



Home



My Network



Jobs



Messaging



Notifications



Me



For Business



Learn



## Profit or Principles; Can you have both?

**Maria MacMinn Varvos**

Leader in Adult Education | Post-Secondary Innovation | E-Learning...



October 22, 2024

By Maria MacMinn-Varvos | MMV Educational Consulting in Calgary, Alberta

Throughout my career in both the private and public education sectors, I've seen firsthand the complexities of balancing profits and principles. I would like to share some insights and offer the lessons I have learned over a 30-year career in post secondary education. I hope some of these lessons learned will resonate with others in educational leadership who are facing similar challenges.

I have had a taste of what it is like to work in cut-throat business environments, non-profit bare bones community organizations as well as government run organizations. I learned best practices and worst practices. When I became the owner of a private school, I had to "put my money where my mouth was" and test out the management style that I believed would result in profit without compromising my principles. My professional journey through good and bad experiences guided me to

find the alchemy that would align my management style with my values.

I sought solutions to my values vs. profit dilemma through business management books, workshops, and leadership courses. Two philosophies resonated with me: Lance Secretan's *Reclaiming Higher Ground* and Jim Collins' *Good to Great*. Both offered case studies proving that values-based leadership can drive success without compromising profitability.

Secretan's "**Higher Ground Leadership**" promotes a values-centered management style where loyal, productive, and creative employees lead to profits. His model emphasizes:

- **Mastery:** Striving for excellence.
- **Chemistry:** Building strong relationships.
- **Delivery:** Meeting others' needs with respect and passion.

He also identifies three key practices for embedding this model: **Learning**, **Empathizing**, and **Listening**.

Collins' *Good to Great* focuses on the qualities of "Level 5 Leaders," whose humility, resilience, and accountability transition companies from good to great. He highlights five key traits:

1. Setting successors up for success.
2. Being humble and modest.
3. Demonstrating unwavering resolve.
4. Showing diligent, persistent work ethic.
5. Giving credit to others and taking responsibility for failures.

These principles have helped to shape my approach to leadership, blending profit with principles.

The following is a walk through the management philosophy and strategies that I have tried to implement and practice over my 30-year career:

### 1. Trust First

Trust is a powerful motivator. By giving employees the guidance, training, and support they need—and trusting them to deliver—you foster an environment where people are motivated to meet expectations. Employees often rise to the level of trust you place in them.

## **2. Every Role Matters**

Recognize that every position within your organization has value. The closer someone is to the front line, the more impact they have on the organization's success. Ensuring that everyone feels their contribution is vital fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility.

## **3. Empower Employees, Don't Overshadow Them**

The role of a leader is to empower employees, not to seek recognition from them. Equip them with the tools and support needed to excel in their roles. When your employees look good, the entire organization benefits.

## **4. Invest in Professional Growth**

Continuous learning is crucial. Encourage both personal and professional growth through mentorship, training, and development opportunities. Supporting staff development not only strengthens their skills but also increases their commitment to the organization.

## **5. Play to Strengths**

Place people in roles that maximize their strengths. When employees are in positions where they can excel, they'll take ownership of their work and feel valued. This boosts both morale and productivity.

## **6. Offer Leadership Opportunities**

Providing employees with leadership roles, no matter how small, builds their confidence and fosters pride in their work. As they grow in their capabilities, they become more engaged and motivated to contribute to the organization's success.

## **7. Set High Standards and Provide Support**

Setting high expectations is important, but equally essential is providing the support employees need to meet those standards. Offering opportunities to develop necessary skills ensures that quality work is achievable.

## **8. Flexibility and Appreciation Go a Long Way**

Flexibility can often be extended without compromising organizational goals. A simple thank you or a gesture of appreciation doesn't cost anything but can significantly boost morale and loyalty.

## **9. Be Transparent**

Transparency fosters trust. Keep employees informed but do so in a way that makes them feel secure and valued. Share successes with them, and they'll feel part of the organization's achievements.

#### **10. Leave Personal Issues at the Door**

As a leader, your attitude sets the tone for the entire workplace. Always strive to bring a positive energy to your interactions with staff, no matter the challenges you face personally.

#### **11. Be Accessible**

Make yourself available to staff and clients. An open-door policy – literally leave your door open – where employees feel comfortable approaching you. This strengthens relationships and keeps communication channels open.

#### **12. Encourage Collaborative Problem-Solving**

When employees are involved in finding solutions to the challenges that affect them, they are more invested in the outcomes. Collaboration leads to stronger commitment and better results.

#### **13. Small Celebrations Make a Big Impact**

Frequent, smaller celebrations are often more impactful than occasional large ones. Recognizing achievements regularly reinforces positive contributions and keeps morale high.

#### **14. Prioritize Relationship-Building**

Whether you're leading a business or an educational institution, relationship marketing—focusing on building strong, long-term connections—pays off. While slower than current digital marketing strategies, it creates a solid foundation of trust and loyalty, particularly when your product involves life-changing decisions like education or training.

#### **15. Hire for Impact, Not Just Budget**

If you can't afford to pay employees a fair wage, reconsider hiring. Rather than spreading your resources thin with multiple part-time positions, invest in fewer full-time roles. Employees who feel financially secure are more focused, productive, and committed.

#### **16. Engage with the Community**

Connecting your organization to the community through fundraising and volunteer activities is a win-win. It strengthens your public image and fosters goodwill while giving back.

### 17. Collaboration Over Competition

Collaborating with other organizations can create mutual benefits that extend far beyond the boundaries of competition. Goodwill and shared projects open doors to new opportunities. Creating partnerships with organizations that support the non-academic needs of a diverse workforce can build a community of support that helps students transition to employment.

These lessons have been learned through experience, observation, and reflection. They're rooted in the principles that both Lance Secretan's *Higher Ground Leadership* and Jim Collins' *Good to Great* advocate: successful leaders balance values with results. In the end, sustainable profit cannot be separated from ethical leadership. A thriving organization is built not just on monetary success but on the success of the people who contribute to it.

The real measure of success lies not only in profit margins but in the positive, lasting impact you create for employees, clients, and the broader community. Profit and principles are not mutually exclusive—you can, and should, have both.