

FIRST THINGS FIRST

KEEPING YOUR CLASSICAL
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ON TRACK



KATHLEEN F. KITCHIN

First Things First

*Keeping Your Classical Christian School
on Track*

Kathleen F. Kitchin



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For resources & additional information on *First Things First: Keeping Your Classical Christian School on Track*, please visit my blog at ccontrack.com.

Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
Introduction	xi
Chapter 1 – Your School’s Vision	1
Chapter 2 – Your School’s Culture in the Midst of Culture	15
Chapter 3 – Your School’s Board	29
Chapter 4 – Your School’s Administrators	51
Chapter 5 – Your School’s Faculty & Staff	85
Chapter 6 – Your School’s Curriculum	99
Chapter 7 – Your School’s Parents	131
Chapter 8 – Your School’s Students	147
Chapter 9 – Your School’s Feeder Churches	159
Chapter 10 – Your School’s Community	175
Chapter 11 – Your School’s Volunteers	177
Chapter 12 – Your School’s Alumni & Donors	181
<i>Epilogue</i>	185
<i>Appendix</i>	187
<i>Resources</i>	235
<i>Credits</i>	243

Introduction

As Classical Christian Education (CCE) has spread in the United States (and beyond) over the past 25-plus years, most of it is strong, staying on the tracks, and functioning well, praise God, with children and their parents delighting in a beautiful, good, and true learning environment with Jesus Christ at the center. As with any organization or church or family or child, however, habits can emerge over time that can lead us to wander somewhat from our destination and, if unchecked, can begin to run us off the rails. No school desires to wander or run off track. But it happens. Much of this book explores how that wandering begins. What are the red flags that can warn us of danger ahead? How do we *recognize* red flags? How can we *identify* those red flags? How can we *act on* those red flags to avoid running off the rails? As we seek God's best, we will want to know.

After more than 20 years as an educator, I am more passionate than ever about Classical Christian Education. I have taught in public school, a national tutoring center, community college, homeschool, CCE private school, and CCE homeschool tutorials. In the present educational climate, I am more convinced than ever that CCE is one of the ancient ways that God entreats us to follow.

My journey through this topic of keeping *first things first* so that classical Christian schools can keep on track began when my former boss told me I should write this book. I declined, but four years later, the Lord made it clear: I was to write this book and I dared not refuse. This book has been prayed over every step of the way, and the Lord has introduced me to marvelous educators, board members, & pastors to whom I am indebted.

In the scope of this book, I have not sought to exhaustively interview hundreds of schools. The Lord led me first to professors at Grove City College (GCC) in Pennsylvania who founded and teach the classical Christian education minor. As far as I know, GCC is one of the few colleges that teach CCE. From there, I began to interview several classical Christian schools around the United States that are applying the model well, and I am sure there are hundreds more who are doing the same. These leaders shared generously with me what the Lord has shown them. I enjoyed learning from them, and I have shared in these pages their wisdom.

In the scope of this book, I did not exhaustively interview hundreds of educators. One does not need to siphon all a patient's blood to determine if there are problems. One takes a sample. I interviewed a sample. I interviewed teachers whom the Lord brought to me. These teachers are top-drawer, invested, hard-working educators. These interviews often brought us into the valley of pain and problems. I was blessed to hear their stories and to learn how the Lord redeemed their personal pain with His balm of Gilead. At some of their schools, the cure came; at others, the cure may be yet around the corner. I have recorded in these pages their wisdom.

As I have embarked on this book-writing journey, my consistent prayer to the Lord has been Your will, Your way, Your words. All errors are mine.

