

WORDS FROM BIGTOP

JULY 15TH, 2026

What's My Role?

By Curt "BigTop" Marek

The Tent and the Table

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' ... those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor."

1 Corinthians 12:21–23

Stay in Your Lane

One of the biggest questions we spend our whole lives answering is “What’s my role?” And in most workplaces, the answer gets handed to you as a warning: stay in your lane.

I felt that working in school districts more than anywhere else. Everybody’s job is fenced off from everybody else’s. Math teaches math. English teaches English. Science teaches science. The football coach coaches football, and the basketball coach coaches basketball. Collaboration outside your lane isn’t encouraged — it’s practically against the rules. Everyone gets a title, a department, a lane, and a clear line about what isn’t theirs to touch.

Paul saw the same tendency in the church at Corinth, and answered it the same way: “*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.*” (1 Corinthians 12:12). A lane isn’t a wall. It’s just one part of a body that only works because every part is attached to the same thing.

How I Got My Name

I was a Director of Operations. I built schools — blueprints, construction crews, all the way through opening day and student enrollment. But opening day is just the beginning. That’s the easy part to picture. The real work is everything after: the day-to-day, once the ribbon’s been cut and the buses start running, that keeps the whole thing standing. My nickname, BigTop, came from that part of the job. I erected the tent. I made sure every ring was up and operational so the teachers could get out there and show off the ponies and tame the lions. I ran the circus called schools.

There was no glamor in it. No accolades. No prestige. Just showing up every day, listening, and finding a way to make somebody else’s dream happen.

What Actually Shuts a School Down

Here’s a question worth sitting with: what closes a school for the day, besides bad weather?

- No water. No water means no food service, no working toilets, no sanitation.
- No electricity. No power means no food, no A/C, no heat, no lights, no air circulation.

- No internet. This one might surprise you — schools can actually run without internet and Wi-Fi. Most teachers have just forgotten how to teach without it.

Bad weather is the reason you hear about most, and that's precisely because #1 and #2 rarely make the news. That's the operations department — showing up in the worst of circumstances and never signing off, keeping the circus running. You want to close a school fast? Have the operations team walk off the job: custodians, kitchen workers, maintenance, bus drivers, IT. They assemble the school long before teachers, principals, counselors, superintendents, administrators, and students ever walk through the door — and they're still there long after everyone else has gone home.

The Case for the Ring Leaders

Teachers, principals, counselors — the people standing where everyone can see them. They're shaping minds directly, building the relationships a kid remembers twenty years later.

Pros: Direct impact. Visible relationships. The credit — and it's deserved — for the moments that change a kid's life.

Cons: None of it happens without the tent already standing. Visibility isn't the same as importance, even when it feels that way from the outside.

The Case for the Big Top Crew

Custodians, bus drivers, kitchen staff, maintenance, IT — the people nobody applauds because most people never see them working at all.

Pros: They make the show possible in the first place. When they fail — no water, no power, no bus — everything stops, instantly, no matter how good the teaching is.

Cons: No glamor. No accolades. Easy to overlook until the day something breaks.

What running schools taught me is that we love to build a hierarchy out of roles that were never meant to be ranked. Every ring needs somebody in it. Every job is a rope holding up the same tent.

The Parent Is the Client

Here's a question that trips people up: who's the client in a school? Most people say the student. Some departments will tell you it's the teacher. But the truth is simpler than that — the parent is the client. They're the one entrusting their most precious possession to a school district, trusting that district to help raise that child up with a set of educational and moral standards.

The parent is the client. The student is the product — the piece we are all diligently crafting into the future of our world. And everyone else? Everyone else is a life changer.

The bus driver might be the only smile that kid sees all day. The kitchen worker hands over nourishment and energy in every tray they make. The custodian, at the end of the night, is quietly getting the building ready for tomorrow, never knowing which of those kids he's actually impacting. They all have a role. They all have a purpose. And somewhere along the way, we started monetizing that purpose into a hierarchy that disrespects almost everyone standing inside it.

Scripture never lets us forget whose child that actually is. *“Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.”* (Psalm 127:3). The parent isn't handing the school a project. They're handing over a heritage — and everyone who touches that child's day, in any role, is stewarding something that belongs to God first.

Aaron and Hur: The Same Lesson, Older Battlefield

This story goes back further than a movie or a mega church stage. In Exodus 17, Israel is at war with the Amalekites. Joshua leads the fight down in the valley — the visible role, the one everybody's watching. But the battle actually turns on what's happening up on the hill: as long as Moses holds up the staff of God, Israel prevails. The moment his arms drop, Israel starts losing.

Moses got tired. His arms couldn't stay up on their own.

“When Moses' hands grew tired, they put a stone for him to sit on. Aaron and Hur held his hands up — one on one side, one on the other — so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.”

