

LYNDA REID

COMMUNICATING A VISION Imagine hosting your clients' grandparents for the day. Each of them there for the express purpose of checking your performance against their own internal scorecard. That's just one of the balancing acts Lynda Reid has to perform as principal of St Cuthbert's College.

The private, and prestigious, Auckland girls' boarding and day school catering for Years 1-13 was hosting students' grandparents the day *Management* magazine spoke to Lynda Reid. Maybe that's why she refers to the school's extended stakeholder group as the St Cuthbert's family.

"I always think the role of the head is quite polarised," she explains. "A head has to deal with some very different sets of stakeholders. On one level we're a business, and I have a set of stakeholders who expect this business to be run in the most effective and efficient way possible: But with a very high level of understanding that the parents are committing some very hard-earned discretionary dollars to their daughters' education."

Nothing unusual so far. These are the normal expectations of any business leader. But there's an added dimension peculiar to schools. "At the same time, we have a group of very key stakeholders in parents who also expect this to be a very people-focused business. They have quite a different view of my role. They see me as the person who knows their daughter, knows intimately what's going on in the school." This means being physically present at a huge range of events, and being a very personal figurehead for the school.

To do all of this, Reid says she has inherited and developed "the most fantastic" senior management team. Even so, it would take some special skills to success-

fully link the needs of nearly 1500 students and each of their supporters.

Dr Lester Levy, chief executive of Auckland University's Leadership Institute, recently described Reid as an "authentic leader", as someone who is interested in the long-term health of the enterprise. Reid herself talks of a "strong sense of stewardship" driven by the high level of stakeholder commitment to St Cuthbert's. "I really like," she says, "to work in a collegial way."

Regular 360-degree reviews with the entire staff also tell Reid that she's regarded as both fair and consistent.

Around her she's created a team with breadth in terms of the qualities that they bring. "I really believe in giving people autonomy within their areas of practice. I want to be involved. I want them to use me as a sounding board. I want to come in, work with them through the final decisions but I really want them to have an absolute stake in what they're doing." And the structure is relatively flat because the staff have explicit and substantial areas of responsibility.

"Within that I want every staff member to understand what the purpose and focus of the organisation is. I see that one of my key roles is communicating." And, it would seem, applying business tools in a robust fashion.

Reid has won praise from her school board for having one of the strongest strategic planning models they've seen. The school has an explicit strategic planning

process and a regularly critiqued strategic plan. At the beginning of each year, staff are given a strategic focus document "that articulates our eight core strategies and what we are doing this year. Everybody who is a line manager within the organisation works to an operating plan – all of which feeds back to a master operating plan and then into a strategic plan. It's a good model."

In fact, following recent staff interviews for a Harvard-style case study of St Cuthbert's School by The Leadership Institute, Lester Levy told Reid that at every level of the organisation people can articulate a shared vision around what the purpose of the organisation is, and how they achieve that purpose.

Reid says that she knew "early on" that she wanted to become a principal. That stems from a combination of being enthralled with the subjects she wanted to teach – English, history and drama – and an interest in management. She thanks the head of her Christchurch primary school for telling her mother, "This girl has to go to university", and her mother "probably the person I admire most in the world" for making it all possible. Reid is very aware of the sacrifices her mother had to make on her behalf, and Reid certainly leaves one with her sense of appreciation.

"Because of my family situation I guess I always saw education as the pathway out. I am the product of a single parent, state house background. I'm the first person in my family to have gone to university."



MANAGER OR LEADER?

"I believe I'm a leader. Schools are essentially about creating and supporting aspirations – so you have parents with aspirations for their child, you have the child who needs to understand herself before she can develop that sense of aspiration, and you have staff who are, for the most part, in this job because they have a sense of mission about it... One of the primary roles that you have in education is to create a vision of what being truly educated means. So it's about articulating that vision and then going that next step, to look really closely at the systems and programmes and ask 'is there a match between the two?'"

