

Being Missional **Is** About Being Relational

Rick Kempton

It has been my great privilege to serve in two mission-centric Christian schools over the past 30-plus years. Friends Christian in California and Annapolis Area Christian School in Maryland were both founded in the mid-1970s and enjoyed steady, healthy enrollment growth before the enrollment downturn in the post-2008 years. However, both schools weathered the trial and have seen upswings in their enrollment as a result of the school board leading well and inspiring the faculty and staff to share the board's commitment to mission and vision.

When it comes to effective board leadership, there is much to learn from business leadership models. As Christians, however, we are called to a higher standard. Essential to the ministry of any Christian school is that the board of directors operate as a Christ-centered leadership group. This is a game changer. I've learned that Christ-centered boards have four distinct qualities that enable them to stay mission-centric.

Relational

A Christ-centered board puts relationships first. This includes a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and godly relationships with others. The school board's and school leadership's collective commitment is not to the school's mission statement; rather, it is to the statement we make in the lives of students and the school community *because* of our mission. Whether we have an evangelistic mission or classical school philosophy, our common ground springs from Matthew 22:37–39 (ESV): “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” No matter what specific goals we choose to emphasize through our mission, we must all be about the relational priorities that Jesus speaks to all of us in that passage. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is the driving reason we exist.

Jesus told us what our two highest priorities must be: loving Him and loving others. Our educational niche must never become more important than those two relational priorities. The school board members, as guardians of the school mission, must work together to pursue and protect that relational focus. This serves as a compass as we endeavor to bring our particular educational mission into focus.

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Humble

Finding board members who have valuable knowledge and experience to contribute has never been difficult in my experience. Board members contribute valuable knowledge and skills they've developed over many years. It is far more challenging to develop and maintain a *humble* board.

Board members and school leaders alike step into leadership roles with their own opinions and, sometimes, a personal agenda. Christ-centered boards are able to set this aside and make decisions based on the organization's mission and vision. That requires humility.

Humble leaders think about those they are leading rather than themselves. They know their role is about loving well and serving well. Humble leaders seek input from others. They listen and want to learn. They celebrate the contributions of

others and give God the glory for success. These are traits that must be nurtured on any Christ-centered board.

Discerning

Discernment is another important element for a Christ-centered board. The ability to think with discernment is synonymous with an ability to think biblically. We are all faced with an onslaught of unbiblical thinking and attitudes every day. Spiritual discernment is the ability to tell the difference between truth and error—between biblical thinking and unbiblical thinking—and it is essential to having wisdom.

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Board members can nurture their discernment by studying God's word and recognizing God's grace. Discernment is needed to evaluate what's important and what isn't, what's mission-centric and what's not. What does God want for the school? Discerning leaders go beyond the obvious to listen to the Holy Spirit as they make important decisions: "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9–10, ESV).

Champions of the Mission

Two years ago, the chairman of the nominating committee at AACCS began a meeting by asking me to recite our mission statement. I did so, and, additionally, pointed to the poster on the wall that displayed our mission and core principles.

He proceeded to tell us that, from that moment onward, every serious board candidate must not only understand our school's mission, but be totally committed to it! It was a high bar, but I wholeheartedly agreed. The vetting process must look for champions of our mission.

Following this speech, the chairman gave every committee member a copy of *Mission Drift* by Peter Greer and Chris Horst. Over the course of the next several months, committee members took turns presenting a chapter overview at the beginning of each meeting. In addition, the candidates who were interviewed and selected to advance to an interview with the entire board each received a copy of the book. The infusion of mission focus, along with the excellent content we studied together in *Mission Drift*, has had lasting influence on our school board. I highly recommend this process for both your board and your school leadership team.

Summary

The authors of *Mission Drift* begin with a warning: "Without careful attention, faith-based organizations will inevitably drift from their founding mission." Unless boards are intentional about the mission, unless they focus on it at each and every meeting, this mission drift can happen.

The authors also explain, "Mission True organizations are etched in excellence. Their programs—the work they do—must model the highest of quality." I've been working with or serving on boards for over 30 years and have had the blessing of experiencing boards that are "etched in excellence." This excellence stems directly from their Christ-centeredness, including a focus on relationships, humility, and discernment. Boards that do this well serve as powerful champions for the missions of their organizations.

Rick Kempton has served in Christian school leadership for more than 30 years. After serving for 28 years in the Friends Christian School System as the founder of the middle school and system superintendent, he is currently the superintendent / head of school at Annapolis Area Christian School in Maryland. He has also served as a member of the ACSI board of directors for more than 20 years and currently serves as the board chairman.

Reference

Greer, P., C. Horst and A. Haggard. 2014. *Mission drift: The unspoken crisis facing leaders, charities, and churches*. Bethany House: Grand Rapids, Michigan.



The image shows a poster for "ALIGNED INFLUENCE CONSULTING". The top section has the company name in a large, serif font. Below it, a dark green banner contains the text "ALIGNING THE INFLUENCE OF THE BOARD, THE EXECUTIVE AND THE ORGANIZATION" and "CREATING FLOURISHING SCHOOLS" in white, sans-serif font. The bottom section features the ACSI logo (a stylized cross inside a circle) and the text "ACSI APPROVED PARTNER" and "ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL". Below this are social media icons for LinkedIn, YouTube, and Facebook. At the very bottom, a blue banner displays the website "AlignedInfluenceConsulting.com".