Exodus 17:12–13

Scripture is careful to give credit at every level: the one swinging the sword, the one holding the staff, and the two men whose names most people couldn't tell you today, holding up somebody else's arms.

- **The battle is decided on the hill, not just in the valley.** Joshua gets the credit for the swordwork; the outcome actually depended on the staff staying up.
- **Nobody remembers Aaron and Hur's résumé, only their willingness.** Scripture names them for one thing: they showed up and held on when Moses couldn't hold on by himself.
- **Tired arms aren't a disqualification. They're an invitation for somebody else's role.** The custodian, the bus driver, the kitchen worker — they're holding somebody's arms up so the visible work can keep going.

That truth isn't new, and it isn't limited to schools or battlefields. My grandfather's generation was living the same lesson on a farm, long before anybody called it an org chart.

Three Brothers, One Farm

There was a farmer with three sons, and each son had a wife and four kids of his own — boys and girls, all different ages. It was less a farm than a small plantation, and everybody on it worked.

The father handed the operation down in three pieces. The oldest brother managed the livestock. The middle brother managed the fields and the crops. The youngest ran the barns, gathered everything the farm produced, and hauled it to market. Nobody ran the whole show. Each of them ran his piece.

Every Hand on the Farm

The grandkids worked too, each according to what they could carry. Some watered the livestock and collected the milk. Others picked crops and gathered the grain that became the food the family ate and the food they sold at market. Some cleaned out the stalls and shoveled the manure the fields needed as fertilizer. Some gathered eggs from the hens. Every job on that farm — glamorous or not — fed the next season.

Grandpa and Grandma ran the house. They managed the bills, kept the kitchen going, and rang the dinner bell at the same time every night, without fail.

The Dinner Bell

When that bell rang, everybody came running and sat down at a table spread out like a banquet.

Now — did the oldest brother get the biggest cut of steak because he ran the cattle? Did the middle brother get the best of the crop because he grew it? Did the youngest get some special reward because he negotiated a better deal at market than anyone expected? Did the kids who shoveled manure get less than the kids who gathered eggs?

No. Grandpa gave God the credit, said grace, thanked Him for the bounty and the health of the family, and said amen. Then everyone ate. Unselfish. Humble. Everybody got enough to make it through the next day. One day at a time. Different roles, same purpose, same reward.

The Case for Paying by the Job

Reward people in exact proportion to what their piece of the work was worth on paper.

Pros: Rewards effort and skill directly. Motivates people to specialize and get better at their piece. Feels fair, in a transactional sense.

Cons: Turns the table into a scoreboard. Somebody always feels shorted. It forgets that shoveling manure is the reason next year's crop grows at all.

The Case for the Family Table

Everyone eats because everyone belongs to the same harvest, whether they ran the cattle or carried the water bucket.

Pros: Nobody goes to bed hungry because their job looked smaller. The reward matches the shared purpose, not the shift. Gratitude, not comparison, sets the tone.

Cons: It only works if somebody at the head of the table — a Grandpa — is willing to say grace before anyone reaches for the biggest piece. Without that, it slides into resentment or free-riding.

What that farm was really teaching those kids wasn't that every job is the same. It's that the reward was never actually about the job. It was about the table.

The Vineyard Workers: The Same Lesson, Older Field

Jesus told this exact parable long before that farm existed. A landowner goes out at dawn and hires workers for his vineyard at an agreed wage. He goes back at nine, at noon, at three, and again at five, hiring more workers each time. At the end of the day, he pays every one of them the same — the five o'clock workers get a full day's wage, right alongside the ones who sweated through the heat since sunrise.

"The workers who were hired first came and expected to receive more. But each of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 'These who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you... Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'"

Matthew 20:9–15

- **Don't confuse the wage with the worth.** The five o'clock workers weren't worth less. The day was just further along before somebody found them.
- **Set the terms before the work starts.** The landowner agreed to a wage up front, not after comparing baskets at quitting time. Grandpa said grace before anyone picked up a fork.

- **The harvest needs every hour, not just the first ones.** A vineyard needs workers from dawn to dusk. A farm needs the shepherd and the manure-shoveler, both. A school needs the principal and the custodian, both.

Bringing It Home

Whether it's a tent full of rings or a table full of food, the lesson is the same. Your seat isn't earned by which job looked hardest, which title sounded biggest, or which piece of work paid best at market. Whether you're running the cattle, shoveling the stalls, doing the math nobody sees, or keeping the water running so the lights stay on — when the bell rings, you get to eat. Worth remembering at whatever table you sit down to, or whatever tent you're holding up: home, work, or church.

The tent doesn't need a star. The table doesn't need a scoreboard. Everybody holds a rope, and everybody gets to eat.

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."

1 Corinthians 12:4–6