



Breaking Boundaries

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BOUNDLESS ENERGY: MOVING A SCHOOL BEYOND THE LIMIT.

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Buenos días a todos los presentes. Gracias por vuestra invitación para dirigirme a ustedes lo que considero un privilegio para mi, mi escuela y Nueva Zelandia. Espero que algunas de mis experiencias puedan asistirles en vuestros contextos educacionales en el futuro. Deseo a todos, un año nuevo muy prospero.

Gracias.

There is a traditional, well known English Nursery Rhyme, “Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle” where ‘the cow jumps over the moon’. This rhyme - oftentimes read to our own children- suggests, for me, boundary breaking.

Slide 1.

I use these lines today to suggest to you that boundary-breaking leaders have a dream, a dream that may, at first, seem impossible but can, in fact, become a reality.

Today I share with you, my dream for a school where teachers and students would look to break the bounds of traditional practice. I founded my aspirations on a practical conceptual framework of principles upon which I will now expand.

My dream required an energy of the kind that drives and is driven by: (*slide 2*)

- Commitment
- motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic)
- intellectual curiosity
- carefully guided practice and current research
- focus, discipline, risk taking, a desire for challenge
- inner strength

These precepts underscore my whole value system –

And, of course, an integral part of this process, on reflection, was to develop the personality to handle it all- a key factor when you’re bending under the load of 101 things to do and people to see.

Jan, quoted Charles Webber as, so rightly, saying, “Boundary Breaking has a strong relational factor.” Building strong relationships with my students, staff, parents and community was absolutely essential, and I set about doing this from the beginning. I did this by taking time to talk to people, especially our students and teachers, as I will explain in a minute.

The inculcation of these precepts into my practice required a BOUNDLESS ENERGY. It is this energy - the force, I believe, that is fundamental to building a boundary breaking school.

Boundary Breaking thinking, in effect, occurs in the spirit of Socratic thought and I will explain.

If I was to successfully move my school beyond its present limits I had to look at where the school was at and assess what needed to be done to make it great – more than successful, ‘A cutting edge school!’ I had to engage all stakeholders and get them thinking differently! When I was first appointed to Tauranga Intermediate 10 years ago, I found a school in demise, stuck in a rut, with a diminished spirit and a budget deficit blow-out, disgruntled staff, students without clear direction, in a word, an aimless school, but one with huge potential. My brief was simple - establish discipline and re-energise the place. Not so simple!

Change had to become a doing word, not just conceptual. To action change I drew on an inner strength to drive the goals and issues my stakeholders and I identified: **financial security, academic rigour, supportive staff and student relationships and strong school tone**-only then were the conditions right for any boundary breaking to occur. We

looked at ways our school could really move forward, could become a 'Could be' school that Jan alluded to. My task was to motivate and focus all stakeholders - students, staff, parents, Board of Trustees - to bring our collective goals to a successful conclusion. In doing this I hoped to move students, beyond teachers and books to take control of their own learning – their own BOUNDARY BREAKING.

It was mighty hard work!! It took real vigilance. I had an obligation to drive the best practice and keep the focus by continually placing my dream in front of my stakeholders. **That was the brief from my Board of Trustees.** I supported those who struggled and modelled it myself; I supported some senior staff who, though they articulated change for others, resisted it when they themselves had to change. I tried never to lose the focus of my direction.

Opening the minds of staff and students and inspiring them with a culture of a responsibility to self improve and make a contribution to their school, their families and their communities was done by encouraging them. The old adage ' he who makes quick use of the moment is a genius of prudence' holds true here. So I was on the look-out for the teachable moments: during staff meetings, coffee breaks, lunch breaks, when I visited classrooms and teaching spaces, on my playground duty and during planned professional development. This was done on site and offsite using the variety of learning spaces we were trying to encourage them to use. Not easy, but all our planned professional development is done within a boundary breaking ethic and culture. We took staff to technology days, to outdoor camps, to cultural marae, to computer suites, to dance studios; all team-building exercises. Of course we had to build the financial resource to do this. It is not cheap!

Because we encourage our colleagues and students to see themselves as part of the global school - citizens of the world, not just New Zealand- we, at Tauranga Intermediate, have a culture of wanting to give our students a strong advantage in technological capability, languages and cultural interaction. At the same time we inculcate the sense of ourselves as New Zealanders – what makes us tick! what gives us cultural diversity, uniqueness as kiwis. Because of our geographical isolation, we want to give our students a competitive advantage to take on the world. I let nothing be impossible – failure is not an option for me! That's BOUNDLESS ENERGY. I am always saying to my students, " If you work together you will have synergy, the collective energy of us all will be hard to beat!" I tell that to my staff, too, and now I hear them repeat it around the school. That is the Force!!

