

Renewal & Advocacy Fuel: Leadership Lessons Along the Way

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Eric, age 4 1/2



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Some Key Questions

- How can I shift from *surviving* to *thriving*?
- How can I shift my focus from what's not working, to what I DO want?
- How can I step into my leadership?

What is a Leader?

- Anyone who wants to help others
- Knows how to draw on the intelligence that exists everywhere: organization, classroom, community.
- Acts as a steward of other people's creativity, gifts, wisdom. **Margaret Wheatley**
- Collaborative and flexible: we all have a piece of the puzzle. Everyone is contributing! We take turns leading.
- Sometimes the leader is the 5 year old in the room

Winnipeg: WOW Factors

- **Inclusive early childhood centre**
- ACL-MB Family Leadership Retreat
- School Transition: Collaborative school principal

Inclusive Early Childhood Centre

- Red flags – led us to an early diagnosis
- Integration facilitator, worked with autism consultant
- Included Eric in all activities with peers
- Proactive planning meetings

How do I shift from surviving to thriving?

- Lots of overwhelm
- New diagnosis, steep learning curve
- Work-related stress for both parents
- Not much sleep
- Extended family members ill

Begin to notice our inner conversations...

How do I move from focusing on what's not working, to focusing on what I want?

- Learning to notice our language patterns
- The power of metaphors
- The power of visual aids

Water Metaphors

- Salmon swimming upstream
 - Sink or swim
 - Shooting the rapids
 - Sucked under
 - Coming up for air
 - Paddling as fast as I can
- What are the metaphors in your life right now?

What do I want?

- Calm water - Clear, Quiet, Serene
- Smooth sailing
- Soothing sound of the trickle of water
- Breathe deeply, cool summer breeze
- Ripple effect

Are you picturing that?

Winnipeg: WOW Factors

- Inclusive early childhood centre
- **ACL-MB Family Leadership Retreat**
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ACL-MB Family Leadership Retreat

- Weekend retreat for families with children with special needs
- Respite
- Relaxed setting. Laughed, cried, silly skits, reflected on our lives

Outcomes of Leadership Retreat

- Energy to burn!
- Full of possibilities,
- Grateful
- ↓ isolation
- How can I step into my leadership?
- Connect to a larger conversation
- Ready to do some trailblazing

Winnipeg: WOW FACTORS

- Inclusive early childhood centre
- ACL-MB Family Leadership Retreat
- **School transition: collaborative school principal**

School Transition: Collaborative School Principal

- Language: work the muscle
- Listened deeply, Family Centered lens
- French immersion experiment
- ECE at school IEP meetings
- Collegial collaboration
- REAL BONUS: Community building, critical mass of 'an accepting culture' smoothed the transition to school and impacted other students

Trip to the legislature (yegisuture)

Sabrina & Eric 2003



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Toronto (2003-2006)

Challenges:

- new town, no extended family within 4000 km
- kids making new friends
- school refused special needs supports in French Immersion
- Exclusion, teasing, bullying
- Disclaimer!

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How can I focus on what I DO want?

- What **do** I want?
- Why is that important to me?
- What's good about this situation?
- What else can I do?

Toronto WOW Factors

- CL Toronto – Education Liaison
- Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education
- CL Toronto - Sibshops
- Extend-A-Family
- CL Ontario – *Creating Inclusive School Cultures Project*

Community Living Toronto

- Education Liaison
- Family centred planning – creative!
- Companion with a coaching style
- Strategy and debrief sessions
- Solution-focused
- Attentive listening
- Advice-free

(Some Advice on Advice)

What are some of the
ways you might?

(then be quiet and let the
person think about that!)

Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education

- Understand our rights
- Websites: school board inclusion policy
- HRC: Guidelines for Accessible Education
- Mentoring from experienced people
- Hear what other people are doing, gave me new ideas

A Big Lesson From Eric

(Sometimes the leader is an 8 year old who is late for school)

Community Living - Sibshops

- Stress relief for Sabrina
- Lots of fun & connected with kids who understood
- Gained a sense of voice
- Started to experience her own leadership:
 - in the classroom
 - on a conference panel

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Extend A Family

Mission: "to ensure people develop meaningful relationships and participate fully in the community"

- Family Centered – design around what you need
- Grade 3. Friendship Circle – play-based
- Grade 4. Friendship Circle Ambassadors. Learned rules to playground games and used them to connect kids on the playground.