Reid's professional career began in Dunedin as head of English and dean of Year 13 at Logan Park High School, and then after 10 years a promotion to deputy principal at St Hilda's Collegiate School, a 450-girl day and boarding school.

Teaching didn't have complete control yet, though. "Early in my career I'd always been attracted by the idea of law, and I was tempted at one point. I had a very canny mentor in my first head. He was fantastic at giving me a challenge just at the right moment. So I spent 10 years in my first school because every time I got a little bit bored or restless he gave me a really interesting job that I couldn't wait to get involved in." Teaching won.

In 1996, she moved to Auckland and St Cuthbert's. Along the way Reid married Murray, now deputy principal and head of senior campus at Dilworth School – a boys' boarding school of 500 in Auckland.

Reid added to her BA and teaching diploma by becoming the only independent school head to receive a Leadership in Education Award from the Secondary Principals' Association. She is also president of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of New Zealand, vice president, Independent Schools of New Zealand, an executive board member of



THE CHANGING ROLE OF A SCHOOL

Since 1915, when St Cuthbert's first opened its doors, the school has developed a heritage and culture of its own. As principal Lynda Reid says, the school is there to educate the whole person, and parents want that culture for their daughters. Increasingly, she says, that means pupils do all their music at school. Over 40 percent learn an instrument within the music school, widely regarded by many as the leading music school in New Zealand, and consistent winner of national awards. Most now also play all their sports at school. With 30 sporting codes, 58 netball teams and 24 hockey teams, 92 percent of students from Year five onwards play one or more sports for the college, which currently holds seven national titles.

But on top of these traditional activities, parents expect their daughters "will be able to have breakfast at school, that she will be able to be cared for after school – so we run after-school care programmes. Reflecting parents' busy lives, we run holiday programmes. We offer support for them as parents through the provision of parenting courses. We help them deal with their own family issues – so we provide counselling services and family therapy. All of those things are becoming part of the college's role."

The school is also aware that for some families it is the single biggest point of stability in their child's, or even their, lives. Through bereavement, illness, or major family difficulties, where people once would have gone to the church or to their community groups, or even to their friendship networks, for some families the school now provides.

The New Zealand Institute, and a member of both the Secondary Leaders' Forum and the University of Auckland Consultation Committee.

One could be forgiven for thinking this doesn't leave much time after a 60-hour working week which includes "more often than not" an event to be attended at the school every night of the week, school sports on Saturday, and chapel at the school "most Sundays". But, somehow, Reid is also able to present at conferences both in New Zealand and overseas, and last year hosted old girls' reunions in London, New York and San Francisco, and worked with Mme Sylvie Pierre at the Lycée Louis le Grand on an exchange programme.

She also visited St Paul's Girls School and The Godolphin and Latymer School in London, Oxford and Stanford Universities, The Chapin School in New York, and a range of west coast US schools. Then there was a professional development course at Harvard Business School.

How? "When I first started here my children were young. There was a wonderful need for self-discipline. Back then I tried to get home by six o'clock knowing that I had to work again in the evening. But there was that discipline of knowing that as soon as I walked in the door, that was family time. There might only be an hour of it, but it was family time. That's a discipline I've tried to maintain." Reid adds that it certainly helps being married to someone who understands the pressures and responsibilities.

She also acknowledges she's had some help along the way. At Logan Park and St Hilda's, Reid says she was fortunate to work with people who mentored her – encouraged and gave real opportunities, and where she learned "just how you manage the daily complexities of life".

Now she finds herself mentoring others. The role of mentor, she says, can be done in two ways. "Sometimes you have people who are in a position to actively mentor

you... [and] at appropriate times offer the next step for you. Perhaps see that you're ready for a step before you yourself may be ready for it." Reid's preferred model, however, is "somebody trusted enough to use as a sounding board. Somebody that you could talk an issue through with – not even necessarily to give you advice but just to give you that way of approaching and articulating an issue – just even saying them aloud and helping you through your own thinking processes.

