



The Centre  
for Skills  
Development

# Talent Magnets

Attracting and retaining  
young teachers through  
courageous leadership  
and inspiring cultures



**Simon Breakspear**   **Peter Sheahan**   **Dominic Thurbon**

## Abstract

Outstanding schools need outstanding teachers. Yet, in this country, the best and brightest high school and university students show little interest in pursuing a career in education. Further, every year a significant number of quality teachers leave the sector, either to retire or to take up opportunities in other industries. Most alarmingly, many do so when they are just 3-5 years into their career. In the coming decade, the quality of Australia's education system will decline unless there is a significant improvement in the attraction and retention of talented teachers.

The highly competitive labour market conditions and the so-called 'war for talent' heighten the need for educational leaders to employ new thinking and strategies to actively recruit and retain quality teachers. This process will involve understanding the shift in employee expectations, adopting a more modern leadership mindset, building inspiring workplace cultures, and over time creating a compelling employment brand for teaching.

It is time to launch a national movement to make teaching a career of choice. This movement will be initiated and implemented by visionary and committed educational leaders, and it will require a fundamental shift in focus from system-wide change, to school-based change. This paper focuses on the first part of such a movement: building a culture that attracts and retains the best young talent. We present ten clear strategies that will help education leaders begin the process of building inspiring workplace cultures.

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## Forward: “Now is the time”

### *Dearest readers*

I write this new forward to our teacher attraction and retention white paper at the height of the ‘global financial crisis’. While just this morning Ben Bernanke predicted that America was within twelve months of beginning the long and hard process of economic recovery, this same day our own Prime Minister released a forecast of no less than six years of budget deficits.

Unemployment is tipped to hit 8.5% in the near future (leaving nearly one million Australians without work) and across the developed world we’ve shed more jobs, more rapidly, during this recession than at any other time since the Second World War.\*

But not in the education sector.

In fact, in education it remains the reverse. We are still looking down the barrel of a teacher shortage crisis that will seriously undermine our capacity to educate the next generation of leaders.

Not for sixty years have we been presented with such an opportunity to get the best and brightest minds into education. For the first time in Gen Y’s professional experience, job security is a valuable offering. It won’t be enough to keep them when the market bounces back, but it’s enough to get them in the door right now.

Them and everyone else!

Talented bankers, IT workers, public servants, accountants, managers and HR professionals everywhere are looking for work. We know that 1/3 of qualified teachers in this country don’t work in education; it’s a fair guess that some of those people are now looking for employment once again.

So, although the crisis we’re living through is going to cause great pain and anguish for many, the education sector needs to see this also as an opportunity. Now is the time! It’s time to elevate the issue of building attractive education brands and cultures to the top of the priority list and focus on seizing this opportunity to attract talented people into the education sector.

I sincerely hope that some of the ideas we present in this paper will assist education leaders in building these environments.

**Dominic Thurbon**

May 2009

\*According to recently released figures by the United States Department of Labour

“Be the change  
you want to see  
in the world”  
Ghandi

In other words:  
stop lobbying  
and start changing.

## Introduction

Education reform is a critical enterprise of any modern nation. As we move into the ‘knowledge age’ and an increasingly competitive global economy, the quality of our schooling must continue to improve to give our students the best chance to succeed, and to secure our growth and prosperity into the 21st century.

A growing consensus is emerging that the key mechanism for improving the quality of education is raising teacher quality. The international consultancy, McKinsey and Co., recently released a report examining the core elements of top school systems worldwide.<sup>1</sup> They reported that two of the three factors that set the best systems apart were related to teacher quality. The first was attraction of quality teachers, and the second was improving teacher instruction through professional development.

Closer to home, the Australian Council for Educational Research released a report on behalf of the Business Council of Australia on how to improve learning outcomes of all students.<sup>2</sup> The report outlined five key reforms, all directly linked to teacher attraction, development and remuneration.

Consequently, the focus has shifted from broad discussion about how Australia’s education system could be improved, to the more specific question of what can be done to attract, retain and develop quality teachers.

Yet, while there has been plenty of system-centric ‘examination from 30,000 feet’ of attraction and retention strategies, there has been little discussion of what individual leaders, already running schools, can do to help attract and retain young talent. It is the purpose of this paper to shift the focus of leaders in education away from the “system” and mass-scale initiatives, and toward what happens at an individual school level.

**In other words: stop lobbying and start changing.**

To that end, in this paper we will:

- ▶ Outline the desired qualities of the next generation of talented educators and introduce the idea of the ‘edupreneur’
- ▶ Detail the demands of this type of teacher, drawing on our work in this area with organisations around the world
- ▶ Propose a new mindset for education leaders that focuses on taking ownership of the attraction and retention issue
- ▶ Present strategies for leaders at a school level that will help build workplace cultures attractive to ‘edupreneurs’
- ▶ Show how these changes create a trajectory towards a powerful education employer brand in the future

While we would never suggest that this paper contains all the answers, our aim is to shift the discussion away from policy-level initiatives that have been bogged down in debate for many years, and onto areas where strong, courageous education leaders can start making a difference today.

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1 McKinsey & Company (2007): “How the worlds best-performing school systems come out on top”, Accessible at [http://www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/socialsector/resources/pdf/Worlds\\_School\\_Systems\\_Final.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com/clientservice/socialsector/resources/pdf/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf)

2 Business Council of Australia (2007): “Teaching talent: The best teachers for Australia’s classrooms” A paper prepared by the Australia Council for Educational Research.

Australia alone will be short 40,000 teachers by 2010.

But of greatest concern, the quality of talent choosing teaching is in steep decline.

Attrition is almost 25% for those in their first five years of teaching.

In 2004, around 3000 Australian teachers were headhunted by British schools alone.

Over 1/3 of our teaching workforce (almost ½ in some states) is due for retirement within the next ten years.

## The Problem: The Teacher Shortage Crisis

For much of the 20th century, developed countries maintained a secure flow of quality employees into teaching. Attracted by high job security, large volumes of teaching scholarships, a powerful social identity for the profession and at times limited corporate opportunities, classrooms were quite easily filled with talented teachers.

This is no longer the reality. Australia – and much of the developed world – is on the verge of a teacher crisis. On current trends, UNESCO predicts a developed-world shortage of 5 million teachers by 2016, with the Australian Education Union suggesting that **Australia alone will be short 40,000 teachers by 2010**<sup>3</sup>, up from 2003 estimates of a 20-30,000 shortfall.<sup>4</sup>

Despite all the debate, the problem is getting worse, not better.

There are three key forces driving the teacher supply crisis: (1) low attraction of new teachers; (2) poor retention of existing (particularly young) teachers; (3) the impending retirement of a huge proportion of the teaching population.

### Low Attraction

Teaching is not a profession of choice for talented students, with education degrees languishing in the bottom third of national university preferences.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training reports that the proportion of higher education students studying education declined from 21.3% to 10.6% between 1983 and 2000.

Further, secondary students do not cite teaching as a career of choice. In a 2003 study, less than 23% of secondary students said they would even consider teaching as a possible career.<sup>6</sup>

**But of greatest concern, the quality of talent choosing teaching is in steep decline**, with a 2008 study showing that the average academic level of those studying and entering teaching has dropped from the 70th to the 59th percentile of academic achievement since 1983.<sup>7</sup>

### Poor Retention

The second concern is the significant number of quality teachers who leave the profession every year. The 'revolving door' of education – high rates of burnout and attrition – is a worldwide problem, but particularly concerning in Australia. Recent statistics suggest that around one third of trained teachers in Australia no longer work in the profession, and **attrition is almost 25% for those in their first five years of teaching**.<sup>8</sup> Up to 50% of surveyed teachers said they did not plan to be in the profession in 10 years time.

It is not only losing teachers to other sectors that is a problem, but also to other countries. Australia has a growing concern with other nations targeting our highly skilled teachers. Although no definitive report exists on the total number of Australian teachers working overseas, a brief survey of international press shows many countries name Australia as their primary source of foreign teachers. **In 2004, around 3000 Australian teachers were headhunted by British schools alone**.<sup>9</sup>

### Mass Retirement

Poor attraction and high attrition of talent is problematic in any industry. Yet for education a compounding ticking bomb is the mass retirement horizon, which raises the stakes even further. The average age of a teacher in Australia is 49<sup>10</sup> (more than ten years above the national workforce average) and **over 1/3 of our teaching workforce (almost ½ in some states) is due for retirement within the next ten years**.<sup>11</sup> Without real effort to keep these teachers in the system, we stand to lose a great many of them, and with them their institutional knowledge and pedagogical skills.

3 "World shortage of 18m teachers by 2016", The Age, 16 January 2007

4 "Union fears teacher shortage growing bigger" ABC Online, 17 March 2007

5 "Teaching strategy to lift statuses", The Australian, 14 April 2008

6 Stokes, H. & Tyler, D. (2003): "Secondary Students Attitudes to Teaching as a Career", University of Melbourne/DEST

7 Leigh, A. and Ryan, C. (2008): "How and why has teacher quality changed in Australia?", Australian Economic Review, 41(2), 141-159.

8 DEEWR (2008): "Teacher workforce data and planning processes in Australia", p20.

9 Harper, B (2007): "Factors fuelling the looming teacher shortage", University of Wollongong

10 The Australian (2008): "Catholic Schools get Honours in teacher recruitment"

11 DEEWR (2008): Ibid.

Employees are now 'shopping' between companies, and even whole industries, to find a job in which meets their needs.

So the question is: what is education doing as a sector, and what are you doing as a leader, to attract teachers to your school and to the profession?

## The Cause: Why the Best and Brightest Do Not Choose Teaching

### The Changing Labour Market

Workforce pundits are clear: we are heading into a global talent crunch. Unemployment is at historic lows, growth in available labour is slowing and organisations across the developed world face an "employees market".