Now, let me introduce my school - (*Slide 3*)

Tauranga Intermediate School is set in the city of Tauranga situated on the East Coast of the North Island of N.Z. in a region called the Bay of Plenty. The city has a population of 100,000, is located two and a half hours from Auckland (New Zealand's largest city) and is New Zealand's number one tourist resort. Tauranga is blessed with beautiful surf beaches, a lovely

harbour, is home to New Zealand's largest export port, has abundant sunshine and is the home of the New Zealand kiwifruit industry.

Our school in 1994, when I became Principal, had 670 students. Today it has a roll of 1200 students and is one of New Zealand's largest Intermediate Schools. An Intermediate school is unique in any educational context in that it serves two year groups only - year seven and year eight or 11 to 13 year old students. This means that every year 600 new students come in as 600 move on to secondary education. Managing this alone, requires boundless energy! But within that 2 years, I am very aware that we must make a difference for these students, our emerging adolescents. It is not so much in their transition from Primary to Secondary education that is important to us, but the transition in their thinking about how to learn, exposing them to a multitude of opportunities that will open their minds – let their minds run free. So we involve them in a host of educational experiences - musical, artistic, outdoor pursuits, technological, cultural as well as a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy. And, what better time to nurture all this than during the

developmental stages of emerging adolescents. Parents want their children to come to our school because we have the policy of providing a wide variety of activities and experience, and because we now have an environment that is secure, where children can be spontaneous yet disciplined. To prove this to you, let me read some cards I received just before coming here. They illustrate my point. *-Cards-Literacy achievement rates.*

We are not what you might call a privileged school, in the accepted sense of that word. Our school demographics are comprised of:-

28% New Zealand Maori students

2% other cultures

70% NZ European students

13 -20 International short stay (6 -24 months) students

So, my school is a microcosm of New Zealand society, a very average school in terms of its intake and socio-economic status.

Although Tauranga is an attractive seaside resort there is a significant gap between those who are well off and those who are not. 60% of Tauranga residents live on less than the average NZ income of \$32,000 per annum. Consequently, our students are not necessarily from privileged backgrounds, and we don't as a school, therefore, have access to affluent support.

Today I will outline some practical strategies that have worked for me in over 30 years experience as a Principal. One strategy is in our approach to the classroom. Yes, we still 'box' students in classrooms but it is what is going on inside the 'box' that has changed enormously over this time. Actually, where our parents and grandparents spent all their time in their classroom, this is no longer true for my school. *(shoe slides of classrooms)* Our students move to different spaces for different learning experiences – to the science and technology rooms, to the dance and drama suite, to the wharenui (the Maori cultural meeting house), to the outdoor education camp. Our classrooms are technologically programmed with conference phone, computers, intercoms. Our students produce videos, power-point displays, launch novel studies on the intranet, use MSN

messenger to talk with students overseas. Our Curriculums in New Zealand have moved over time from being prescriptive to being descriptive, they emphasise critical thinking. Teachers must move with this and we, as leaders, must help them adopt the new mind-set. I do this through coaching. It is up to us to change the classroom to meet the new curriculum. So, our classrooms at Tauranga Intermediate are now being specialized as multi-media, bi-lingual, learning-styles classes, booster classes, boys'-only classes, international students' classes. Change takes energy. There are barriers! One in particular centres on political correctness. In New Zealand anyway, political correctness is beginning to hamper the tradition of spontaneity once so prevalent in our schools. The Health and Safety compliances now imposed by the government impact on our outdoor education programmes, our outside school visits and even our playground activities. *(We must spend money to assure safety - extra staff for the 1:6 teacher pupil ratio required when students move outside the school; teachers must now fill in time -consuming RAManagement reports that describe all steps they will take to assure student safety while out on an excursion; recently a flying fox we had at camp that we all thought was great fun had to be dismantled because it did not pass safety regulations as it passed over a concrete path! All fixed playground equipment must have a regulation soft landing pad underneath. It is my responsibility to find the funding for all this, or our children miss out.)* While my teachers are still prepared to break boundaries they are nervous about being made culpable for what, in the past, would have simply been accepted as a legitimate accident.

