

## “When the Blizzard Hits”

Take a moment to notice that title: When the Blizzard Hits.

Just recently, a large blizzard hit our area, leaving stranded travelers, loss of electricity, and whiteout conditions. For a brief time, the situation was dire. Then, within a few hours, the sun was shining, the snow was melting, travelers were once again on their way, heat was restored to homes, and the situation improved.

Once again, let’s look at that title: When the Blizzard Hits. There is no “IF” there, but only the word, “WHEN.” It is not “IF the Blizzard Hits,” but “WHEN the Blizzard Hits.”

The same is true for the process of strategic planning as we coach through the design of priorities that will move a district on to excellence. The “blizzards” are going to hit. The pushback is going to occur. Those who are not aligned with the vision of the district are likely going to challenge the thinking used to prioritize strategies and initiatives.

The success during and following the blizzard can easily be attributed to the preparation prior to the blizzard. Is the generator full of fuel? Did I get the snow tires put on the truck? Is the firewood stacked and dry, ready to be used?

The same is true for the strategic planning process.

The following questions provide an opportunity for executive coaches to reflect on practices and hone their craft in order to continually support clients in preparing for the impending “storms”.

- Is the district leadership team clear on their “why” and are they able to articulate that with clarity to stakeholders?
- How has the district successfully sought input and feedback from stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees, during the process to ensure the plan “belongs” to the district, and possibly even to the community as a whole?
- What evidence is visible ensuring that the district “owns” the decisions regarding the choices of the priorities within the Strategic Plan?

- Who are the “champions” of the plan? Why are they willing to be “champions” of the plan? How might we coach in such a way that the willingness to serve as a “champion” spreads?

Anticipate the impending “blizzard” that is bound to arrive. Storms and challenges form the crucible for the triumph of a district or organization. The pivotal factor lies in the mindsets and outlooks adopted in advance. In navigating the strategic planning process, the district will likely encounter resistance along the way. Herein lies the opportunity for executive coaches to adeptly guide leaders, by skillfully challenging them to prepare with diligence and commitment before the storm, supporting them with tools and resources through the storm, and celebrating alongside them after they have weathered the storm.

*In good times, people listen to what you say.  
In difficult times, people watch what you do.*

Pressure test the plan.  
Remember that oaks grow  
strong in contrary winds  
and diamonds are made  
under pressure.

Peter Marshall

Times of great calamity and  
confusion have been productive  
for the greatest minds. The  
purest ore is produced from the  
hottest furnace. The brightest  
thunderbolt is elicited from the  
darkest storm.

Charles Caleb Colton

Storms make trees  
take greater roots.

A dove struggling in a  
storm grows stronger than  
an eagle soaring in the  
sunshine.

Matshona Dhliwayo