

More On The Deming Management Method

In last month's *Ehint*, we revisited William Edwards Deming's *Management Method*, examining some of the "Fourteen Points and Seven Deadly Diseases" in terms of their relevance to education today. In that *Ehint*, we told how five of his points were still significant; in this *Ehint*, we discuss five more in terms of their importance and application to education.

1. ***Adopt the New Philosophy.*** This point is aimed specifically at "managers," or in the world of education – administrators. Deming tells us that people will "see through" anyone who says one thing, but whose actions make evident something different. Administrators cannot just express their values through words, but must actually demonstrate them in all actions with the rest of the staff and other stakeholders. When these actions represent an attitude of energizing change and full commitment, a domino effect takes place, spreading outward and exciting others to become believers and action-takers. Administrators must serve as true *leaders*, not just supervisors.
2. ***Institute Training on the Job.*** Bringing in an important speaker or other special training on "staff development day" is a good start – but information without practice is meaningless. Professional development, coaching, and mentoring need to be encouraged, acknowledged, rewarded – and ongoing. Professional Development Communities are excellent ways to provide these experiences, but they need to be organized with specific purposes, guidelines, and timelines. Simply assigning people to a committee (or "community") is not enough. Likewise, time must be provided throughout the school year. Progress can't be accomplished in only an hour or two here and there.
3. ***Break Down Barriers Between Staff Areas.*** We all want to protect our own "turf," but for real progress in student learning to occur, the entire district must work as one team. Every subject area is important, and needs to go through the same processes to assure quality curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments. Likewise, school improvement processes need to be district-wide, which means that subject area committees should be PreK-12 – not separate committees by building level. When educators of different departments and different age levels of students work together on common goals, they engage in meaningful dialogue, are frequently enlightened, and consistently end up with better decisions for student results.

4. ***Eliminate Management by Objective.*** This point does not, as some people interpret it, mean we should not have targets. What Deming is talking about here is short-sighted versus thorough, long-range planning. Setting targets in response to a problem without first understanding and addressing the root causes for the problem will only lead to greater setbacks. For example, simply declaring that the district needs to raise test scores is meaningless. Educators must determine why scores are low in the first place, and the specific steps necessary to correct that situation. As these steps are implemented, progress needs to be continually reassessed, which means original completion dates or methodologies may have to be revised. But if the district has created a long-range plan and adopted a procedural model for accomplishing it, then real progress occurs over time.

5. ***Find Solutions, Not Examples to Follow.*** So often we hear, “Why reinvent the wheel? Hasn’t someone already done this and can’t we just use what they’ve done?” Sometimes reinventing the wheel is a useful effort, especially when problem-solving is involved. In many cases educators seek to copy someone else’s solutions when the process of seeking their own can be instructive to individuals, stimulating to organization building, and can result in longer-lasting effectiveness. The reinvented wheel, more often than not, turns out to be more innovative and of better quality than the “original.”