

## **What? So what? Now what?**

Several years ago I was facilitating a session for a community group and as we came to agreement on an issue a member of the roundtable said, “Well that’s the *what* we need to do. Now we need to answer the questions: *So what?* What difference will this make? Then we need to ask, *now what?* What do we do about it?”

This simple formula has stuck with me ever since.

### **What? – Community leadership**

We talk about community leadership in many ways. For some of us it is another program thrust, a technique that needs to be implemented. For others, community leadership is a way of being - a deeply held belief that a school is at the heart of a neighbourhood and the only way to improve the school’s performance is to better the neighbourhood.

Though I would prefer you believe the latter, community leadership, to me, is both about technique and passion.

What is it to you?

### **So What? – Better communities, better families, better children**

Can we start by agreeing that there is a direct correlation between the well being of a community and the well being of families and children?

If this is our common starting point the question for me is what does this mean for community leaders?

If you have a paid or volunteer position at any level in your school or community, you are a leader. How are you choosing to exercise your leadership? You can choose to see this leadership in isolation (just doing my job) or you can choose to see it in the context of building a better neighbourhood. How you think about your position will make a huge difference in what you do.

From your experience, what difference does your position make?

### **Now What? – What are you doing?**

The next step is to do something. But what can you do that will really make a difference?

This is what I would like this hot seat to be about. Let’s talk about leadership, and community leadership, but more importantly let’s tell the stories of what we are doing

that is making a difference - the kind of difference that has effects the well being of our community, families and children **all at the same time**.

**Here are my top five things to do:**

- ❑ Find alternatives to “extra fees” for activities and books. Work with the children and families to raise funds. Pool the funds and celebrate that success. The best fundraisers are those that benefit the community. One school started an Envirothon in which community members sponsored them to clean up and/or beautify the community.
- ❑ Build a community garden and plant loads of flowers – pick a place near the school but not on the school grounds to build a second garden, then a third, etc. This benefits both the school and the community in general.
- ❑ Find ways for community members to bring their history, hobbies and talents into the school. Start after-school clubs with community people - go to them and have them come to you. Imagine what one hundred activities might look like – soccer, music, kites, etc...
- ❑ Build community into the curriculum. See the school as a community and find ways to nurture the community. There are dozens of ways to do this. Call these nurturing activities “community activities” and build them into biology classes (gardening), art classes (murals), home studies (barbeque for the neighbourhood), physical education (a soccer tournament for 4 year olds), etc.
- ❑ Open up the school. Declare that your school is no longer a school. It is a community park and facility. Create an advisory board that builds a vision for this great building and piece of land. Remind them you need to run the school there for 8 hours each day but that still leaves about 16 creative hours a day to work with! Weekends and holidays are wide open! Begin to dream together.

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