(If someone had been clowning around up at camp and had fallen off the flying fox or the high ropes or rock wall, for example, or if someone was hurt through their own fault, but were unsupervised at the time, then my staff heads may now roll ,where in the past the child involved would have seen it as his own fault.). Another barrier we must conquer in

boundary breaking is the ‘tall poppy syndrome,’ a real problem in our country, where boundary breakers are sometimes ridiculed, ‘put down’ for excelling. Yet I am saying to staff and students ‘reach for the sky and jump over the moon’ and I encourage them to make their ‘what if’ moments, alluded to by Jan, real. But making them into a reality requires careful resourcing in terms of the people and tools to do it. I must continually encourage confidence, spontaneity and security in my students and staff, and encourage problem solving and experimentation to overcome any barriers. Again I do it through modelling and coaching. I try to deliberate and collaborate with others, while taking responsibility myself for the things I know I have control over, like funding or supporting them in the face of bureaucracy. But it is by all means not all barriers. Besides, I see such things as a challenge rather than a headache!

Because my school has a clear technological focus I appoint key staff members, experts themselves, to coach other teachers and students to discover what the technology tool can do for them alongside traditional tools like books. I have two media experts whose job it is to help staff and students select which tool best serves their needs. They are mobile, moving on request to the learning space as required. They know that is not so much that a computer is better than a book – they hold different interactive experiences- but these media experts teach the skills of using computers as a tool and how to integrate other resources into the learning. I am no expert! They teach me, too, when I need them. They help plan units of work with curriculum leaders and launch them on the intranet for all staff to utilise. They are a great asset and assist in boundary breaking approaches, because they, too, are thinking constantly beyond the square, helping others use their intellectual curiosity to make their ‘What ifs’ a reality. A recent ‘What if’ moment arose from a nation-wide competition in which our technology staff entered students who were required to problem solve a marketing solution for a Dairy Company. It had a 24 hour time limit on it. They sprang into action. They won the competition because of the technology component they integrated into the solution, using electronics, music and marketing ideas. The synergy of collective energy worked, and won \$10,000 for our school and a huge affirmative boost that reverberated right across the school community! The whole thing reflected the boundary breaking ethic of giving discretionary commitment - they worked before school, after school, at lunchtime as well as in class. The teachers did not tell the students what to do. The students came up with the ideas in the spirit of letting them ‘have a go’. The teachers gave them the skills, tools and materials to build the componentry to come up with the product. Winning this competition resulted in nation-wide exposure for our school with Television NZ arriving for a whole -school assembly to present their cheque. It was a ‘feel good’ experience , a result of boundary breaking thinking and boundless energy. To achieve such experiences requires all of us to give the discretionary commitment that gets things done. It is no different for me, as the leader of the school. I must model discretionary commitment, too. I try to make myself readily available. Leadership is not an easy job. You can’t shut yourself away to get on with pressing administration. My office door must be open, and open in particular to staff and students. I strongly believe that face to face interaction is crucial to cementing strong relationships.

One thing I believe that really works in inspiring staff and students is to be continually optimistic – from the start of the day until the end the day. It’s a kind of acting performance! I try to tell stories about past experiences or humorous happenings. I kid around sometimes with staff and students. Leadership is about having the optimism to believe that tomorrow will dawn better than today. Sometimes this may be a matter of consciously hiding any pessimistic feelings – but optimism will help engender a kind of security among staff. “Oh well, Brian’s doesn’t worry, so I won’t either.” Anxiety can undermine progress. I try to have a sense of humour and enjoy my staff and students, even in a crisis. (*Rocky story with our run -away-boy or the David Stanley story from our young teaching day, or the Dental nurse and the horse*)

A really major thing in my school, as you might have realised, is to provide sufficient resources to allow my staff and students to meet the variety of expectations and experiences we demand; so I don’t balk at spending the budget

money –But I do spend a lot of time and energy finding the funds, making sure they are there for the spending. Not just the money but time – time is a critical resource. I buy it from money produced through the International students programme and our outdoor education camp, which we hire out to the public when we are not using it. Both are separate businesses that run at a profit, and this surplus is poured back into the budget creating time and resource for all our students and teachers. I also work at getting local business sponsorship for our projects; and through prudent investment. It certainly does take time and energy! Boundless energy. It takes motivation - and who isn't motivated by money!! It takes commitment and inner strength. These things I try to nurture in myself. To be honest, I'm not sure how I do it, that's why I mentioned the personality factor before. I'm a bit of a servant leader!

There is no easy way around it. It takes time and you have to find the balance between your personal and professional lives. In many ways your profession becomes your life but there are ways you can include or involve your partner and families so some of it becomes a shared experience. I do have a life. I like my sport and we have a large garden to care for, but I enjoy it. I'm something of a news and spectator sport junkie, too, so I'm guilty of switching on the box to watch the All Blacks defeat France, despite pressing school matters. And I like my Saturday morning lie - in ! It all gives me space from school.

But, irrespective of the profession – you **have** to give time, you **have** to maintain energy levels and you have to drive and encourage passion, don't you?