These days, great employees are in high demand by a vast range of industries, and those now industries find themselves competing with each other for talent in the same way they have been competing for customers. **Employees are now 'shopping' between companies, and even whole industries, to find a job in which meets their needs** – needs which often are very different from what they used to be.

The magnitude of the organisational response to this talent shortage reflects its scale. The Defence Department, a 50,000-plus-person organisation, now spends hundreds of millions of dollars per year on attraction initiatives, including the well-publicised introduction of a Defence GAP year. Individual companies are also spending big on recruitment and employer branding. PriceWaterhouseCoopers, for example, spends \$1.2 million per year on its graduate/traineeship program alone.

Serious businesses are spending serious money to attract great staff, not just to their companies, but also to their industry more broadly. Education is competing with these industries. The reality is that employees who make excellent teachers also have skills and abilities that are desired by other industries: leadership, communication, innovation, collaboration and management. Since other organisations are looking for the same type of talent as schools, both current and potential teachers are faced with a range of new compelling employment prospects.

**So the question is: what is education doing as a sector, and what are you doing as a leader, to attract teachers to your school and to the profession?**



The power is shifting from the organisation to the individual.

In the war for talent there will be winners and losers.

## Rising Expectations & The Power Shift

Employee expectations are directly related to the state of the employment market. In an over-supplied labour market where quality jobs are at a premium, power is in the hands of the organisation. In this environment, opportunity is comparatively scarce and there is no need to compete aggressively for talent. There is also little impetus to take an active interest in the demands of your workers, as their capacity to “vote with their feet” if you don’t meet expectations is limited.

This was the reality for the baby boomers and Gen Xers when they entered the workforce: more candidates than jobs and power resting firmly in the hands of the organisation.

In contrast, today Generation Y is entering an employment market characterized by increasing demand for talented workers, and a simultaneous drop in the availability of people due to falling birthrates. Unemployment today is only 1/3 what it was when the bulk of Gen X entered the workplace. And the demographic side of that equation – falling birthrates – ensures that this change is structural, rather than cyclical.

Consequently, **the power is shifting from the organisation to the individual**. The result is rising expectations amongst talented staff that now find themselves in high demand, and elements of the employment proposition that were once considered luxuries are fast becoming price-of-entry necessities.

Today, nearly 40% of Australian companies report wage inflation as a direct result of the shortage of staff, and around 1/3 say that they would have hired more people had anyone with the right skill set been available.<sup>12</sup> In addition to pressure on wages, employers are finding their staff increasingly demanding in other areas of the employment proposition. Calls for exciting and inspiring work environments, concern with employers’ environmental or social responsibility record and demands for flexible working environments are all on the rise.

To highlight this fact, consider a commercial law firm with whom we recently worked. A senior partner revealed to us that a talented candidate for the position of senior counsel had declined a job lucrative offer because he was not satisfied with the firm’s “carbon footprint”!

Young workers, in particular, are serious about moving when their expectations are not met. While average tenure is falling across the workforce (having dropped from 15 years to 4 years across the last five decades),<sup>13</sup> the average tenure of a Gen Y in a job is only 16 months.<sup>14</sup>

The most crucial thing leaders must understand is that attraction is a zero-sum game. **In the war for talent there will be winners and losers**. The winners will be the groups that shape an employment offer that is attractive for the best talent and that meets the rapidly rising expectations of talented staff, and the loser will be the ones that do not.

## How Employees Make Decisions

Given these rising expectations, it is important to outline the key considerations of talented staff when choosing between jobs. From our work with organisations around the world, we have isolated six key considerations. These apply to choices between industries, and also choices between employers within an industry.

The six considerations are:

- ▶ Remuneration and Benefits
- ▶ Interest in the Work Itself
- ▶ Culture of the Industry/Workplace
- ▶ Industry/Employer Brand
- ▶ Career Development and Future Opportunity
- ▶ Lifestyle Suitability

We will examine these issues now, in reverse order.

12 Manpower (2006): “Manpower Global Talent Survey 2006”

13 Talent Edge (2007): “Engaging the Next Generation”

14 Management Today (2008): “Work 2.0 Survey – My Generation”

The sector has enough opportunity, but the challenge is being proactive in finding out your team's career aspirations, matching them to a suitable opportunity, then equipping them with the skills required to take it up.

### ► Lifestyle Suitability

Workplace location and working hours are often cited as a primary differentiator between one opportunity and the next. Education has a distinct advantage in this regard: the vast and dispersed network of schools means that almost any living preference can be satisfied. In addition (even though I'm sure it doesn't feel like it!), working hours – except at those a department and school executive level – are amongst the lowest in any industry. When coupled with school holidays, this is an automatic “tick” for education.

### ► Career Development and Future Opportunity

In a tight labour market, workers do away with the traditional career structure of “start at the bottom and work your way up”. Instead, they stay at a job only until they feel they will develop and progress in their career faster by leaving. Organisations must ensure ongoing development, progression and up-skilling of their staff if they want to retain them.

This is an area of concern for education. Although there are myriad pathways available to educators within the school and the sector, often these pathways are unclear or appear inaccessible. **The sector has enough opportunity, but the challenge is being proactive in finding out your team's career aspirations, matching them to a suitable opportunity, then equipping them with the skills required to take it up.** Perhaps the greatest part of that challenge is accommodating the various demands of different staff: some talented teachers want to remain teaching in the classroom, others want to move into administrative, executive, managerial or policy positions. Fashioning clear career opportunities tailored to the individual requires real effort.

Of great concern, much of our work has revealed a phenomenon in schools where opportunity is given not to those most deserving, but rather to those who have been around the longest. That is, many schools promote ‘stayers’, rather than ‘leaders’. This will be examined in detail later in the report, but suffice to say it destroys a culture of high performance.

### ► Industry/Employer Brand

People make snap judgments about which industries and employers attract them and which ones do not. These judgments are not necessarily based on rational, researched opinion, but often on small things like scattered anecdotes they've heard from people in the industry, the image in popular press and the types of social identity attached to such industries.

To highlight this fact, consider some stunning research undertaken by a trades association in New Zealand, which found the biggest barrier to young people entering trades was not poor pay, lack of flexibility, or bad working conditions. Rather, it was the fact they young males thought it would be hard to ‘pick up’ at the pub on a Friday night if they told girls they were a plumber.

That is, it was the image of the industry that was most strongly influencing their choices.

Even more startling is the relationship between enrollments in certain degrees with the TV shows portraying that profession. For instance, there has been an explosion in the popularity of forensic chemistry degrees in the wake of shows such as CSI Miami. So influential was CSI that at the West Virginia University the number of graduates in forensic identification jumped from just three in 2001 to 400 in 2004, coinciding directly with the rise of the show.<sup>15</sup> Graduates from Buffalo State's Fashion Textile Technology program more than doubled from 115 to 287 between 2000 and 2006, a trend widely attributed to the TV show ‘Project Runway.’<sup>16</sup> Research has also indicated a positive correlation between the careers of television role models and career aspirations in children.<sup>17</sup>

The uncomfortable truth is that the reputation of teaching in the popular consciousness and the status of teachers in the minds of many members of society has diminished. Teaching in Australia is seen as an ‘old school’ profession with an unimpressive employer brand. As outlined above, top students no longer see it as a career of choice.

15 Johnson, R (2004): ‘Popular TV show attracts students to forensic science.’ The American Observer, 17th March

16 Rey, J (2006): “As seen on TV”: Colleges find more students choose majors from popular shows.’ Buffalo News, 24th November

17 King, M. M. & Multon, K. D (1996): ‘The effects of television role models on the career aspirations of African American junior high school students’, Journal of Career Development, 23(2), pp111-125.

“I love teaching,  
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But this view is not irreversible, nor does it mean that there are not people who still feel a deep calling to be part of this truly important profession. The key here is to understand the subtle difference between wanting to teach, and wanting to be a teacher. Or, as one teacher recently put it: “I love teaching, but I hate my job”.

Many young people do, in fact, think teaching would be a fabulous job. It offers genuine variety, constant challenge, a sense of purpose, an opportunity to make a contribution and good work life balance. But the perception of what it is like to work in schools, on the other hand, is not so positive. The key reasons students cite for not wanting to pursue a career in teaching are low job status, poor career prospects, a perception of the job being repetitive or boring and high workloads.<sup>18</sup>

These problems are not intrinsic to teaching; they are problems that have evolved in the workplace. This means leaders can solve these problems and change these perceptions if the set about building better workplaces for teachers.

### ► Culture of the Industry/Workplace

The culture of an organisation is like its personality. It is a way of generalising and grouping together the shared understanding of the way things are done, how people within it organise and interact. Whilst much effort is expended in designing the school experience for students (creating stimulating, rich, diverse experiences etc), educational leaders spend little time analysing and shaping the daily experience of their employees. This has led to an education system in which school culture is not attractive to the best and brightest staff.

Culture is the focus of most of this paper. It is our firm belief that **educational leaders are in a position to implement positive changes in their workplaces that will create a culture of high-performance, innovation, collaboration and opportunity**. This would not only attract bright and talented teachers, it would also help retain them for longer periods, and encourage those who do leave to one-day return.

### ► Interest in the Work Itself

Somewhat self-evidently, people are drawn to areas of work that interest them. Theoretically, teachers like teaching, doctors like medicine and lawyers (strange as it may seem to the rest of us...) like law. But of course, it doesn't always work like this. Plenty of people don't like their job, find their work boring, and are there because it is simply where they have ended up.

Earlier we noted that attrition in early career teachers is 25%. If we find that many of these teachers are leaving because they do not like, or are not suited to teaching itself, then this is a problem with selection. Other industries have overcome such problems in the past. The medical industry overcame a problem with their selection process favouring the academically gifted, but not suitably selecting on the basis of communication skills and bedside manner. This was partially redressed by changing the undergraduate interview process to give more weight to communication ability and inserting extended response questions in admission exams.

