How To Change School Culture?

Schools can change, this is only possible when we look beyond the hardware or the infrastructure. The quality of education does not depend on plain simple academic scores and has a lot to do with the culture of the institutions. Lick, Clauset and Murphy have addressed the challenges in The Change Creation System, and show there is the need for the empowerment of professional educators who want to meet the learning needs of their students and inform their own practice. Their view is that we need to work with Collegiality, experimentation and reaching out to the knowledge base. Schools can change, only when we work with a clear mission and ensure due regard for:-

1. Collegiality
2. Experimentation
3. High expectations
4. Trust and confidence
5. Tangible support
6. Reaching out to the knowledge base
7. Appreciation
8. Caring, celebration and humour
9. Involvement in decision making
10. Protection of what is important
11. Traditions
12. Honest, open communications

"This is such a good creed for all of us at the school and beyond to live by. I will support the entire school community to help achieve these goals. Thank you for creating this."
~ William N Bissell (MD Fabindia and Co Founder The Fabindia Schools)

Best we understand the role of all the elements that help schools change:
1. Collegiality
Collegiality is the relationship between colleagues. Colleagues are those explicitly united in a common purpose and respecting each other's abilities to work toward that purpose. A colleague is an associate in a profession or in a civil or ecclesiastical office. Thus, the word collegiality can connote respect for another's commitment to the common purpose and ability to work toward it. In a narrower sense, members of the faculty of a university or college are each other's colleagues; very often the word is taken to mean that. (Wikipedia)

2. Experimentation
Learning itself is an experiment, and way beyond simple trial and error. Education must develop with experimentation, what we also call experiential learning. Experimentation - the testing of an idea; "it was an experiment in living"; "not all experimentation is done in laboratories". Experiment, inquiry, research, enquiry - a search for knowledge; "their pottery deserves more research than it has received". Experimentation - the act of conducting a controlled test or investigation is indeed to only way we can bring about a culture for learning.

3. High expectations
There must be the inherent spirit to go beyond, rise and shine and compete not only against others but compete with ones own expectations. The higher the bar, the more the possibility you will make the effort to vault over it. If you set you goals at an achievable level you will not go beyond mediocrity. An athlete in motion, a marathon runner and even a toddler all have to make an effort and live up to the high expectations, and this is a very important element to bring about a change in the culture.

4. Trust and confidence

"The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them." - Ernest Hemingway
Schools can only change when they start trusting the students, teachers, parents and the full community. Confidence will only grow with trust, we must trust and be trusted. There is the need for the 'benefit of doubt' to help people with a free mind and a spirit to soar.

5. Tangible support

Counselling and training will not help alone, there is the need to provide tangible support. Tangible support is the easiest type of support to recognise, as it involves the provision of goods or services to a focal individual. Examples of tangible support include financial help, providing housing and other demonstrated welfare actions. In a health context, tangible support acts directly on something that is causing stress for the individual who is ill, while informational and emotional support can be offered for a larger range of health-related stressors (Wills, 1985). This means that tangible support acts directly on stress; because of this, it is generally only applicable in a buffering context. (Source K8Lin.Com) However, tangible support is not highly correlated with emotional or informational support, while the two are highly correlated with each other, suggesting that it is more easily separated from the other two common types of support (Schaefer et al., 1981).

6. Reaching out to the knowledge base

Brewing knowledge is what the schools do, and they must reach out for the best knowledge support and training. Often there is the need to rely on professional support and even specialised resources that do not exist in the community of the existing schools. For schools to learn, all effort is needed to widen the knowledge base, reach out and expand the horizon. 'The initial use of the term knowledge base was in connection with expert systems which were the first knowledge-based systems. A knowledge-based system consists of a knowledge-base that represents facts about the world and an inference engine that can reason about those facts and use rules and other forms of logic to deduce new facts or highlight inconsistencies.'[Wikipedia]

7. Appreciation

"Develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation." Brian Tracy

"Feeling appreciated is one of the most important needs that people have. When you share with someone your appreciation and gratitude, they will not forget you. Appreciation will return to you many times." Steve Brunkhorst

Appreciation is all about understanding. When you show your appreciation to someone, you are thanking them, but you're also telling them that you understand what they have done. If you know a lot about wine, you could be said to have an appreciation of it. If you take music appreciation in college, you will understand music better. Appreciation also can mean a rise in value—you might refer to the appreciation of the value of a house. We must appreciate every bit of the effort put in and then only there will be the culture of change in the organisation.

8. Caring, celebration and humour

A birthday is one day, when we show we care for an individual and celebrate his being with us, and this is always done in good humour and cheer. The ethos of caring and celebrating every moment is very important to bring about the change. We must value every moment and ensure an environment full of care and concern. Team building is only possible with caring and understanding. A good captain has to care for his team and this is the first lesson of leadership. They always say that we must keep everyone in good humour, as this is the only antidote to stress and the challenge of change.
"Cherish Yesterday, Dream tomorrow, Live today." -Zig Ziglar

9. Involvement in decision making

We must be transparent and involve all in our decision making process, for a culture of change to thrive and to gain everyone's confidence decision making must be open and democratic as far as possible.

Decision-making can be regarded as the cognitive process resulting in the selection of a belief and/ or a course of action among several alternative possibilities. (Wikipedia) Consensus decision-making tries to avoid "winners" and "losers". Consensus requires that a majority approve a given course of action, but that the minority agree to go along with the course of action. In other words, if the minority opposes the course of action, consensus requires that the course of action be modified to remove objectionable features. For any change to happen there is first the need for agreement!

10. Protection of what is important

Core values must not be compromised, we must stay to the vision and the mission of the school or the organisation. The process of keeping safe is the literal meaning of protection, and when we know that our values will not be compromised, we gain confidence in the team and provide a comfort level to help be the change. 'It's simple, effective, and more important than it might seem', this is the crux for every action and thus very crucial never to deviate from the goal. Learning may not be a straight line, but the approach to learning must not be threatening and bring about upheaval in the environment for learning.

11. Traditions

We value traditions, and long established practices add to learning. A tradition is a belief or behaviour passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. When we respect traditions, we value what has come down to us over a period of time, and this brings about a comfort level and the teams respect the agent or the people who are working to bring about the culture of change.

12. Honest, open communications

There has to be a purpose, and that too the most honest one. Being transparent is the best way to convey purpose, to share and offer all assurance to win hearts. 'Honesty is the best policy' to deliver change often people with doubt the honest intent, and this challenge must be overcome with communication, communication and communication.

We start with first connecting, then move to communicating, this makes way for collaboration and then alone with there be creation.

Connect > Communicate > Collaborate > Create

For bringing about a culture of change, we need to build the connection and then only will create the necessary impact. It is an irony, the four C words are in alphabetic order!

This article is an effort by Sandeep Dutt (sd@ebd.in) to explain the necessary elements of building the environment for change, and this is only possible with Collegiality, experimentation and reaching out to the knowledge base.