"I would never have had anybody who would help me with the solution but they might have helped me [by] giving me a venue or an environment in which I could talk about it."

And what Reid once received, she now gives back. "So I'll quite often get a call, 'I have this interesting proposition. Can I come and talk to you about it?'"

"They think they're coming to ask for advice when what they really want is somebody who will listen and perhaps ask a question which pushes them in the right way." Reid says it is a "fantastic" situation

to be in – to be able to do something that other people did for her.

But there are problems, too, running a high-profile school in New Zealand today. From Richard Chait, a professor of higher education at Harvard Business School, Reid learned that there's one thing a school board should ask: "What's the thing that keeps the head awake at night?"

One of which must be, of course, the NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) debate. Reid has been quoted widely on this topic, and clearly points out that no decision has yet been made on whether St Cuthbert's will stay with NCEA, move to the International Baccalaureate programme, another programme entirely, or some combination, and they needn't be mutually exclusive.

"It's a source of great despair to me that as a nation of four million people, we cannot agree to work sensibly and rationally through the issues to get a qualification that is right for all New Zealand students," she says, adding that from last year's cohort, students of NCEA have been accepted at "Princeton and UCLA, University of London, and Melbourne – the highest-ranking universities internationally".

The decision to review the school's exam offerings is just another part of its strategic planning process, says Reid. "We're always examining practice... looking very closely at outcomes. We do a lot of data analysis – a lot of highly intentioned examination of what outcomes are and we feed them back into how we improve processes. Out of that comes this belief that qualifications, like everything else, [is one of the] things we have to examine regularly. I guess that we're looking for some natural evolution.

"We also believe really strongly that we're educating

the whole person. Academic achievement is a cornerstone, but we're also looking at music, sport and drama and all those things. The International Baccalaureate has what they call creativity, action and service, where students must be involved in those things to gain their qualification. So that's very attractive to us."

The notion of service is perhaps already in place, with St Cuthbert's College students helping with homework and shortly reading programmes at Orakei Primary, a decile four school in Auckland. More challenging for some, however, is a similar programme run with decile one Manurewa East Primary, where St Cuthbert's pupils run, and fundraise for, the Duffy Books in Homes Programme, as well as helping on sports days, and "buddy" reading with the Manurewa school pupils. In addition, the Manurewa pupils get to share the college's extensive ICT capabilities.

Business interests aren't forgotten. Each year the college enters two teams in the Young Enterprise scheme (winning Company of the Year in 2006 with a nifty device which connects recycling and wheelie bins to avoid two trips to the gate), and runs internal "Junior" Young Enter-

prise programmes for Year 10 pupils, some of which can earn up to \$5000 from their projects. Each team must, as part of these programmes, apply business planning concepts to practical assignments.

The school, in conjunction with Kings School and Kings College, also runs the Endeavour Programme for Māori and Pacifica students. Through this, the school aims to have nine percent of its Years 7-13 roll on some form of scholarship placement by 2008.

For the future, we return to the other thing that keeps this particular head awake at night. Reid is concerned, both as the head of St Cuthbert's College and the Association of Independent Schools, about New Zealand's teacher supply crisis. "Because teaching is struggling to maintain its recruitment numbers."

She wishes that New Zealanders understood how highly regarded the New Zealand education system is internationally, and would have confidence in the professionalism of teachers. "I don't diminish the challenge of bringing up the performance of the tail and that's something that as a country we absolutely have to focus on. And if we stopped denigrating education all of the time maybe more people would consider it as a career.

"One of the most significant things we did a few years ago was to describe, in the most detailed terms we could, what student outcomes after 13 years of education would look like." Then by looking backwards, understanding how the school's programmes could create that capacity and those experiences and those values. "We do a lot of modelling like that. It's creating a vision. It's communicating a vision. But more significantly it's going and seeing whether programmes, policies, approaches actually combine to deliver that. That's a never-ending exercise." **M**



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