The following chapters include interviews with people who have worked at schools and have experienced red flags and interviews with heads of schools who proactively establish means to discern red flags to keep their classical Christian schools on track. Chapters range from your school's vision to your school's culture in the midst of culture, your board of directors, administrators, faculty & staff, curriculum, parents, students, feeder churches, community or area, volunteers, and finally your alumni & donors. My assertion is *To avoid running off the rails, classical Christian schools need to keep first things first and to recognize, identify, and act upon red flags.*

In what ways do schools typically run off the track? There are usually four kinds of deviating from the tracks:

- 1) Running off the track, but do not know it due to inexperience/blind spots,
- 2) Running off the track, but do not know it due to pride,
- 3) Running off the track, and know it but suppress the truth, or
- 4) Running off the track, know it, and humbly desire to change.

Firstly, some schools are running off the track but do not know it due to inexperience or legitimate blind spots. Many of us were not trained under the Trivium model and are learning in great gulps; others are now teaching who grew up under the model but may need to sip their teacher training in increments to understand more about the how's & why's of CCE teaching. Resources are available, including annual conferences offered on the Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS) website and the Society for Classical Learning (SCL) website, as well as articles, books, & websites, several of which are noted in the Resource section of this book.

Secondly, some schools are running off the track but do not know it due to pride. Are we feeling deep pleasure from being “king of the hill, top of the heap”? Did we begin our school in utter dependency upon God and upon daily prayers, and now that we are more independent, have we said, essentially, we can do this by ourselves? Are we remembering God? Are we praying for the Holy Spirit's help and guidance? Is God actively, daily acknowledged as the Author of any success we have?

Yet a third way to risk running off the tracks is for schools to know it – but suppress it. In nautical parlance, we intend justly to perform *damage control*. What often happens, though, is a problem may be denied and then covered up, and eventually gets worse. It pops up elsewhere increasingly until no “whack-a-mole” mallet can keep it down. Perhaps one fear is “wanting to keep a reputation to keep students.” God says if we have sinned against others, we need to confess our sins and bring our deeds into the light at church, with the board of directors, with our administrators and faculty/staff, with parents, & students, as necessary. John 3:20-21 says, “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and to cover them with His blood. God is in charge and He forgives. He redeems. He heals. He restores.

The fourth and final way of running off the tracks is knowing it – and humbly desiring to change.

God is a God of grace. As consultant Patrick Lencioni says in his book *The Advantage*, an organization can grow in “Smarts” over time, but what is more difficult is organizational health.¹ This book seeks biblical health. If we have not sinned, but made mistakes and poor choices, we need to own that. If we have sinned, we need to confess. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” God restores the years that the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25). We can trust in Him.

What exactly is the track we are trying to keep our schools on? The track is *God and the Bible*. The track is *classical Christian education*. There is debate and discussion on this very term at present, but essentially the track is *classical*, that is, it follows the Greek & Roman models of learning according to the Trivium (grammar, logic, & rhetoric) roughly corresponding in age to elementary school, middle school, & high school and focuses on the best that has been “thought and said,” composed, created, & discovered – the classics. It is *Christian* in that all subjects have Christ at center, sovereignly integrating them all, Christ whose finished work has brought salvation and abundant life. It is *education* in that it seeks to “lead out” (from Latin, *educare*) as it teaches students made in the image of God to learn how to learn so they may become life-long learners to the glory of God, and provides them tools that have been lost since the seismic shift in educational goals and practices in the mid-1800s and thereafter.

This is not a how-to book on starting a classical Christian school; however, interviews with heads of healthy, on-the-tracks schools reinforced for me that the cornerstone truth is to keep *first things first*. What are those first things? In general, first things are the most important things. They are prime. The Latin word *primus* and Greek word *protos* mean “first” and *proto-* means “original or early stage.” How you establish those first things in the early stages of your school is critical, so this book will identify strong, stable foundations, while not being a manual *per se*. We will also examine how strong, stable foundations help keep schools on track and explore strategies to keep those first things from slipping to third or fourth place, or even dropping off the radar.

¹ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 6.

In addition, this is not a recipe book. Each classical Christian school has its own “soil” in which God has planted it. The beauty of how different all our schools can be, yet so alike in our desire to bring glory to God and to love our neighbor while pursuing education classically, can inspire us all. My focus is on *principles*. My prayer is that this book will help continue or start conversations that will help schools keep first things first and keep their schools on track as we fix our eyes on Jesus.

