

Lessons from the Professions

What School Boards Can Learn About Governing from Medicine, Law, the Military, and Other Professions

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Proposition

To examine school board service through the 'lens' of a profession, and reflect on what lessons if any, we can learn from colleagues in several 'other' professions.



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Agenda



- Characteristics of professions
- Board service...professional practice?
- What we can learn
- Implications for practice

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What is school board service?

- Is there a 'practice' of boardsmanship?
 - Trusteeship?
 - Governance?
- Is our 'craft' an art or science that can
 - Be taught?
 - Be improved with practice?
 - Be improved with continuing education?

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Purpose



To improve our practice

in our part-time 'profession' of governance

by learning from other professions

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Starting Premise

- Ours is a professional practice
- The practice of governance
 - It may be 'pre-professional'
 - It may be 'emerging'
 - Nevertheless
- We can learn from others

First...what is a profession?

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Flexner (1918)

- Specialized body of knowledge
- Practical as well as theoretical
- Can be taught via professional education
- Motivated by altruism to serve
- Individual responsibility
- Organized membership

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Characteristics of a Profession

1. Specialized body of knowledge
 - Practical as well as theoretical
 - Difficult entry – demonstrate expertise – higher education
 - Continuing professional education
2. Service – apply knowledge to benefit society
 - Society's sanction, position of trust
 - Autonomy, individual responsibility
 - Code of ethics
3. Organized membership
 - Expand knowledge/enhance practice
 - Determine entry requirements
 - Self-policing

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Professional Status Challenged

- Society's sanction
 - Laws that reduce autonomy
- Body of knowledge
 - Internet - Knowledge no longer exclusive
- Altruism
 - Physician vs Trial lawyer conflicting interests

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Other Professions

- 'Emerging' or 'Pre' Professional
 - Some characteristics missing
 - Not fully defined
- Evolving over time:
 - Nursing ~ autonomous - settings/functions
 - Education (K12) ~ autonomous
 - Business management - ~ barriers to entry
 - Sports - ~ higher education ~ self-policing

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Table Talk...

What about our practice shows characteristics of a profession?



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1. Specialized Body of Knowledge

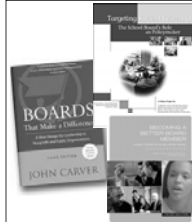
- Practical as well as theoretical
- Difficult entry – demonstrate expertise – higher education
- Continuing professional education

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Practical as well as Theoretical



- Principles/Theory
 - Governance vs Management, Education
 - Board authority and role
 - Board acts as one, 'speaks' through policy
- References
 - Boards That Make a Difference
 - Targeting Student Learning
 - Becoming a Better Board Member



Specialized Body of Knowledge

Difficult Entry?

- Entry determined by law
 - Election - 96%
 - Appointment
 - Expertise not assured by 'licensure'
- Preparation not a prerequisite
 - Training mandated in some states
 - Optional in most - <45% participate
 - Orientation & training of candidates
 - Ad hoc training after entry

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Continuing Professional Education

Specialized Body of Knowledge

- On-the-job training
- Superintendent-coordinated training
- Work-study sessions
- Annual conference
- Periodic offerings by state association

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2. Service to Society



- Society's sanction
- Position of trust
- Autonomy, individual responsibility
- Code of ethics
- Concept of servant-leader

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Society's Sanction

Service to Society

- 'Licensure'
 - Certificate of election
- Local control embedded in our culture
 - Democracy at the lowest level
- Federalism
 - Federal, State, and Local
- Community loyalty
 - Our students, our schools, our board

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Position of Trust

Service to Society

- Citizen control of schools
- Board members as trustees
- Board taxing authority

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Code of Ethics

- Board codes of conduct:
 - Open debate and discussion
 - Vote your conscience
 - Board speaks as one
 - Support majority decisions

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Altruism – Servant Leader

- Servant first
 - Natural feeling of wanting to serve
 - Choice to lead in order to serve
- Opposite
 - Leader first – desire for power or possessions
 - Later, perhaps, a choice to serve
- Test: do those who are served grow?

Robert K. Greenleaf, 1970

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3. Organized Membership



- Expand knowledge – enhance practice
- Determine entry requirements
- Self-policing

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Expand Knowledge - Enhance Practice

- Board member knowledge and preparation is often an issue
- Systematic acquisition of knowledge voluntary, depends on interest, motivation
- Some states mandate membership
- Some states mandate training

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Determine Entry Requirements

- One opportunity – when interviewing candidates for board appointment
 - Criteria?