Similarly, if we are finding that our selection process is letting significant numbers of people who don't like teaching into the system, then this needs to be specifically addressed. There are two options. Firstly, programs that offer a 'tailored taste' of life in the industry (such as GAP programs, as will be detailed later) can help candidates make better decisions about their employment. Secondly, the recruitment and admission process can be changed to more accurately select the most suitable candidates for the job profile.

As it stands, precious little research has been undertaken into why people choose to leave education. While there has been some isolated focus group and survey work done on this issue – with the most commonly cited reasons for leaving predictably being poor pay, high workloads and difficult parents<sup>19</sup> – no study has yet dug deep into whether this simply represents misplaced expectations on the part of young staff that could be redressed by improving the selection process.

We would urge more work to be done in this area to help clarify the goal of future efforts.

18 DEST (2003): 'Senior Secondary Student Attitudes to Teaching as a Career, Review of Teaching and Teacher Education'

19 Australian Education Union (2007)

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## ► Remuneration & Benefits

There is no doubt quality teachers need to be paid more. Over the period of 1983 to 2003, the average salary of a starting teacher fell in real terms by 4% for women and 13% for men. Compared to university graduates in other occupations, starting pay for female teachers fell by 11%, and for male teachers by 17%.<sup>20</sup> We agree with the Business Council of Australia assessment that the top teachers need to be paid at least \$120,000 per year.<sup>21</sup>

However it is time to move the discussion beyond the issue of pay. For too long, debates about improving education have been bogged down in this area. This is disempowering for individual educational leaders, stalls discussion and ultimately retards positive change.

There are six clear reasons why the focus of the debate needs to be shifted off pay and onto strategies for educational leaders at the school level:

### 01 ► Leaders CANNOT Control Pay:

Often, educators themselves don't decide pay. Many in the state systems, for instance, are beholden to government awards. But even in places such as independent schools where leaders can make their own decisions on remuneration, already up to 80% of operational costs come from staff salaries, making sharp pay rises simply unaffordable. So regardless of what is 'right', leaders are hamstrung in this regard.

### 02 ► Leaders CAN Control Culture:

**The culture of their own, individual school is one of the only things that education leaders can directly control.** If all leaders were to get to work on their individual schools, with some shared understanding of what a great school culture needed to look like, then the entire system would be changed for the better. This can happen now, without having to wait for a massive, overly bureaucratic structure to give the green light to change award rates.

### 03 ► Effects of Pay as a Motivator in Job Choices are Overrated:

Although in the popular consciousness pay is seen as the key determinant in people's employment decisions, the reality is more complex. Pay is a strong motivator only to a certain level, and rising affluence actually partially decouples pay from motivation (most literature suggests this occurs somewhere around \$70,000 pa). At this point, other needs such as a compelling purpose, a courteous environment, challenging work, ongoing learning opportunity, career development and other more intangible desires start to move become key drivers of employee behaviour. Pay often dominates discussion over these other issues because they are harder to quantify, but being hard to quantify doesn't make them less important.

### 04 ► An Obsession with Pay Damages the Brand:

What is the most ubiquitous message sent about a career in education? It is that teachers are not respected and don't get paid enough. As competition between industries for scarce talent increases, industry bodies and lobby groups need to walk an increasingly fine between pushing publically for remuneration restructuring, and building the reputation of the industry in the minds of those seriously considering entering the profession. Failing to make important changes to school culture because of a stalled, public debate on pay will see the image of education go the same way as the image of nursing, for the same reasons.

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20 Leigh, A. and Ryan, C (2008)

21 Business Council of Australia (2007)

And none of this can hide the fact that individual leaders can do enormous amounts – in fact, they can turn the system around! – from within their own spheres of influence by focussing on building inspiring workplace cultures.

**05 ▶ Teachers Enter the Profession Despite Pay, Then Leave:**

In spite of the bad press and the limited financial opportunities, many people still enter teaching. But then something else happens. After they arrive in the profession, in those first five years something other than poor pay (which they knew about before they entered the industry) is causing them to leave. This suggests that even if we were to pay teachers more, cultural aspects of the job may make this ineffective.

**06 ▶ High-Paying Industries Face the Same Problem:**

The real kicker here, and the strongest indication that simply increasing wages won't solve the attrition problem, is that historically this strategy has failed. Consider the legal profession – a high-paying industry with some of the best-paid graduates of any industry, often earning \$70,000 or more in their first year. Attrition rates here are between 25% and 35% amongst people who have just finished their graduate program. Sure, some head to London and New York seeking opportunity. But many are leaving the big firms for smaller practices, or other industries, and the most cited reasons are the conservative culture of larger firms and the way new hires are treated by managers, and the workaholic culture.

In summary, there is no question that teachers should be paid more. There also needs to be improvements in curriculum, institutional support for teachers, training in new technology and other system-wide initiatives. But clearly, pay isn't everything. **And none of this can hide the fact that individual leaders can do enormous amounts – in fact, they can turn the system around! – from within their own spheres of influence by focussing on building inspiring workplace cultures.**



# The Solution: Building Inspiring Workplace Cultures

In building attractive, inspiring and sustainable cultures, there are three central questions educators must ask and answer:

01. What qualities define the talented teacher of the future?
02. What cultures attract people with these qualities?
03. What, as a leader, must I do to create such cultures?

## 4 Steps to Better Cultures

There are four steps in building attractive workplace cultures. These steps can be divided into two phases, the first focusing on mindset and the second on practice. Changing mindset is about adopting leadership mindsets and understanding changing expectations; changing practice is about building an inspiring culture, and a compelling brand.

| MINDSET  |  | PRACTICE   |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>STEP 01 ▶</b><br>Adopt LEADERSHIP mindsets <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>01. Educational leaders are responsible for driving change</li> <li>02. Schools, not the system, are the locus of change</li> <li>03. Teaching can become a career of choice</li> <li>04. "Bad retention" causes attrition</li> <li>05. The limiting belief: terminal uniqueness</li> </ol> | <b>STEP 02 ▶</b><br>Understand talent's EXPECTATIONS <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>01. To be Valued</li> <li>02. To Grow</li> <li>03. To Express</li> <li>04. To Collaborate</li> <li>05. To Contribute</li> <li>06. To Innovate</li> </ol> | <b>STEP 03 ▶</b><br>Build attractive, sustainable CULTURES <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>01. Learning Leaders</li> <li>02. Soft Landings</li> <li>03. Continual Development</li> <li>04. Ongoing Mentoring</li> <li>05. Incentivised Performance</li> <li>06. Inspiring Spaces</li> <li>07. Fun Workplaces</li> <li>08. Compelling Careers</li> <li>09. Perpetual Innovation</li> <li>10. Active Recruitment</li> </ol> | <b>STEP 04 ▶</b><br>Develop a compelling BRAND <p><a href="#">The Four Stories</a></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>01. Significance</li> <li>02. Opportunity</li> <li>03. Excellence</li> <li>04. Innovation</li> </ol> |

adopt

understand

build

promote

Although problems of attrition and teacher attraction have been identified as critical areas of concern since the early 1990s, so little has happened to address the problem that it is getting worse, not better.

If leaders tackle the challenge, not by lobbying for change, but by instituting it, then gradually momentum will build.

Change enough schools, and you change the system.

## MINDSET (Part 1): Adopt Leadership MINDSETS

Make no mistake: change is hard... really, really hard. So hard, that of the 600,000 Americans who have heart bypass surgery every year, 90% don't change their behavior *even though it kills them*.<sup>22</sup> And so hard that **although problems of attrition and teacher attraction have been identified as critical areas of concern since the early 1990s, so little has happened to address the problem that it is getting worse, not better.**

So, although many educators may have read to this point thinking "I already know all this", we urge you to read this section with fresh eyes, for knowing about a problem and motivating yourself and others to action are distant concepts.

To bridge the gap between knowledge of the problem and taking the steps to solve it, there are five distinct mindsets educational leaders must adopt. They are not difficult to grasp, but they are at odds with the beliefs of many leaders.

### 01 ▶ Educational leaders Are Responsible for Driving Change

Educational leaders must position themselves as change agents and take responsibility for the situation. This is not because they caused it, but because they can help solve it. Significant and sustained change never occurs until individuals take responsibility for the situation. Whilst many stakeholders in the educational sector continue to play the 'blame-game', educational leaders need to take responsibility for the specific issue of teacher attraction and retention.

Too often, educational leaders are left waiting for change to drift down through the system via departmental level policy changes. This approach is disempowering and leaves change held hostage to the agendas of powerful bureaucrats. But leaders in schools can shape workplace culture and bring about dramatic change through force of personality and passion.

**If leaders tackle the challenge, not by lobbying for change, but by instituting it, then gradually momentum will build.**

### 02 ▶ Schools, Not the System, are the Locus of Change

There is an old saying that "people take a job, but they leave a manager". This is true in education, where trained and talented teachers are not leaving "the system", but leaving individual schools. The best chance for change is to focus on the daily reality of teaching, where people's day-to-day experiences are shaping their decisions to stay or leave.

Ultimately, the 'system' is just a collection of schools. **Change enough schools, and you change the system.**

### 03 ▶ Teaching Can Become a Career of Choice

For millennia, teaching was viewed as one of the most respected and desired professions. Educational leaders must fully believe that teaching can again become a career of choice for the best and brightest. In many places in the world teaching consistently ranks amongst the most trusted and respected professions, and there is no reason why education in Australia can't be held in equally high regard.

But we need visionary and courageous leaders to believe in this proposition to make it happen.

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22 Deuschmann, A (2007): "Change or Die" Fast Company Magazine

## 04 ▶ “Bad Retention” Causes Attrition

Whereas young staff who have no interest in teaching tend to become attrition statistics, older staff who are disengaged and bored tend to stagnate in their roles. It is well known that in our rapidly aging teaching workforce there are many older teachers who have lost drive, are change averse and are basically just holding on until retirement. This creates a number of problems pertinent to our discussion.