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Reflecting Back

- What do I want?
 - Get through to the principal
 - Better social life for Eric
- How can I step into my leadership?
 - Find somebody who could influence the principal

Community Living Ontario

- *Creating Inclusive Schools* Project
- Multi-stakeholder consultation: Seven dimensions of diversity
- Impossible expectations we have of teachers
- Continuum of parents, teachers, schools
- We are all on an 'inclusion' road
- Each school is unique. None are perfect. Everyone was doing SOMETHING right!
- There are many ways to affect change

When we step into our leadership, who else benefits?

- Other parents who saw our vision for inclusion began to question the status quo
- Resources to the 3 teachers
- Other kids on the playground
- Wrote letters, shared documents, links

Take a moment to reflect on the things you do every day...Every time you followed the energy of YES, who else has benefited?

Gaia Centre for Work & Spirituality

- Declaration: get closure on that chapter of my life ... and ponder what's next
- How can I reconfigure my career so that I can keep doing the work I can't NOT do, and balance it with my own interests?
- Write some stories about life with Eric



New 5 Year Plan ☺

- Let's move back to BC
- Family wedding in BC May 18, interviews
- By June 1 contract signed
- By June 15 sold our house
- By August 1 we moved back to BC
- By October 1 Solution-Focused Coaching
- WHEW!! (The Universe loves speed).



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Vancouver (2006 to present)

Challenges:

- A move across the country and starting all over again!
- Kids making new friends
- New teacher who didn't 'get' inclusion
 - Eg. Spelling tests in the library with the EA

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Vancouver WOW Factors

- Principal with a vision for inclusion
(hint: I shopped around)
- Educational Assistant (French speaking) 3 years in a row!
- Occupational Therapist extraordinaire
- Friend 2 Friend Social Learning Society

What do I want?

- Influence the teacher about inclusion AND build a good relationship
 - Who else can do this? (EA, OT)
- Good social life for Eric
 - Who can do this? (Friend 2 Friend)

Advocacy & Leadership

In BC I've re-balanced my life

Manitoba nurtured me

Ontario tested me

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Outcomes

- I live the questions (coaching paradigm)
- ↓frustration, ↓anger, ↓despair
- ↑creativity, ↑results, ↑serenity
- **Accolade** letters to the school board
- Eric: better social life, better grades
- I have a huge chunk of my life back
- Trailblazing: First child in VSB with autism to take a Grade 6 class trip to Quebec for 8 days! (*It was their idea*).

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Les Dudes – Quebec 2008



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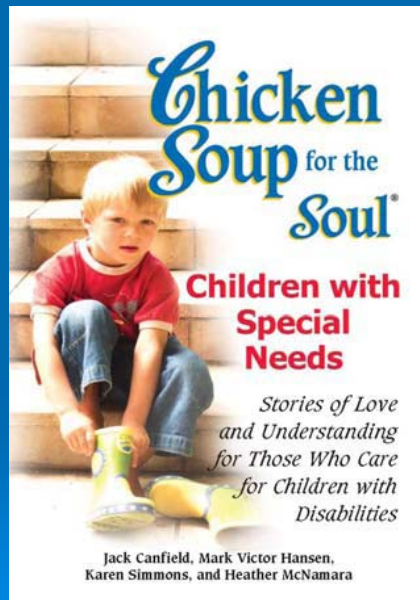
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Today

- New metaphors: I pilot my ship. I choose serenity, whatever the weather. ORCA.
- Coaching for Collaborative Leadership
 - People and organizations whose mission is to work for social wellness
 - Individuals: advocacy that builds bridges
 - Organizations: coaching approach with their employees & clients
 - Art & Science of Coaching: Fall 2008 Winnipeg
- CL-BC Innovations Grant – Leadership Development for Youth with ASD ... and

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Thank you



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