



Lessons Learned in 2020

January 4, 2021

A new year and new beginnings are always exciting for me, but I am not sure I ever have looked more forward to a new year like I do today. The start of a new year gives us an opportunity to reflect on the lessons from the prior year and leverage that learning as we move with hope, faith and anticipation of the year to come.

If 2020 were a book, it would be one filled with twists, trials, tragedies and triumphs. This time last year, no one had any idea of what we would face in 2020. I refuse to start 2021 by rehashing the events of last year because I, like many, would much rather close that book and put it on the shelf. However, I challenge each of you, before we put 2020 on the shelf, to extract the lessons you have learned and allow those lessons to inform your actions and mindset as we enter into 2021.

The 10 lessons I have learned are listed below. My goal is to reflect on these lessons throughout the month of January so that we can continue to grow together in 2021. Below are my thoughts on Lessons 1-3. We will go through Lessons 4-10 in subsequent Monday Messages.

1. **In every crisis, there is an opportunity to either focus on going through the crisis or growing through the crisis.**
2. **You must deal with reality and the conditions as they are, instead of longing for the way things used to be. Normal is nonexistent.**
3. **Your decisions are only as good and as sound as the information you have. Agility and flexibility will help to maintain your sanity.**
4. **Collaboration is key and communication is critical in a crisis.**
5. **Be proactive and be ready to punt.**
6. **Keep your eye on the ball. If the ball goes into the water – so must we.**
7. **Crisis may change our conditions, but it does not change our responsibility.**
8. **During uncertain times, our importance as educators and leaders is magnified and our consistency, confidence and mindset are critical.**
9. **Leaders and educators must be merchants of hope during the crisis.**
10. **What we do, what we say, what we don't do and what we don't say matters. And, in a crisis, it makes the difference.**

Lesson 1: In every crisis, there is an opportunity to either focus on going through the crisis or growing through the crisis.

When this pandemic hit, the uncertainty was overwhelming. So, I made a conscious decision to focus on what I know with certainty. For me, it was safety first and foremost. But the crisis did not relieve us of the responsibility to put systems, programs, people and practices in place to ensure that students receive a high-quality education. In a crisis, I learned that you must narrow your focus while expanding your scope. Our focus was on continuing to educate, but we had to adjust our scope and the “how” of virtual learning and face-to-face instruction in a safe manner. We stayed focused, made the adjustments, and I am grateful for where we are as a result of our response. We rose as an organization to meet this challenge and we will continue to rise as the challenges persist.

Lesson 2: You must deal with reality and the conditions as they are, as opposed to longing for the way things used to be. Normal is nonexistent.

At the beginning of the pandemic, many believed that the crisis was a temporary condition that would soon pass, and so many took the wait-and-see attitude. As the crisis continued, we all began to make the necessary adjustments. But, if we are honest with each other, we all held on to the idea and the hope that things would return to normal soon. However, as we move forward, I am challenging us to forget about what was normal before and realize that our current conditions are the conditions that we have, and our responsibility is to be creative as we carry out our mission to educate in this environment. For us to move forward, we must all realize and accept the fact that the normal that we knew before is now nonexistent. We must deal with the brutal facts as they are in order to successfully meet the challenges before us.

Lesson 3: Your decisions are only as good and as sound as the information you have. Agility and flexibility will help to maintain your sanity.

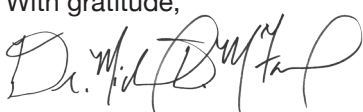
As educators and leaders, we must realize that in a crisis, information is constantly evolving and our decisions are only as sound as the information that we have at that time. This constantly changing stream of information creates somewhat of an uneasiness that we must learn to live with. Agility and flexibility are critical as we move forward into the unknown of 2021. The one thing that will not change is our responsibility to carry out the mission to provide a high-quality education for the students we serve.

I challenge each of you to reflect on 2020 to extract the lessons you have learned from the experience and then focus forward. Our students, our families and our communities are depending on us to lead them through these most uncertain times. I am encouraging you to continue to lead with grace and empathy, but remain clear eyed and focused on our mission. We are educators. Our responsibility is to ensure that our students are safe and that they are educated in a way that ensures they will have choices and opportunities and will leave us as thriving students.

Now is the time that our students and communities need us to lead and to be intentional about following our pandemic protocols while we continue to deliver a high-quality learning experience. I am challenging you to lead by your actions and make sure you are wearing your mask, refraining from large gatherings, washing your hands regularly and social distancing. We must model the behavior we expect, and it is important to signal to students and colleagues that we are not at the end of this fight yet. Now is the time to focus.

In 2020, we learned how to maintain a safe environment and continue delivering a high-quality educational experience. We must continue to do that in 2021. Let us move into this new year with intentional hope and unwavering faith, recognizing that regardless of the situation and circumstance, we are educators, we are heroes and, most importantly, we are missionaries in the midst of this crisis. And we were called for a time such as this.

With gratitude,



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