Firstly, often these people occupy senior leadership positions in schools, and therefore set an atrocious example when it comes to energetic leadership. Secondly, their occupation of leadership positions (which they don't leverage to create positive change, but simply occupy idly) prevents young, talented and energetic staff from moving into these positions and using them to drive change. Thirdly, their occupation of these positions takes away potential promotional paths from people who are looking to progress, which drives up attrition as people have to leave to find opportunity.

It is the job of the leader to solve these problems. Leaders must either accept responsibility for motivating and re-inspiring these people to action and selling them on the notion of positive change; *or* leaders must take courageous steps to remove them from these positions. Considering the dire shortage of teachers, and the valuable knowledge, skill and institutional memory these senior teachers hold, whichever approach leaders adopt they must proceed with tact and appropriateness.

## 05 ▶ The Limiting Belief: Terminal Uniqueness

For too long, educators have operated with the problematic mindset of “terminal uniqueness”: that somehow education is “different” from the private sector in having to respond to changing labour market conditions and staff expectations. They also dismiss the notion that schools can learn from industry responses to these challenges.

Hopefully, the data and argumentation provided in the first section of this report have already put to bed any belief that schools are immune from the effects of the changing workforce. However we also want to dispel the myth that schools can't learn from private sector responses to these challenges.

Many educators lament the rise of corporatism in the education sector, and indeed running schools like businesses has its problems. Unfortunately reluctance to run schools like businesses often seems to translate into dismissing the private sector as the source of any instructive practice at all. **You don't need to run schools like businesses in order to learn from business**, and in the area of proactively creating cultures that foster innovation, build retention and attract talented staff, education leaders could learn a great deal from some highly successful private sector initiatives.

Once leaders have adopted these progressive, empowering mindsets, they can then move on to equipping themselves with a keen understanding of the demands and expectations of talented young staff.

You don't need  
to run schools  
like businesses  
in order to learn  
from business.



Educators that look for new ways of doing things, embrace change and innovation, are excellent and engaging communicators and are committed to the task at hand.

## MINDSET (Part 2): Understand Talent's EXPECTATIONS

In this section, we briefly explore the first two questions outlined above:

01. What qualities define the talented teacher of the future?
02. What are the expectations of people with those qualities?

### What Qualities Define the Talented Teacher of the Future: The Edupreneur

During a national road show for the Australian Council of Education Leaders conducted by *Centre for Skills Development* CEO, Peter Sheahan, delegates brainstormed the qualities of great teachers. The list they generated is instructive for leaders looking to characterise the educators of the future.

The qualities they listed included:

- ▶ Exceptional communication skills
- ▶ High emotional intelligence
- ▶ Academic strength
- ▶ An innovative approach to work
- ▶ aWillingness to take risks
- ▶ Performance orientation
- ▶ Commitment and passion
- ▶ Desire to contribute and be part of something bigger

Interestingly, the job profile these qualities most closely match is the entrepreneur. Perhaps the educator of the future is best called the *edupreneur*: **educators that look for new ways of doing things, embrace change and innovation, are excellent and engaging communicators and are committed to the task at hand.**

Imagine if our education system attracted and retained teachers that displayed these qualities. Would we not then have staff that could form the basis of a world-class education system?



Employers must find creative (and cost-effective) ways of communicating how much they value their staff and be proactive in making the value felt.

Talented staff thrive in collaborative environments where they can interact with like-minded talented individuals, both in internal networks and also externally.

## The 6 Expectations of the Edupreneur

Although everyone is different, from our work helping organisations across the world attract and retain talent matching the above skills, we can summarise the key expectations of edupreneurs into six discrete demands.

- 01 ▶ **To Be Valued:** At the most fundamental level, talented staff have an expectation to be valued. This value can manifest in pay, public recognition, opportunity or a variety of other incarnations. **Employers must find creative (and cost-effective) ways of communicating how much they value their staff and be proactive in making the value felt.** In addition, talented staff do not only want to be valued by their employer, but also by their *community*. People really about the social status their job, and changing societal perceptions of education is of real importance.
- 02 ▶ **To Grow:** Talented staff expect that their work will make them more employable for when leave. That is, they expect that in the process of working for you, that they will be exposed to new opportunities, and gain new skills and experience that leave them better off than when they started. This means employers must proactively create opportunities for promotion (vertical or lateral) and training and development.
- 03 ▶ **To Express:** Talented staff display high levels of creativity in their approach to work. They are also generally multi-talented, with a number of strengths. But with this creativity and talent comes a demand for freedom. This includes freedom to try new approaches to their job, and also flexibility in fitting their work into their broader life. This manifests clearly in the oft-cited demand for work-life balance, and also in demands to be allowed to take innovative approaches to lesson plans, teaching methodology and class structure.
- 04 ▶ **To Collaborate:** **Talented staff thrive in collaborative environments where they can interact with like-minded talented individuals, both in internal networks and also externally.** This means that employers and managers must reconceptualise business units, organizational departments and silos and allow their staff to collaborate creatively across traditional boundaries.
- 05 ▶ **To Contribute:** There is a growing desire amongst talented staff to make a positive contribution, both to the organisation and to the community at large. Schools have a natural advantage in this regard considering the obvious importance of their contribution to society. Leaders must not only make the importance of the individual's and organisation's work clear, but also empower staff to get actively involved in shaping the nature of their contribution.
- 06 ▶ **To Innovate:** Talented staff are bright enough to be on the leading edge, to drive innovation, change and improvement – and they know it. Organisations that want to retain the best and brightest must commit to unleashing the creative potential of their staff through embracing change and moving with the times. This means committing to a perpetual cycle of innovation, being open to new ideas and creating an environment that fosters creative thinking.

These demands are increasingly prevalent in all workers, but are particularly pronounced amongst young, talented staff. With these demands in mind, the discussion now turns to building inspiring cultures.



Ultimately it will be education leaders themselves – not external consultants or bureaucrats – who create the most comprehensive strategies for overhauling education cultures based on their knowledge and experience in the industry.

## Practice (Part 1):

### Build attractive, sustainable CULTURES

This section presents ten strategies for leaders that can be easily implemented to help build inspiring cultures. Although based on our extensive work and research in education and the private sector, here and abroad, **ultimately it will be education leaders themselves – not external consultants or bureaucrats – who create the most comprehensive strategies for overhauling education cultures based on their knowledge and experience in the industry.**

The ten strategies we examine are:

01. Learning Leaders
02. Soft Landings
03. Continual Development
04. Ongoing Mentoring
05. Incentivised Performance
06. Inspiring Spaces
07. Fun Workplaces
08. Compelling Careers
09. Perpetual Innovation
10. Active Recruitment

These strategies can be implemented in any order. **As always, however, the first step is the hardest: the most important thing is that leaders pick one strategy and set change in motion.**

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## 01 ▶ Learning Leaders

The old adage “the fish rots from the head down” is a helpful reminder of the need to keep leadership thinking fresh. Leaders in schools are not just decision makers, they are also role models, and as role models they are responsible for setting the tone for organisational culture. They must not only drive culture change in others, they must live it themselves.

But in the busyness of school life, many senior leaders struggle to set aside regular opportunities to model good leadership by actively engaging in learning, coaching and development themselves. As has been common practice amongst executives in business for many decades, educational leaders must begin to invest significant time and funds into the development of their own leadership capacity if they want others to follow.

There are some excellent initiatives beginning to emerge in this area that give senior educators access to high-level training.

For instance, through the *Partners In Learning* program administered by the Australian Business and Community Network, senior executives provide leadership training and mentoring to school principals. Through the program, educational leaders meet one-on-one with a business leader to share expertise and discuss solutions to pressing problems. The program has helped forge over 70 mentoring and learning relationships, with high-profile business names being involved, such as Ralph Norris of the Commonwealth Bank, Ernst & Young Chair, Brian Long, and Citigroup CEO Stephen Roberts.

In a review of the 2005 pilot, 100% of education leaders involved in the program said that it helped them in their approach to problems in their school – and little wonder, considering the outstanding quality of leaders to which they have access.

Investment in training such as this not only models good learning practice for other staff, it also energises leaders and fills schools with new thinking and practice.

In addition, we know that no one leader is going to change a school on their own, so senior leaders need to find other likely change agents (such as senior teachers with a passion for change, or young teachers with the energy to drive innovation) and involve those people in the learning process.

## Why not...

- ▶ Join an education network that gives you access to potential mentors
- ▶ Look outside the education system for people that offer inspiration and insight. Look into groups like The Executive Connection, The CEO Forum or Partners in Learning
- ▶ Allocate a budget for executive coaching – one session per month, for ten months
- ▶ Create a “leaders group” within your local network of schools where you and five other educational leaders get together for peer mentoring and to share ideas

## 02 ▶ Soft Landings

As noted earlier, attrition amongst early career teachers is an astonishing 25%. Well-constructed induction programs for beginning teachers will be important in stemming this exodus as they help build a culture of “soft landings”. A beginning teacher induction program should specifically target graduates (or those in their early years of teaching) and should focus primarily on helping them adjust to life as a teacher.

The problem with most induction programs is that people incorrectly assume induction takes a day or two. In reality, induction takes much longer than that. Getting used to a new job or “learning the ropes” can take months, especially for young staff who are not familiar with the work environment. As such, induction programs must be structured to provide ongoing support over a long period of time, not simply during an “orientation day”. Worryingly, over 50% of teachers indicated they had never been involved in any sort of ongoing induction process.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, beginning teachers are under significant strain. They are often required to complete the same job as a teacher of 20 years experience and usually with little to no institutional support. This creates incredible stress and places unnecessary burdens on beginning teachers. The induction program should help them through demanding processes with which they are unfamiliar, such as reporting and – perhaps most importantly – dealing with difficult parents. It should also provide constructive feedback on classroom instruction.