Each chapter of this book contains the following elements, modeled structurally on how Jesus spoke to the churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira (Revelation 2:1-7; 12-17; 18-29).

- Recognition/Root Words of Key Terms/Discussion of Topic
- Case Studies (in-depth interviews of individuals/schools)
- Common Red Flags
- Possible Trends (some chapters)
- Sober Reflection Questions (for the individual & for the group)
- Getting Back on Track
- Healthy School Distinctives
- Setting a Goal/Expressing a Desire
- Encouragement

May God lead us as we endeavor to keep first things first and stay on His track.



As the manuscript for this book was headed to the publisher, the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, changing our lives forever. Everyone homeschools now. Parents are stressed. Students are stressed. Administrators are stressed. Teachers and staff are stressed. Nothing appears stable as people are suffering, jobs are lost, parents are stretched, video lessons are created, students are struggling, eyes are worn from hours fixed on screens. Everyone is tired, exhausted, in fact. My eyes flood with tears about these struggles. My heart goes out to parents, to administrators, to teachers & staff, and to students who are wrestling with something we could never have imagined.

School after school is heroically salvaging a ragged school year. Is it perfect? No. Is God being honored? Yes. Parents, administrators, teachers & staff, supporting churches, and dear children are being reached out to as we all strive to keep first things first. Honor God. Honor man.

In CCE, we have always been rebuilding the ruins. Now we are all compelled to build with unfamiliar tools, but like Nehemiah rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls with trowel & sword, we need to keep our focus on our mission. Our stability has come and will continue to come from God.

Sections entitled “Staying on Track during a Crisis” have been added to some chapters.

This book seeks to encourage all in our endeavors to keep our classical Christian schools on track.

Chapter 1

Your School's Vision

“Where there is no vision, the people perish...”

Proverbs 29:18

*“Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.”*

Psalm 127:1a

Latin students at classical Christian schools recite, “*video, videre, vidi, visus*. To see.” These young students have learned that to have *vision* means “to see.” The word *school* itself derives from the Greek *skhole*, meaning “leisure, philosophy, a place where lectures are given.” So, we find a place, hire some teachers, enroll a few students, gather textbooks, “stock up on pasta,” and open our doors – right? But what is our purpose? What do we see?

Dr. Robert Godfrey, president emeritus of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, says that American education has changed in its mission over the centuries. In the 1600s & 1700s, the mission was to be “pious, moral, and utilitarian”; in the 1800s, it truncated to being “moral and utilitarian”; and finally in the 1900s & 2000s, it was reduced to being starkly “utilitarian.”¹ We have indeed cut the moorings, yet classical Christian education (CCE) seeks to return the school to the Rock and not merely to be a place for lectures.

The founders of a school have a spark to start something that has not been done before, to bring the classical Christian model to their area, to create a school where they can send their *own* children and grandchildren. They desire to reestablish the pious and moral aspects of education because there often is no viable alternative. God paves the path for like-minded parents to gather to create a school, establish a board of directors, hire teachers, and perhaps even design a website and most definitely brochures that share the school's purpose and hopes.

But you may be saying, “Yes, yes, we have all that on our website and in our brochures and we're all set,” but it is interesting to see that many schools may have the vision, mission, & values on the website, but – that's where it stays – or in the brochure, but – that is only for the new parents and new teachers. *The vision can often become a distant memory*. If we want integration, we need to be sure first, that the vision is from God; and second, that all roads at the school are leading back to it. How we treat a visitor in the front office or how we discipline a child – all need to trace back to “What are our vision/mission/values?” In our ever-more fragmented culture, we, too, can slip into saying X on our website, but doing Y in actual, everyday life. We need to be consistent. And that is the intention of this book. How do we make more conscious not only *what* we say we are doing, but actually *how* we are doing it? It will not be done perfectly, but if we write a vision and then place it far from our eyes, we run the risk of losing the very school we love.