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Self-policing

- Board self-discipline
 - Governance policies
 - Persuasion - Limited ability to sanction
- Procedures for discipline/removal
 - Recall by voters
 - Declaration of vacancy
 - Removal on conviction
 - Not based on peer review

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Table Talk...

Pick a profession. What lessons can it offer to school boards?



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Professions We Can Learn From

- Medicine
- Law
- Military
- Education
- Management
- Sports



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Medicine

- First, do no harm
 - Find out what hurts; stop doing that
 - Dysfunctional boards
- Physician, heal thyself
 - First govern ourselves, then our districts
- Triage/Prioritize
 - Can't do everything – do the most critical things
 - If everyone gets a little penicillin, no one gets cured



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Non-Lesson – Medicine

- Lengthy preparation period



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Law

- Constitutional basis
 - Fundamental principles
 - Written law/policy
- Separation of powers
 - Limited government
 - Judicial restraint
- Get it in writing
 - Contracts
 - Policies
- Due Process
 - Hearing before decision-making



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Non-Lessons – Law

- Bar Exam for entry
- Excess
 - Legislative – All problems need a law/policy
 - Judicial – Policy making from the 'bench'
- Adversarial process
 - Winning & losing?
 - or Truth



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Military

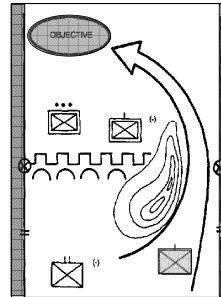


- Unity of command
 - Command responsibility/accountability
- Delegation of authority
 - Give authority when assigning responsibility
- Mission-type orders



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Mission-Type Orders



- Mission clarity
 - Commander's intent
 - "Take the hill"
- Boundaries
 - Freedom of action
 - 'How' to 'take the hill' is left to the commander

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Non-Lessons – Military

- Autocratic leadership
 - Basis: Unilateral decision-making
- Blind obedience
 - Basis: Coercive discipline
- 'Mickey Mouse'
 - Trivial rule-making



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Education



- Time-tested principles
 - Instructional time, opportunity to learn
 - Guaranteed and viable curriculum
 - Effective instruction
- Key ingredient – long-range time frame
 - Boards can offer stability
 - Not annual goals



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Non-Lesson – Education

- Education expertise supreme
 - Boards want to be super-educators



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Management



- Results orientation – bottom line
 - Start with the end in mind
- Feed success, starve failure
 - Don't keep doing what you've always been doing...when it hasn't achieved results
- Case study method



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Non-Lessons – Management

- Management expertise supreme
 - Boards want to be super-managers
- Be Careful not to over-apply the business model in schools
 - Cuban



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Sports



- The Team
 - Each position has a separate purpose
 - Only excel when all players work together
- Owner-coach relationship
 - Owners have a role – stick to it
 - Coach runs the team on the field



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Non-Lesson – Sports

- Performance 'shortcuts'



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Table Talk...

What are the implications?
Next steps for your board?



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Implications – Keep



- Boardmanship principles
 - Board exists only when it meets
 - Board acts only when it takes a vote
 - Board speaks through policy (only?)

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Implications – Do Less Of



- Detailed operational 'control'
 - Tinkering with details...Telling staff 'how'
 - 'Micro' Policy at the operating level (staff regulations)
- Surrendering control/oversight to Superintendent
 - Serving as a sounding board / 'advisor'
- Unprofessional conduct – violating:
 - Unity of command - Board integrity

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Implications – Do More Of



- Study our specialized body of knowledge
- Results orientation
 - Distinguish ends from means
 - Focus on student issues vs. adult issues
- Formalize board code of conduct
- Learning from others
 - Our own 'community of practice'

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Consider Next Steps

- Should governance be more professional?
 - If so, what do we want 'professional' board behavior to look like?
- How might we contribute [to a profession]?
 - Expand the body of knowledge
 - Protect society from 'malpractice'

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Recommendations

- Board member professional education
 - Continuous learning via continuing education
 - Create communities of practice
- Let staff be professionals in their field(s)
 - Managerial – the profession of management
 - Instructional – the profession of education
- We have our own 'craft' of governance
 - We can choose to professionalize it

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Summary

- Characteristics of professions
- Board service...professional practice?
- What we can learn
- Implications for our practice

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Conclusion

- Governance is professional in nature
- We can learn lessons from the professions
- Our choice:
 - Become servant-leaders
 - Study, contribute to & promote our craft
 - Society's function – shaping its own future

"I touch the future. I teach."
Christa McAuliffe

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- *Targeting Student Learning*
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- For more on servant-leadership:
www.greenleaf.org

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