But over and above assisting with the procedural side of teaching, these programs should induct teachers into the culture of the school. If leaders are going to expend valuable resources in building attractive workplace cultures, then talented graduates need to be inducted into the “way things are done around here”. Pairing your best members of staff with new recruits will help pass on positive attitudes and behaviours, let senior teachers pass on their skills and help new teachers settle in to their role.

So how could such a program work?

Firstly, each new recruit should be linked to an experienced teacher-mentor. That person needs support in their role as mentor. Encouraging them to be “learning leaders” and engage in professional development and mentoring relationships themselves is an excellent start. The creation of a “curriculum” with sample questions for mentoring sessions and hypothetical situations would be an ideal supplement.

Secondly, a routine for regular review sessions (including face-to-face conversation time, class observation and formal review) needs to be established. It needs to be regular enough to be useful, but not so onerous a burden that it impacts on people’s work.

Thirdly, new staff should also be provided with a “buddy”. This buddy would be closer in age to the recruit and could support them with the smaller, day-to-day challenges. The program could also incorporate opportunities for new staff to share experiences in small group sessions each term, a slight reduction in teaching load (where resources allow it) and professional development opportunities throughout the year.

This is not a particularly difficult system to implement, but it has had great effect in other industries. Law firms, for instance, have real problems with early-career attrition because of the confronting nature of the recruitment process and the intimidating size and environment of the organisation. The firms with which we have worked have had great success in controlling this problem by implementing the buddy/induction systems outlined above, some reducing attrition and increasing offer acceptance by over 50%.

## Why not...

- ▶ Do an audit of your current mentoring system (if you have one!) and be proactive in gaining feedback from participants
- ▶ Assemble your five most talented young teachers and conduct a focus group to find out what support they most needed when they began. Design a program around this feedback
- ▶ Appoint a gifted member of staff to the role of mentor. If you can, allocate some teaching load to mentoring. If you can't do that for resource reasons, find a passionate member of staff who is energetic enough to take on the extra responsibility and give them the support they need to do a good job
- ▶ Start a 'new teacher upload', where once a month new teachers gather to discuss their progress and problems

## 03 ▶ Continual Development

Education leaders must stop seeing training as merely a tool for development, and start seeing it as a valuable tool for attraction and retention. The number one thing talent looks for in an employer is for the potential to ‘build their resume.’

This cuts to the heart of a fundamental shift in the employment market. In oversupplied labour markets, the ‘psychological contract’ of employment was that workers would trade their loyalty (tenure) for job security. But now, as opportunity abounds, the new ‘psychological contract’ is “I will work for you, and in return you will make me more employable for when I leave to pursue other opportunities”.

In short, young talent are looking for organisations that will train and develop them to become more employable. The importance of this can't be overstated. In consulting work we recently undertook with an electrical engineering firm in Victoria, we analysed their graduate attrition figures. During the 5-years where graduates were undergoing formal training that gave them new skills and presented them with new opportunities, retention was 100%. But in the first six months after that process ended and people stopped being exposed to new training and development opportunities, attrition rose to 50%.

Amazingly, when the company extended the graduate program for one more year, filling it with further training and development opportunities, retention was 100% in that extra year, also. The clear link was between ongoing, formal development and retention.

These startling figures show the importance of training and development in keeping talented staff, yet there are a number of barriers to its provision that we have encountered.

Firstly, some leaders are worried about making staff as skilled (or more skilled) than themselves. This is a mindset problem for which there is no magic solution; the only answer is to stop acting like that because it helps no one!

Secondly, many leaders are justifiably concerned that if they make their staff too employable or invest too much in their training they will either be headhunted or leave seeking further opportunity. Logical as that may appear, from the above analysis we can see that you have far more chance of keeping staff if you invest in constantly training and developing them, than if you deny them those opportunities. The absence of training and development opportunities drives staff away far more quickly than they would be headhunted.

Thirdly, there is often laziness around professional development. Through the Centre For Skills Development, we administer the Beyond Chalk project – a professional development program offering free training around implementing technology in the classroom. Although leaders say they recognise the importance of training and development, only around 40% of schools that are approached engage the Beyond Chalk team, even though it is entirely free. The biggest hurdle we find is finding someone in the school willing to take the time to organise the professional development event! Leaders must be the energetic leaders in this regard.

Finally, cost is routinely cited as a barrier to engaging professional consultants or trainers to work with staff. Although this is certainly a real barrier, there are two important points for consideration. The first is that training and development is crucial, and that creative measures should be undertaken to fund it, such as approaching the Parents and Friends Association for support or looking for free alternatives. The second is that there does not necessarily have to be outside involvement in these professional development opportunities. Consider appointing a member of staff to research and conduct a half-day session on a topic – say, using podcasts in the classroom. Teacher-led development is a free, highly engaging workaround that schools could adopt.

The change in the psychological contract with today's talented staff makes a culture of continual professional development a powerful force for attraction and engagement. Leaders need to take active steps to overcome the above barriers and provide these opportunities on a regular basis.

## Why not...

- ▶ Encourage staff to undertake further study, such as Masters degrees or additional educational qualifications. Support them in this process in whatever way you can
- ▶ Organise one Professional Development Day per term, but don't make them traditional development days. Look for cross-industry, outside-the-box sessions that will make teachers feel like they are being exposed to new ideas, new practices and new ways of thinking
- ▶ Assign one of your engaged, forward thinking staff members the task of putting together a half-day session on a specific subject, including exposition, activities and points for discussion. If possible, lighten their teaching load for a month while they prepare it
- ▶ Get serious about professional development! Let us suggest you start at [www.beyondchalk.com.au](http://www.beyondchalk.com.au)

## The professional development model of relying solely on one or two full-day lectures per year is dead.

### 04 ▶ Ongoing Mentoring

Following on from the above point, it is not only the provision of training we should be considering, but also the form that training takes. **The professional development model of relying solely on one or two full-day lectures per year is dead.** Although big-ticket items like teacher conference attendance and professional development days are important, research clearly shows that coaching and mentoring models of training are a vital part of development strategies.

This ongoing training can take many forms. One of the best examples is the 'aspiring leaders program' that has been hugely successful in some schools. In this program, leaders identify talent early and invest in giving them skills in leadership and management. There are two significant benefits to such programs.

Firstly, they directly increase retention because they are run over a number of years and people are keen to stay for the duration of the program. This has worked in other industries, as seen in the electrical engineering example above.

Secondly, they teach valuable skills that our schools need to stay healthy into the future. By helping young teachers learn skills from experienced teachers we expedite their learning and improve the quality of teaching.

These programs consist of a number of elements. They should involve mentoring sessions with senior staff, and 'leadership retreats' where ideas and information are exchanged, and external professionals are brought in to bring new perspectives to the conversation. They should also allow talented teachers to "shadow" both senior teachers and executive staff to learn directly through observation.

## Why not...

- ▶ Get five of your most trusted, senior staff together and identify your most talented young teachers that could take part in an aspiring leaders program. Brainstorm what you could do to create such a program and who you would have involved
- ▶ Create a shadowing program where young staff can spend time with senior members of the executive and gain insight into possible future career paths

### 05 ▶ Incentivised Performance

The models of behaviour reinforcement that we know are critical in developing students are often completely forgotten when managing staff. Ask yourself: why is it that teachers provide students with stickers, merit awards and supportive feedback directly after positive behaviour or production good work? We know it is to validate and reinforce good work, and is most effective when delivered close to the time the work is done.

But in what ways are talented teachers rewarded and validated? By an annual, award-based step increase in pay?

It is time to validate and reward talented teachers, and to do it better. Talented employees demand their good work is noticed, and to be fair this is not so much to ask. Rewards for good work don't necessarily have to be monetary but they do have to be of real value.

So what can be done to not only recognise and reward, but also to incentivise excellent performance?

Firstly, educational leaders need to develop a list of desired employee characteristics and practices that align with the type of culture they are committed to building. Perhaps it is integration of technology in the classroom, or reports being completed before deadline, or positive parent responses about the teacher's dedication to students. This first step is crucial in clarifying exactly what it is that leaders are trying to incentivise, as different types of behaviour are incentivised by different types of rewards.

Secondly, educational leaders need to work out how to recognise and reward these practices in a way that is inexpensive, but shouts 'I value you.' Start by thinking about small rewards, delivered frequently (rather than large rewards given once a year, for example). Consider bottles of wine or movie tickets given out at the weekly staff meeting for people that have gone above and beyond the call of duty. Even though the reward itself is small, the statement of value it makes is significant.

Additionally, recognition is a valuable reward in and of itself. Excellent performers should be singled out and praised so others are encouraged to follow their lead. Often, leaders claim that this system is already in place, but in reality we find that the "system" is just a certificate slipped quietly into the pigeonhole on a Thursday afternoon. Recognition must be given in a way that shows a genuine, public appreciation.

We would go so far as to recommend instigating a "teacher of the week" award. If you think that people in your school would not take that award seriously, or would laugh at it and anyone who won it, then you have just identified a problem that needs fixing. That problem is the tall poppy syndrome, alive and well in schools today.

We recently had the privilege of being asked to present awards for high performers at the annual dinner of a large, multi-national client. When the awards were presented, winners came to the stage, accepted their award and then returned to their table. At this point, their peers would sarcastically punch their arm and snigger 'ah, high performer mate – well done', or other things that demeaned the achievement. Most frustratingly, at the post-dinner drinks, the CEO himself was engaging in the same sort of downplaying of the award.

It is no different in many schools. In one consulting engagement we undertook for a school in the Northern Territory, we found that the problem in an otherwise excellent system of financial rewards for high performance was the need for self-selection (that is, high performers were being asked to nominate themselves for the award). The problem was that teachers felt too self-conscious to nominate, because there was a culture in the school that laughed at high performance, rather than celebrating it.