Typically, organizations have vision, mission, & core values statements that guide their work. Oftentimes these three terms do not have consistent definitions in the business world. Using their Latin (L.) root words, these terms mean the following:

¹ Dr. Robert Godfrey (lecture, Rockbridge Academy, Millersville, Maryland, c. 2007).

Your School's Vision

- *Vision* – the broad picture (<L. *video, videre* to see)
- *Mission* – what God is sending you to do (<L. *mitto, mittere* to send)
- *Values* – principles or standards of behavior (<L. *valere* to be worth)

VISION STATEMENT

Keeping your classical Christian school on track is keeping first things first, and Step #1 of those first things is *vision*. Assuming they have counted the cost before building the tower, the founders need to have a *picture* of what they desire for these students. God says that where there is no vision, the people perish. If a school is formed and there is no vision, the people assembled to form this school will eventually disappear. Vision rivets people to persevere toward a goal that is unseen, yet worthwhile.

Regarding a school's vision, several questions arise:

- What is a vision-caster?
- Who is doing the seeing?
- What are they seeing? What exactly is in the vision?
- Who or What is the source of that vision?
- How far down the track are they seeing?
- Who is helping others to see this vision?
- How do you write a vision statement for your school?
- Do vision statements make for noble artifacts, doomed to darkness in file cabinets or, worse, just passed by as part of the furniture, nothing important?

First of all, what is a vision-caster? According to Dr. Nelson Granade, a vision-caster is “someone who can see beyond what is and paint a *picture* of it so others can see it and move toward it [*italics mine*].”² Secondly, who is doing the seeing? Just a man? Just a woman? The vision needs to be prayed for and the source of the vision must be God Himself, or the school will be built on sand. Founders can go on a retreat and devote much time to Scripture reading and prayer as they seek to establish the vision God will give them with the help of the Holy Spirit. As they pray, they can ask God to tell them what the desired goals are, and also what the mission and core values of this school should be. These children will not remain children. As Mr. Steven Sheets, veteran school administrator in North Carolina for 26 years, says, we need to “start with the end in mind.”³ We desire to educate the man, the woman; therefore, the vision must see far down the track and address what kind of men and women God desires to develop. Start to see the destination right at the very beginning. Write these golden nuggets of wisdom down in language that captivates parents' hopes for their children as they seek to raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. This will be your vision statement. *This is the first of six foundational documents.*

The *vision statement* should be neither too short nor too long. A single sentence will not do. A concise but nearly full page that includes goals for graduates, goals for faculty & staff, goals for parents, and goals for the community with which they interface should suffice. Define the terms used; at minimum, include a definition of *Christian, classical, Christ-centered, and Trivium*. Each aspect of the vision needs to be rooted in Scripture and needs to be explained in word pictures that captivate the heart & mind.

This vision is one of the most important undertakings parents do – raise the next generation for the Lord! A vision statement “looks forward and creates a mental *image* of the ideal state that the [school] wishes to achieve” through God's grace. “It is inspirational and aspirational and should challenge employees [*italics mine*].”⁴ It is inspirational in that it urges its adherents to embrace it and do it. It is aspirational in that it can “never be fully achieved,” and we must rely on God.

² Dr. Nelson Granade, *Wilkes Journal-Patriot*, September 23, 2015.

³ Steven Sheets, interview by Kathleen F. Kitchin, Greenville, North Carolina, September 5, 2018.

⁴ SHRM, “Mission & Vision Statements: What is the difference between mission, vision and values statements?” Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), March 5, 2018, <http://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-qa/pages>.

Your School's Vision

Questions to consider when drafting vision statements could include:

- Most importantly, what does God want our vision to be?
- What picture of a grown child are we oriented toward developing?⁵
- What situation are we seeking to solve?⁶
- Where are we headed?⁷
- If we achieved all strategic goals, what would our students look like 10 years from now? 30 years from now?" Sample vision statements may be found in the "Appendix" section of this book, but we will explore several, below. These vision statements vary in structure, but all provide word pictures to help their school *to see* the vision.

