neil was the President of the Canterbury and West Coast Secondary Principals’ Association. It was in this role that Neil was involved almost as a bridge between the Ministry of Education and schools and eventually in 2012 Amuri was given some release time so that Neil could carry out the demanding role of offering advice and guidance to the MOE and helping schools get back to normality. This role was not intended to be one of looking after principals’ well-being, but for many of us, myself included, this is what Neil did.

In 2015 Neil resigned as a principal and took on the role of Executive Assistant to the Canterbury and West Coast Principals’ Association using the resourcing provided by the Ministry to the CWCSPA. He also carries out principal appraisals and helps Boards of Trustees with principal appointments as a consultant. Additionally, he runs the Canterbury Aspiring Principals’ Course as an initiative of the CWCSPA.

Since 2011 Neil has worked deliberately to change the culture, and particularly with reference to enrolments schemes and the way in which schools work together, working with Coralanne Child, our Director of Education in the Ministry of Education. Neil has helped to affect a culture change from one of competition to a more collaborative model where our agreed CWCSPA vision may well come to fruition. Study trips to Auckland, Melbourne and Brisbane have been extremely valuable in building this culture.

During these eight years Neil has been working in an intentionally unassuming and encouraging way, helping principals to reflect individually and as a group, although this has been a challenge and made even more difficult as schools appointed new principals, many who have not experienced the devastation of the earthquakes, either professionally or personally.

Neil’s thoughts and advice on leadership

- While leadership can be taught aspiring leaders must be able to relate to people.
- Leadership is about creating a culture where people can thrive, give of their best, and enjoy what they do.
- Building a culture of trust based on strong relationships will allow any organisation to progress.
- People always come first so know those you work with and have empathy for the personal side of peoples’ lives.
- Keep people informed even if they don’t like the message.
- Be seen and be honest.

Lessons

- “I should have been more visible across the whole network. I tended to work with a small group of principals. I could have been more systematic and visited every school.”
- “I don’t lead from the front. I’m an encourager and I lead in more subtle ways, trying to build collegiality and collaboration.”
- “I couldn’t change my natural style but at times, I should have consulted more.”
- Neil commented that the strong collaborative relationship built with Coralanne Child, Director of Education, was essential for progress to be made. He attributes her willingness to work in a collaborative way for much of the progress made towards implementing enrolment schemes across the city, and getting agreement with most schools signing a Memorandum of Understanding and agreeing to maximum roles. “The Ministry is no longer the enemy; we are all in it together and there is a genuine and sincere desire to work in partnership.”

As a leader Neil believes it’s important to be seen as fallible, to apologise when you haven’t had the answer and “stuffed it up”. It’s okay to fail, to be vulnerable. This is courageous leadership in my (author’s) opinion.

On optimism

Neil is optimistic about the following:

- “As a wider society we are now starting to have conversations we should have had about things such as poverty, equality and racism. He cites our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, as providing strong leadership
- The high quality of young leaders and the students in our secondary schools.
- The Canterbury secondary schools’ network: “We have been able to work together on school rolls in a supportive and collegial way; perhaps now we can work collaboratively to ensure more equitable outcomes for our Māori and Pasifika learners which is an issue across our region”.

On aspiring leaders

- We need more people who are personable, who can build relationships, are empathetic, can hold others accountable in a respectful manner, who communicate well and are visible.
- Values of respect, honesty and consistency are essential.

Culture or strategy?

“Absolutely its culture – built on positive relationships. Sometimes, principals sweat the small stuff and take themselves too seriously. The future is positive; have some fun. At times I think we are our own worst enemies and NCEA provides an example of this where many fall into the trap of competing rather than looking at what’s best for our learners and teachers”.

“If I were a principal again now I would do it differently. I’ve learnt so much over these past five years.”