**Make no mistake: peer pressure is as alive and powerful in the staffroom as it is in the playground.**

This speaks to the importance of having a formal system of recognition where leaders show genuine appreciation of high performance and good work. These cultures only change when courageous leaders demonstrate in practice that high performance is not only incentivised, it is also respected.

Finally, on the subject of incentives, it is important to deal with the controversial issue of performance-based pay. Of course, when it comes to incentivising high performance, monetary incentives are the most obvious option. But the education system is at odds with most other institutions in that they resist linking pay with performance. For most organisations, it is standard practice to set out Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are linked directly to bonus or incentive structures, but not in education.

The key objection to this system offered by education leaders is that it is hard to measure 'performance' in teaching. For instance, if a teacher's performance is measured by the results of students, teachers with less academically gifted classes are at a disadvantage. In addition, there are valuable activities in which teachers engage that are hard to measure, such as involvement in co-curricular activities, pastoral care and student mentoring.

But despite these fair objections, performance-based pay can be hugely valuable. There is ample evidence that tying performance to monetary reward works, so long as the outcomes required to receive the reward are clearly set and are seen as realistic and attainable. Leaders should at the very least look for performance-based rewards, if not a system of performance-based pay.

Whatever systems leaders embrace to incentivise, recognise and reward high performance, they should be proactive in asking staff what rewards they would most value, and shape their systems around the answers.

Make no mistake:  
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in the playground.

## Why not...

- ▶ Set aside five minutes in your weekly staff meetings to single out two teachers for their excellent work. Give these staff a bottle of wine or some movie vouchers – or get even more creative with your rewards!
- ▶ Implement regular performance reviews, and empower lower levels of managers (such as year coordinators, subject heads etc) to also review performance of their team on a regular basis. These reviews should recognise work well done and also offer constructive feedback on their performance. The more formal, annual reviews should be 360-degree reviews
- ▶ Create a list of what counts as 'high performance' in your school. For some schools, this will involve measurement of students' academic performance; in others it will involve implementation of technology in the classroom or the use of new lesson plans. In reality, it will probably be a combination of the above and other factors.
- ▶ Start an annual 'high performance' awards night where the best performing teachers are singled out for recognition and given public acclamation

## 06 ▶ Inspiring Spaces

The built environment shapes our interactions, so it is no surprise that physical space is a critical consideration in modern workplaces. The nature of the workspace sends powerful messages about the sort of organisation we are trying to build, and about how we value our people.

Companies go to great lengths to manufacture a physical space that aligns with their values and culture, often at great expense. Consider Westpac, who are trying to build a cultural association with sustainability and responsible environmental behavior (you probably remember their “every generation should live better than the last” campaign, and their publicised signature of the global agreement between banks to not fund environmentally damaging projects). Such is their commitment to this culture that they spent over \$700 million building an office site that embraced the latest in energy saving, environmentally friendly construction technologies. It even has a worm farm in the basement that helps recycle kitchen waste! They are now rated amongst the top-100 most sustainable organisations on the planet, and continue to build a strong employer brand as the “responsible bank”.

In general, schools do not have the luxury of expansive budgets for this operation, but the reality is that creating positive physical environments doesn't have to be expensive. At the simplest level, schools should use the budget and staff resources they have to ensure spaces make positive superficial statements of value. This is a crucial point.

The two most frequently cited problems with communal spaces are “the coffee is crap” and “the toilet paper is terrible”. These seem like tiny things, but nevertheless they are the most frequently cited problems. They are real points of pain – and if you've ever had to drink staff room coffee for a year, I'm sure you understand!

The reason they are so important is that although they are small in cost and stature, they are massive in the statement of value they make. To leaders, they rationalise the purchase of bad coffee and cheap toilet paper as “they cost too much money”. In other words, “they are not worth the money”. But to staff, the decision says, “we are not worth the money”. It gives staff the impression that leaders think they are not worth even the meager expense of decent toilet paper.

A litmus test should be introduced: if you would never buy it for yourself at home, you should not be supplying it for your team. Of course, for some luxury items this yardstick is unsustainable. But for many items, it is sustainable if leaders make an effort.

Of course environments do not only make statements of value, they also affect mood, productivity and culture. Open spaces in communal areas, for instance, encourage the free flow of ideas and information. Collaborative environments don't emerge by accident – they emerge by creating a space that facilitates interaction and exchange. If you want to build a culture of collaboration and innovation, consider fashioning spaces conducive to interaction, and then formalising the use of those spaces by scheduling an “innovation lunch” or a “brainstorm breakfast”.

Whatever sort of space you create, there needs to be a logic to it. Physical environments have an enormous impact on mood, on interaction, on motivation and attention and on perceptions of value. At the very least, leaders should think about a fresh coat of paint, but hopefully they will think of much more than that.

## Why not...

- ▶ Hire a workflow specialist to spend an hour discussing with you the set-up of your communal spaces. You'd be surprised how many valuable recommendations they can make that you can then implement yourself!
- ▶ Be proactive and ask your staff what they think of their environment. Don't chicken-out and have a "suggestions box" – pull your staff aside, one-by-one or in small groups, and have a conversation with them. If you don't feel like you have the rapport to do that at this stage, get an intermediary to make the initial approach
- ▶ Ditch your next PD day and instead bring in a few tins of paint and get staff to reinvent the common room
- ▶ Go get some good coffee and some decent toilet paper!

### 07 ▶ Fun Workplaces

We recently concluded a consulting engagement with a large metropolitan outbound call centre that was having enormous difficulty retaining staff. It's no wonder: the job was selling insurance over the phone at dinnertime! The company could not change the task to make it easier, but they did manage to make substantial progress by changing the environment in which the job took place. The changes they made were small, but effective.

They rigged a couple of small basketball hoops around the office, and supplied some small fluffy basketballs. When a staff member made three sales in an allotted period (putting them slightly above target) they were allowed three shots at the hoop. If they got all three, they won a prize. The prize could be a number of things: perhaps movie vouchers, a six-pack of beer or even an early mark from their shift if it was appropriate.

The nature of the prize wasn't as important as the fun, competitive air about the whole system. For instance, when someone got their three sales, a bell was rung and the team would gather around the hoop and cheer for them while they took their shots. It created a sense of community, camaraderie and shared entertainment. But small, fun activities do more than just entertain: they increase engagement through breaking routine, they build teams, and – if implemented correctly – they incentivise high performance.

We are happy to recommend that leaders should, simply, try to make schools more fun places to work.

That fun creates engagement will not be news to anyone, least of all educators. Teachers who create lively, interesting classrooms get higher levels of engagement from their students, and also get better results. There are some excellent education initiatives built on precisely this theory. The Centre For Skills Development delivers, on behalf of the Commonwealth Bank Foundation, the StartSmart program – a national financial literacy education program aimed at Years 9-11 students. The workshops are built entirely on the premise of creating fun, engaging and interactive learning environments that make complicated (and often dry) issues of financial literacy exciting. Combining activities, stories, multimedia and humour, these sessions – delivered to over 60,000 students per year – are met with overwhelming response precisely because of the engaging environment they create.

**Yet we rarely take the same approach in making our workplaces lively, engaging and interesting. It's like somehow we came to believe that as we get older we stop wanting to have fun.** The call centre mentioned above found that introducing fun initiatives into the workplace could build engagement and increase retention. Benchmarked tests also found that people performed better after this system was introduced.

Some companies take this to an extreme degree. Consider Virgin Blue, who has turned being 'fun' not only into a strong consumer brand, but also a compelling employer brand. Virgin empowers their staff to take a casual, humorous approach to the job (inter alia making jokes in their safety announcements and placing amusing signs around their airport terminals, for example) and in doing so not only increase staff engagement but also create a more enjoyable experience for their consumers.

Education could do the same thing (hopefully without losing luggage), but leaders have to license this sort of behavior. If creative members of staff feel as though senior leadership doesn't promote creative expression or empower them to do fun things at work then it is virtually impossible to create an inspiring environment.

Yet we rarely take the same approach in making our workplaces lively, engaging and interesting. It's like somehow we came to believe that as we get older we stop wanting to have fun.

## Why not...

- ▶ Create an inter-departmental competition, accessible to all staff members. The “Office Olympics” is always a great place to start, but the more creative – and applicable to daily routine – the competition, the better
- ▶ Identify the four funniest, most creative people in your team and buy take them out to a lunch where they brainstorm ways to spice up the office
- ▶ Have a “funny hat” day, but don’t tell the students. No, seriously – why not?

The best and brightest are not the ones ascending through the ranks.

### 08 ▶ Compelling Careers

The policy and procedures that guide promotion, and the presence of a clear path for ascension through the ranks, have a massive shaping effect on culture. This needs to be examined in two areas: firstly the process and considerations surrounding promotion decisions; and, secondly, the structure and accessibility of the career path itself.

To turn to the first question, talented employees – like most people – expect to be considered for promotion on their merits and their capacity to effectively discharge the responsibilities of the role. Few things will send talent packing faster than the promotion of non-leavers above leaders within the sector.

It is interesting for education leaders to consider what their employees would declare to be the “rule for promotion” in their school. For example, would they say, “you just need to be around for 10 years”? Or perhaps, “you need to be well connected with so and so”? While many leaders would reject the proposition that nepotism or politics guide some decisions within their organisation, there is ample, disturbing evidence to suggest that education in particular suffers from promotion not being on the grounds of talent.

In non-teaching, professional, degree-qualified occupations there is a clear correlation between how people score on achievement and aptitude tests and their level of earning. That is, smart, talented people get the most promotions and earn the most. In teaching, however, studies have found no demonstrable correlation between aptitude, achievement and earnings (in fact, the only correlation is a slightly negative correlation, with people who score lower earning slightly more).<sup>24</sup>

This should be of real concern to education leaders as it is compelling evidence that **the best and brightest are not the ones ascending through the ranks**. Clearly, more needs to be done to create a system where talented staff are recognised through promotion.