VISION STATEMENT EXAMPLES

Covenant Academy, Cypress, Texas

Character development at Covenant Academy in Cypress, Texas, covers six desired outcomes:

- 1) *Virtue*: Students will demonstrate high moral standards. They will recognize obedience as an expression of love for God and His word. They will honor God and those made in His image, and rightly order their affections. Students will study the Bible as our moral compass, and the representations of virtue in classical literature.
- 2) *Wisdom*: Students will think deeply, reason soundly, recognize the consequences of ideas, and make wise choices. Students will learn to make all thoughts captive to Christ and love what God loves.
- 3) *Eloquence*: Students will demonstrate fluent and persuasive speech. They will listen discerningly and speak winsomely in articulate defense of truth, goodness, and beauty.
- 4) *Balance*: Students will demonstrate well-rounded foundations. They will gain mastery of the liberal arts. They will learn grammar (the rules and structure of each subject), logic (the ability to understand the implications and build on the foundations of those rules), and rhetoric (the ability to present and defend their conclusions). Students will appreciate the connections between literature, arts, athletics, and the sciences, enabling them to pursue lifelong learning in areas of special interest and the ability to be conversant and competent in other fields.
- 5) *Literacy*: Students will demonstrate knowledge in a range of fields. They will cultivate a love of learning, and a love of the true, good and beautiful through studying a broad selection of great works of theology, literature, history, science, mathematics, music, and the visual arts.
- 6) *Servant Leadership*: Students will demonstrate the ability to humbly lead others. They will seek to imitate Christ who came to serve, not to be served, as they practice leadership qualities honed through character training, mentoring, service and daily discipleship."

I traveled to Richmond, Virginia, where I met with Mr. Keith Nix, head of Veritas School. A former businessman and passionate proponent of classical Christian education, he says it can be easy to transmit the vision and to have agreement upon what comprises a good education. Then, hopefully and prayerfully, the school community does a "deep dive" and "there's a point when the vision grabs you and as you go deeper, it only gets more rich and more beautiful. It alters your life." This is a key phrase that Nix used more than once – a *thick, rich community* – something he treasures & protects.

Veritas School, Richmond, Virginia

The Portrait of a Veritas Graduate

"Veritas faculty, staff, and parents seek to cultivate graduates who:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Your School's Vision

- Understand and believe the gospel, enjoying a growing faith in Jesus Christ
- Participate in the local body of Christ
- Study Scripture, pray, and serve faithfully
- Read deeply and charitably; reason truthfully and rigorously
- Speak and write with wisdom and eloquence
- Engage creation with wonder, pursuing beauty and working diligently
- Love and serve Christ the King, bringing *shalom* by sharing the gospel and acting for the good of others.”

What can be tragic, however, is that so often the vision statement gets put out of sight and, therefore, out of mind. Include this vision statement in your school handbook, newsletter, yearbook, assemblies, and graduation ceremonies. Read this vision at the first board meeting, the first administrators' meeting, and the first faculty meeting – every year. Pray you will follow it. A new school will need to hear this vision statement often; an older school will need to hear it often enough so that they will not forget or wander. Remember, there are new teachers every year who have never heard the vision articulated before, so devote time in new teacher training to state this vision, as well as your mission & values, and to explain each component in an engaging fashion. We need to keep in mind, however, our wording in this document. Dr. Mark Graham, professor of history at Grove City College and creator of their classical Christian education minor, says that “Schooling is not done by slogan. It takes years and years of being faithful, consistent, humble. When it fails, it is repentant.” This vision will be for the long haul.

