

Published in the Daily Herald on September 28, 2009

From *Success* to *Significance*...

By Naperville School District 203 Superintendent Mark Mitrovich

In 1996, I read the book *Half Time: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance* by Bob Buford, which affected me deeply. The author states that the first half of one's career is a quest for success, while the second half is a quest for significance. Buford's words forced me to evaluate my own direction in life and the relation to my work as an educator. I had presumed that my educational endeavors were contributing to the growth of young people, but I found the book's challenges to be somewhat disquieting.

The more I reflected on the concept of moving "from success to significance," the more I was drawn back to another book I had read several years earlier. Dr. Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* had focused my thinking, behavior, and goals. Covey maintained that he had not really created anything new, but had only observed principles in those who were successful and articulated them clearly. Interestingly, Covey was not defining success in material terms, but through those qualities that contribute to a life lived well for self and others. The principles are:

1. Be Proactive (take responsibility)
2. Begin with the End in Mind (what do you want to be?)
3. Put First Things First (prioritize what is really important)
4. Think Win/Win (cooperation and consideration)
5. Seek First to Understand and Then to be Understood
6. Synergize (*creative* cooperation with others)
7. Sharpen the Saw (personal renewal)

In 1999, I found myself leaving education as a profession and pursuing the dream of building a business in the technology field, facing the challenges posed by a significantly different environment than I had experienced as an educator. Regardless of whether it was in the world of business or education, both Covey and Buford continued to influence my thinking and actions. Being outside the realm of formal education provided me the perspective to evaluate what was really critical to the role education plays in preparing our children for the future: the transmission of our culture, as well as the development of the skills, knowledge, and experience to be successful and significant. It also became apparent that significance was a measure we would determine for ourselves.

Trying to translate my past learning and experience into a simple and straightforward framework for this new role I have undertaken as superintendent has led me to move from the traditional three “Rs” of education to four new “Rs”: *Rigor, Relevance, Responsibility, and Resiliency*. In the series of articles to follow over the next several months, I will elaborate on each of these qualities and how they reflect the new opportunities and challenges in education.

They can be defined as follows:

Rigor: the pursuit of academic excellence

Relevance: connecting academics to the real world

Responsibility: dependability and trustworthiness

Resiliency: the strength to persevere

Naperville School District 203 has been both successful and significant. Our mission is “*to develop self-directed learners, collaborative workers, complex thinkers, quality producers and community contributors.*” The thoughts and wisdom of Buford and Covey are very evident in our mission.

Yet, what is becoming very apparent to me is that our children do not have to wait to reach mid-life to achieve significance. They have the energy, desire, and enthusiasm of youth to engage in significant learning, while contributing to our community and the world. If we continue to invest our time and energy in our young people, we will be significant to one another, our community, and the world.