A further challenge in retaining younger staff is that expectations around promotion and progression are experiencing temporal compression. That is, people want to be promoted faster. There are a variety of useful approaches to this issue. We all know how damaging it can be to promote someone above their skill level, so consider instead creating new leadership positions for people with slightly less experience. The complex nature of the modern school provides many opportunities for new areas of leadership that do not require 10 years of teaching experience.

For example, young talent could be provided with opportunities to guide technology implementation within their faculty or stage. Other opportunities may arise in the need for updating of programs and pedagogical practice to align with best practice. These ‘side-ways ladders’ of career progression provide talented teachers with ongoing challenge, stimulation and development opportunities and thus curb tendencies to go looking for such things outside the education sector.

To move to the second issue, the career path itself needs to be re-thought. For starters, leaders need to build career paths that keep talented teachers teaching. In Australia, the highest teaching salaries (of around \$70-75k) can be achieved within about 10 years of entering the profession. **Most upwards movement then requires people to assume administrative or managerial responsibilities. For a young, ambitious person – who really wants to teach – this is a huge barrier to staying in education.**

Private sector organisations have faced similar situations and found instructive answers.

Most upwards movement then requires people to assume administrative or managerial responsibilities. For a young, ambitious person – who really wants to teach – this is a huge barrier to staying in education.

Managers were made to proactively seek out their team members and engage in one-on-one conversations about their individual career action plan.

Consider Microsoft, who faced an analogous problem, with young, talented software developers reaching a ceiling in their careers that meant to progress further they had to assume management positions. This meant less writing of new programs and more managing of people. Promoting people in this way had three damaging results: firstly, it sucked talented developers out of development, where they were most valuable to the company; secondly, management suffered because the people that were promoted were the best developers, not the best managers; and thirdly it caused attrition because ultimately these developers didn't sign up to manage people, they signed up to develop software.

Microsoft's solution was the "dual-career paths" model, which has been widely copied by other organisations. Within development teams, they created two 'streams', one for developers, and one for managers. The first few steps at the entry level were common to both streams, however when a certain level was reached staff were given a choice as to which stream they wanted to pursue. Those who chose the 'management' stream would enter positions of management and spend less time coding and more time working with people. Those that chose the development option would assume only nominal management duties, and would spend the majority of time designing software.

Both streams offered the potential to progress, with promotion resulting in more pay and more responsibility. Both streams also offered a compelling 'career structure', with increases in status and importance within the organisation as you ascended, more opportunity for conceptual and strategic input being offered to those higher up, and, of course, better car spaces!

The model was win-win. It meant that people gravitated towards jobs that matched their skill sets and their passions, increasing the per-person productivity. Additionally, quality software development talent was retained in positions where it was most needed, and the overall quality of management was improved by not putting non-managers in management positions.

Perhaps the most crucial part of this model (which exists in patchwork form in some parts of the education sector) was the way it was managed. **Managers were made to proactively seek out their team members and engage in one-on-one conversations about their individual career action plan.** Although it is common practice in virtually every industry in the world for managers to schedule regular time with their team to discuss their career, this practice has not made the transition to education. As such, many young teachers feel lost, like their career has no clear and inspiring path.

Education leaders are the ones responsible for taking control of the career paths within their institution. They must work hard to promote a meritocracy that offers opportunity to the brightest talent, and be creative in manufacturing clear and compelling career paths tailored to the skill sets of their best staff. It is only by doing this that schools can hope to keep talent within their ranks for extended periods, rather than have them leave seeking opportunity and promotion elsewhere.

## Why not...

- ▶ Develop two new positions in your school that sit between senior management positions and junior positions, and are suitable for talented young people to own. Initial suggestions include overseeing implementation of technology, or coordinating staff learning opportunities
- ▶ Draw your organisational structure and examine the key requirements for each position of leadership. Look for places where young talented staff can be given opportunities for promotion that won't see them out of their depth but will allow them to experience a leadership and management position
- ▶ Create some clear competencies that each position requires and be sure to select appropriately when it comes promotion time. There is not an organisation in the world free from internal politics, but transparency is the first step towards minimising perceptions of nepotism that undermine meritocracies and turn off talent.
- ▶ Conduct a focus group with young staff exploring their demands around career progression and assessing their perceptions of your promotion policies
- ▶ Seriously – if you want to see how cool you can make a classroom and how much fun you can have while learning and being productive, give yourself a real treat and get the StartSmart guys out for a lesson or three! [www.startsmart.com.au](http://www.startsmart.com.au)

Crucially, leaders must be willing to encourage (and at times, force) others to accept and embrace change, also.

## 09 ▶ Perpetual Innovation

The primary characteristic that makes talented staff such a valuable asset is their innovative approach to work. They take creative approaches to problem solving, look for new ways of performing old tasks, and are constantly looking for 'a better way'. Therefore you only retain (and get the most out of) talented staff if you embrace structures for innovation and configure your organisation in a way that is responsive to change and new ideas.

The first thing leaders need to do to encourage innovation is to make a clear statement of its value, and the easiest way to send a signal of value is to commit resources. In this instance, we would argue the most appropriate resource is not money, but is rather time. Too often, schools use scarcity of time to roadblock initiatives that would encourage innovation. But in reality, the only way to encourage innovation is to structure innovation time into the regular working week.

Secondly, leaders need to create a forum for sharing of innovative ideas. Consider a great example from the private sector, the IBM Innovation Jam. In this forum – actually a digital forum – employees, clients, consultants, and even family and friends of employees are encouraged to offer ideas about new products and services. Nothing is 'off the table' – participants can be as open and critical as they like, provided they offer some sort of idea for improvement. Senior IBM leaders look at the output of such sessions, create an action list and delegate key changes down to passionate, energetic team members who can make the changes happen.

Such models for the free exchange of ideas are instructive for educational leaders.

Finally, it is all well and good to encourage new thinking and innovation, but if schools remain fundamentally change-averse, talented staff will still be banging their heads against the proverbial wall. If we truly want schools to attract talented teachers, then leaders must be willing to adapt to the changes that are suggested.

**Crucially, leaders must be willing to encourage (and at times, force) others to accept and embrace change, also.** We have already outlined the reality that leaders face change averse, often-older teachers standing in the way of change. Leaders must take responsibility for inspiring these people and motivating them to action.

Consider schools' approaches to integrating technology in the classroom, an area where leaders can really drive change. Despite growing pressure at an institutional and student level to embrace more technology, schools are a long way behind the curve. This lag is not because leaders do not think technology is important, nor because there are inadequate resources. It is simply because leaders have not yet done enough to make the case for, and break down the aversion to change and motivate people to action.

Making our schools more innovative places that are open to change will not only improve attraction and retention of talented staff, it will improve the quality of education by preventing stagnation and keeping schools of the leading edge.

## Why not...

- ▶ Set aside one of your professional development days for innovation. Spend the early morning with an innovation expert talking about structures for creativity and innovation, and the late morning with a process expert talking about turning innovative ideas into everyday practice. Then spend the afternoon brainstorming ideas for the future of your school. Don't leave until you have five clear ideas for change for the better and a first step for each
- ▶ Make your staff meetings less about procedural matters and reporting of what's going on, and more about ideas, change and innovation
- ▶ Get the staff on Facebook, or even your own intranet if you have one. Build a group for your staff on this platform where they can upload and share ideas on a regular basis. If you need someone to help you with the technology – trust me – ask your youngest teacher!
- ▶ Schedule time in every week for the discussion of one new idea. The idea could be generated through a 'drop-box', or better in a group brainstorm facilitated by a member of staff passionate about innovation. Aim to keep staff constantly in the loop about the progress on each of the new ideas

The culture change process can be fast-tracked by adopting models of recruitment that help get more talent into the system, faster.

It is well documented that the more competitive a system of entry, the more highly valued employees will perceive their position.

## 10 ▶ Active Recruitment

Smart people flock. One of the upsides of attracting and keeping talented people is that other talented people will be keen to work with them. Consider Google's instructive recruitment policy: "if you're smart, we're hiring".

**The culture change process can be fast-tracked by adopting models of recruitment that help get more talent into the system, faster.** In this regard, education leaders can learn extensively from other sectors that have effectively utilised a range of measures to rapidly increase their intake of talent and their access to the best graduates. Such measures will help expedite the culture change process and also provide an excellent platform for ongoing recruitment of the top talent.

Consider GAP programs, for instance. The popularity of GAP year programs has exploded over the last few years, as many high school students are interested in a one-year experience directly after completing year 12 and before beginning tertiary study. The Australian Defense Force has recently implemented such a strategy with great success.<sup>25</sup>

Some schools have begun to offer part-time or full time positions to talented students who would like to return to complete a GAP Year 13 in a particular area (EG. sport, music, senior student mentoring). If combined with a certificate in education, such a program could be classified as a traineeship and even receive government funding. A GAP program allows students to taste educational work without the risk of investing a significant amount of time into university study.

Using slightly different models, accountancy firms have attracted talent through cadetships and internships in which students combine work with the firm with their undergraduate degree. Firms also generally contract interns to work within the organisation for a number of years after the completion of their training. This structure is effective in attracting top employees early.

Schools could implement a similar model whereby each year they take on at least one teaching intern. The school would provide a 1-2 day job and pair the intern with a mentor. Schools that are able could go so far as paying university fees or providing other benefits such as a laptop computer. This would be a highly competitive package.

Law firms take a slightly different approach through clerkships. Firms offer final year law students an opportunity to work in the firm over the summer holidays. From this selected talent pool the firm can then choose those best suited to join the firm as graduates in the following year.

Education leaders could adopt a similar model by offering high quality university students the chance to complete work experience or for education students to complete the teaching practicum requirements of their course at their school. This allows schools to watch the quality of potential candidates and actively seek out the best fits for the school.

The real value of these programs is that they offer a "tailored taste". We must be realistic in our assessment here: if 25% of young staff are leaving, some are leaving simply because they don't like teaching. A benefit of these GAP programs and internships is that they offer potential teachers a taste of the job, which will help them make better decisions about whether it is the right career for them.