MISSION STATEMENT

The second foundational document is a *mission statement* which “is a statement of why the [school] exists...the purpose states *why* the organization does the work it does, but does not define how that work is to be done [italics mine].”⁸ Mission comes from the Latin *mittere* “to send.” What has God sent you to do in your school in your community at this time in history? Questions to consider when drafting a mission statement could include:

- What is our school's purpose?
- Why does our school exist?

MISSION STATEMENT EXAMPLES

Below are several examples of mission statements from various schools throughout the country:

Covenant Academy – Cypress, Texas

- “*Mission:* Covenant Academy exists to serve Christ and His Kingdom by sharing the gospel and partnering with parents to train students by way of Scripture and the classical liberal arts:
- to be discerning, articulate followers of Jesus Christ;
- to be leaders who are equipped to honor and defend truth, goodness and beauty.”

Grace Classical Christian Academy – Granbury, Texas

- “*Mission:* To provide an excellent classical education founded upon a biblical worldview which instills a love of learning, the ability for children to know how to think, not what to think, and in all things to honor and glorify Jesus Christ.”

Veritas School – Richmond, Virginia

- “*Mission:* We exist to glorify God by cultivating students of wisdom and virtue through a Christ-centered, academically rigorous classical education. Our goal is to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and vision necessary to be effective leaders and servants for Christ in a wide variety of professions and vocations. We seek to raise up a generation of

⁸ Sharon Richmond, “Mission, Vision & Values Facilitation,” Graduate School of Stanford Business, accessed July 5, 2019, <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/alumni/volunteering/act/service-areas/mission-vision-values-facilitation>.

Your School's Vision

young people who have a genuine love of learning, who love Jesus Christ with all their hearts and minds, and who can articulate the Christian message with clarity, creativity, and power.”

The Geneva School – Orlando, Florida

- “*Mission*: The Geneva School seeks to provide students in grades K4-12 an extraordinary education, by means of an integrated curriculum, pedagogy and culture, both distinctly classical and distinctively Christian, that pursues goodness, truth and beauty in all spheres of life, while viewing these spheres as elements of a divinely ordered whole.”

The Geneva School used Patrick Lencioni’s *The Advantage*, a milestone that helped them explore the six questions of Lencioni’s “playbook” that he believes every effective organization should have.⁹

Six Critical Questions:

- 1) Why do we exist?
- 2) How do we behave?
- 3) What will we do?
- 4) How will we succeed?
- 5) What is most important right now?
- 6) Who must do what?”

For the coming year, Geneva School is rewriting their playbook somewhat, but it essentially remains the same. [See “Appendix” for sample entitled “Playbook 2017-2018 – The Geneva School Leadership Team.”]

CORE VALUES

The third foundational document is a *core values statement*. Core values are “The boundaries within which the school will operate in pursuit of its vision, values on which the school will never compromise and is willing to pay a price to uphold.”¹⁰ To be meaningful, values must be described in clear behavioral terms. The word *values* is from the Latin *valere*, meaning “be worth.” As you pursue the mission and vision that the Lord has given you, how or in what worthy manner you will pursue them? Will you pursue them with love or with impatience, with kindness or brusqueness, with faith or self-reliance? In other words, will you pursue the mission and vision from God with the fruit of the Spirit or with the dregs of a drained dictator? Each person is of *worth* and our values as a school either are respecting the worth of each person made in the image of God or they are riding roughshod over them. How is our faith coming out our fingertips? We are human and will fail in this, and that is why prayer and coming humbly before God each day individually and corporately is of vital importance. It is only with the power and enablement of the Holy Spirit that we can pursue our vision & mission with godly virtues & values.

When drafting *core values statements*, pray first asking God’s guidance and biblical direction. As you write, questions to consider might include:

- What values are unique to our school?¹¹
- What values should guide the operations of our school?¹²

CORE VALUES EXAMPLE (with Mission & Vision)

Hope Academy – Minneapolis, Minnesota

⁹ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 77.

¹⁰ Richmond, “Mission, Vision & Values Facilitation.”

¹¹ SHRM.