A side benefit of such programs is that they increase competition for placements. **It is well documented that the more competitive a system of entry, the more highly valued employees will perceive their position.**

Finally, educational leaders should begin to broaden the base of recruitment. Just as teachers learn a skill set that makes them highly valuable in other professions, other professions build skills that could make people great teachers. Education leaders should start considering sources of great teachers other than education graduates and other schools. Building a strong relationship with universities and private sector organisations would be a good start, and being open to the possibility that talented teachers might arrive without a teaching degree is also necessary.

25 See <http://www.defencejobs.gov.au/ADFGapYear/>

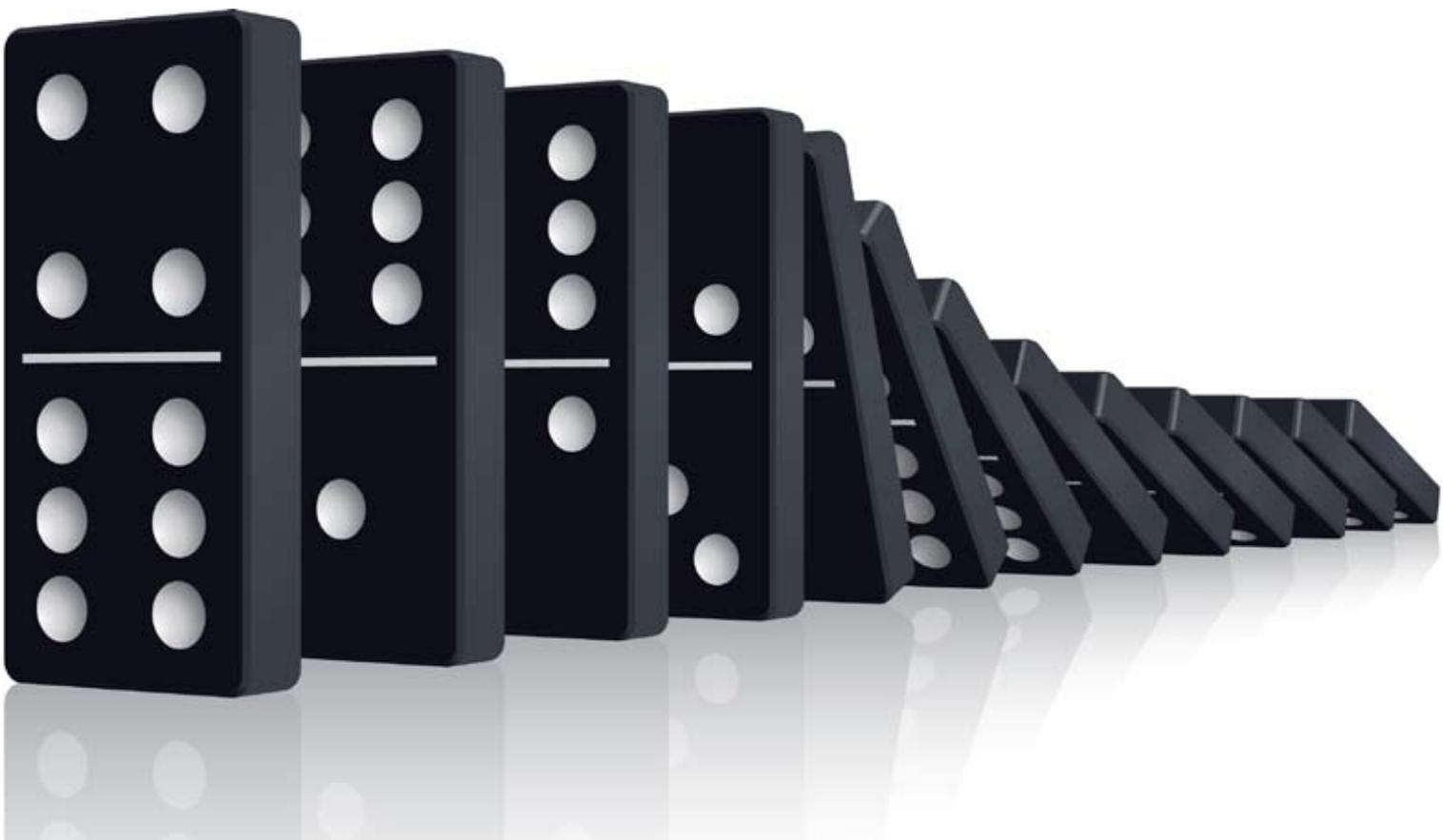
## Why not...

- ▶ Organise a lunch with your most talented Year 12 students and ask them what they want to do when they leave school. Ask them if they'd consider teaching – and if not, why not?
- ▶ Get together with your top staff members whose background is not teaching. Find out what got them interested in making the switch to education. Smart people flock – ask them if they have people they know who would be a valuable addition to your team
- ▶ Approach a university and look into the possibility of a talent partnership where you accept final year education students for internships or clerkships. Find a passionate staff member who would be an inspirational mentor, create a plan, then take them to the meeting with the Dean of the Faculty

## How can leaders begin to implement these approaches in their school?

The above ten strategy areas are by no means exhaustive, but they offer a clear and compelling vision for the first steps in building attractive, engaging and inspiring workplaces. We would offer educational leaders a three-step call to action in starting this process:

- 01 ▶ **Do a culture audit of the school:** The first step in any change process is to acknowledge the reality of the current situation. A simple strategy would be to give the school culture a rating out of 10 for each of the strategy areas above.
- 02 ▶ **Choose one tactical approach to promote for the next term:** In order to change culture, school leaders must choose a number of 'wedges' to jam into the perpetuating cycle of school culture in order to bring about change. We highly recommend leaders lead in the areas they are most passionate about. Leaders should also expect strong resistance to change, but must be confident that they can make an enormous difference if they keep pushing.
- 03 ▶ **Once one strategy is up and running, attempt to implement the next:** Each strategy will play a crucial role in shifting the workplace culture and turning the school into a place that will retain talent. Don't let momentum drop, don't rest on your laurels, and don't get disheartened when people don't instantly share your vision. If you don't take up this process, no one else will.



## Practice (Part 2):

### Develop a Compelling Employer BRAND

While the focus of this paper is building cultures, not brands, it is worth touching on what follows culture change. After shifting the day-to-day reality of teaching, leaders must then cement that positive change by creating a compelling employer brand that represents that positive culture in the labour market and draws talented people towards education.

Your employer brand is the sum total of everything everyone says about you when you are not there. Branding is something most associate with selling a product. Oversupply creates the need for differentiation through branding, a concept we are familiar with in consumer markets where companies go to great lengths to build sharply positioned brands that set them apart from the competition. A similar imperative has arisen in employment markets.

Whilst the concept of employer branding may be foreign to the education sector, it is time for education leaders to understand and embrace the idea. An in-depth discussion on this issue will eventually be needed – probably after some serious culture change efforts have been undertaken, and an authentic brand becomes available.

At this stage, however some key points to consider in relation to employer branding for schools are:

- 01 ▶ **Brands are Built From the Inside, Out:** The problem with previous marketing campaigns encouraging talent to enter education is that they have consisted of a catchy slogan, and no real change. Employer branding is not mere spin. Rather, it begins with the reality of the building attractive school cultures, and *then* representing this clearly in the employment market (hence the focus of this paper on culture change). Branding from the inside out is authentic and results in employees finding alignment between the brand they were sold and their experience day-to-day.
- 02 ▶ **Great Brands Tell Stories:** The greatest brands on the planet tell powerful stories about their company and employees. Google declares that employees are highly innovative and involved in work that is reshaping the world. In Australia, Macquarie Bank has developed a brand of excellence and incredible personal success, dubbed the 'millionaires factory.' The ADF have recently worked hard at communicating a compelling brand, portraying messages of excitement, mateship and career opportunities. A compelling brand involves tapping into these stories.
- 03 ▶ **There Are Many Strong Education Brand Stories:** Education is in a position to carve out a unique and powerful brand story. Some elements of the education story could include

**A story of Contribution** – Education is one of the most important enterprises of our time. Talent is invited to take part in the activity of shaping our future leaders and making Australia a clever, competitive and creative nation.

**A story of Innovation** – Our institutions of learning are home to the greatest learners on the planet. Schools are structures flooded with new thinking, where intelligent ideas are implemented rapidly. Our schools embrace change, innovate and constantly look for exciting ways of developing young people.

**A story of Excellence** – Schools are places for the best of the best. Being exceptional is encouraged and rewarded, high-performance is respected, and the team supports each other in pushing the limits.

**A story of Opportunity** – Schools are places where opportunities abound. Professional development and mentoring are part of daily school life. Promotion and challenge are possibilities for all who are able, dedicated and searching for the next step. Employment opportunities have the flexibility to be shaped to fit the individual.

These are powerful and compelling brand stories that will help attract talent. Different schools will build on these broad stories or emphasise certain aspects more than others in order to best represent their internal culture. Educational leaders should be able to articulate their employer brand message and be able to draw clear links from each story to structural elements of the school culture they are building.

## Concluding Remarks

It is time for change. Our country is staring down the barrel of a teacher shortage that will seriously impede our capacity to educate the next generation of Australian children. For too long, leaders have been content to lobby for change at the top. But now the time has come to implement real, substantive change on the ground. It is up to the education leaders who occupy positions of authority – who have the resources and the resolve – to take responsibility, assume an orientation for action, and make change happen.

Great leaders believe it is possible for tomorrow to be better than today, and that they have a role in making that happen. Now, more than ever, our education system needs those great leaders to once again step forward and make their mark through courageous leadership, innovation and change.

The strategies presented in this paper represent only the tip of the iceberg. Ultimately, it will be education leaders themselves who come up with the best solutions to the challenges facing education.

The time to start is now. Go forth and act!