¹² Ibid.

Your School's Vision

- *Mission*
 - To foster hope in God within the inner-city neighborhoods of Minneapolis by providing youth with a remarkable, God-centered education.
- *Vision*
 - Believing that all children are created for God's glory and endowed by Him with an inalienable potential to acquire wisdom and knowledge, Hope Academy covenants with urban families to equip their children to become responsible, servant leaders of the 21st Century. Committed to the truth, discipline, and values of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Hope Academy pursues this aim by mobilizing educational, business, and community leaders towards the important goal of serving the children of Minneapolis with a remarkable education, permeated with a God-centered perspective. This inter-denominational school will seek to unleash kingdom citizens who work for justice, economic opportunity, racial harmony, hope for the family, and joy in the community.
- *Core Values*
 - The mission of Hope Academy is deeply rooted in the following core values:
 - *Redemption*: We are passionate about God's transformational work to redeem all things through the gospel of Christ.
 - *Relationships*: We believe in the necessity of building deep, authentic, loving relationships with one another.
 - *Radical Dependence*: We exercise a daily, moment by moment, radical dependence on God and His Word.
 - *Remarkable*: By God's power at work within us, we pursue excellence that goes above and beyond all that is expected or imagined."

Regarding core values, Hope Academy said they came up with a lengthy list, but knew that would not be most helpful, so they pared it down to 4, and suggest a number ranging from 3 to 7.

I smiled later as I transcribed this interview, for I observed their head of school returning consistently and naturally to Hope Academy's mission, vision, and values as he answered my questions. When I asked how their school manages so well in the inner city against such odds, he responded humbly, "Well, that would be our *radical dependence* on the Lord," their third core value. Throughout our interview, my questions invariably elicited replies that returned to Hope Academy's touchstone mission, vision, and values. [See more on Hope Academy in the Case Study at the end of this chapter.] Do we at our school know our mission so well that it is memorized and has indeed become a part of us? How about our vision? Our values? All roads in our schools must lead back to what God has provided as the vision, mission, & values for our school. As we stay on track with that *God-authored* calling, He will walk with us through the mountains & valleys of our journey.

In crafting (or redrafting) your vision, mission, and values, keep in mind the following:

1. Pray first, submitting all to Christ's authorship, not yours or what the school over in another town says or what sounds good and is convenient.
2. Consult excellent business manuals on these topics, but ensure that you are following Christ's path, not a man-made formula. (Man-made formulae often begin with "All you have to do is..." and a sense that the formula involves products rather than *people*.) Helpful books have been *Rocket Fuel* by Gino Wickman and Mark C. Winters, and Patrick Lencioni's *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* as well as his *The Advantage*.
3. "The words 'mission,' 'vision,' 'values,' 'purpose,' and even 'strategy' can hold very different meanings to different people. Each [school] must clarify what it means by each of these terms."¹³
4. Make certain the board of directors and head of school are in shared agreement for "a house divided cannot stand" (Matthew 12:25).
5. Bring the *best* of what your former career gave you whether it was the business world, military, etc., but be willing to excise that which is not helpful to the nurturing & admonishing of young souls. Again, we are working with people, not products.

¹³ Richmond, "Mission, Vision & Values Facilitation."

FIRST THINGS FIRST: KEEPING YOUR CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ON TRACK

Have you found yourself thinking any of these thoughts?

“We have been immersed in classical Christian education (CCE) for years and things seem to be going along well.”

“We are new to this model and things are—a bit bumpy, to be honest.”

“We have no CCE background, but do we ever LOVE classical Christian schooling!”

“We are in a classical Christian school, but I think we have wandered from our original philosophy and vision.”

“We are seeing red flags in our school and wonder how we can get back on track...”

Through God’s great provision, classical Christian schools have enjoyed a more than 25-year revival. Many schools apply classical Christian education well and are flourishing. Some schools are perhaps veering off track, while others are in imminent danger of running off the rails.

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