Whether business or personal, I do try to train myself to mentally eliminate unnecessary baggage from my mind so it leaves my mind free to cope with the task in hand. A week down the track issues will be gone. The big issue of the day fades into obscurity – it will be replaced with others but I try to deal with it there and then and mentally engage myself to place maximum energy on positive outcomes.

I do spend a lot of my time mentoring aspiring staff members, but I am not crushed because those I mentor don't break the boundaries at first. It is not my responsibility to ensure they break boundaries; it is my responsibility, as a leader, to give them the opportunity and to show them the way.

One example I will share with you is of an assistant principal whom I had encouraged to engage in professional leadership study, and who subsequently became a principal. This person had not previously considered herself as a leader. She lacked the confidence to reach out on her own. I was aware that if I allowed her to take risks within the secure environment of our school, she would grow. And she did. She constantly put herself beyond her comfort zone, at the same time linking this to the 'What if' culture of our school and her professional study. With time she won her own school and enjoyed the thrill of boundary breaking experience. Today, she still rings me, she is now struggling with the boundaries of her new job and a staff not so inculcated as ours in this approach. Those are her challenges. I can support her, but she must do the footwork now.

But me, I am re-energised by the intrinsic affirmation I receive from seeing others perform. That is what drives **my** boundless energy. *(slide 6)*

I believe, it is the spirit within which we interact with others that is perhaps the x factor. So I must keep this spirit positive. It is the Socratic spirit of including all people around me in my boundary breaking vision. Jan has already outlined the theory of Boundary Breaking Leadership and the rethinking it requires.

I know, theory and practice will come into conflict often, for I can articulate theory but it is often energy absorbing and very time-consuming implementing it. Carefully guided practice, informed by the theory you hear at this conference, helps reduce **wasteful** time and energy. But it is still a busy workload, I know.

I constantly reconsider the basic assumptions of schooling, easier said than done particularly in light of basic accountabilities that are placed upon state schools by the Government. However, I, and I believe Boundary Breaking leaders, don't see this as a problem – rather as a challenge. *(Examples are / enrolment schemes – let everybody in that*

applies / investment of money / stretch rules when it is safe and for the benefit of all stakeholders/ flexible school day / impact on buses.) I do constantly try to respond to the needs of my stakeholders. I now create opportunities for people – let them have a go – For example the multi media classes we are expanding this year was an idea put forward by a senior staff member. We gained maximum community support for this project and will give it a go. Next year we will also create for the first time a boys -only class. A senior manager involved in postgraduate study suggested the idea. I saw the opportunity to link theory with practice, so I provided the teacher and the learning space to see if they could make a difference. I know this senior manager will motivate the teacher and this motivation will feed through to the boys. I am looking forward to seeing the change in these boys, many of whom are under achievers

We have also established classes for children with special abilities. Their class teachers are motivated because they are involved in a practical context that they feel passion for. In these classes the senior teacher involved with them supports her practice with a university research link that helps advance learning for these gifted and talented students. It is an exciting project.

Another example is that at Tauranga Intermediate we make outdoor education offsite at our school camp mandatory for all classes so that all our students develop a pride and love for our natural heritage, and learn of this heritage in a concrete, real environment. Here they learn to canoe, to go on bush walks, to master their fears on the highropes and rockwall. They develop skills and attitudes that they can use in life and in their leisure time. They create the balance of a healthy mind and body. Here students learn to push the boundaries of their own confidence and skill and reinforce their self concept as New Zealanders, who have a passion for the outdoors. All our students are timetabled to spend at least one week here each year. There is a permanent teacher skilled in training students for the activities. He gives support to the class teacher accompanying the students. The camp is also used as a venue for an art camp, a music camp, and international students camp. It is a special learning space.

This brings me to our International languages project – we make Mandarin mandatory for all our gifted and talented students. We also have Japanese, Spanish, German, French and our indigenous Maori language as mandatory. In 2001, I took a group of these students to China. They were the first group of 11 -13 year old students to visit the Shangdong province, and the Chinese really treated them like royalty. The students delivered speeches of thanks and appreciation in mandarin. I was surprised and gladdened to see their confidence, especially our Maori students who were travelling for the first time in their lives. It was a great international experience for all of them.

Actually, in 2000 we established an international student unit, attracting students to our school to learn English. This is proving to be a great success all round as our Kiwi students now have contact with a multiplicity of cultures. It has given us the opportunity to make global connections and, as I speak, the Manager of this unit is planning a trip for our students to Thailand to Shrewsbury International School in Bangkok. We hope to make this a regular exchange with Thai students coming to our school. We have students from all around Asia and the Pacific, teachers from France, Germany, USA, Japan and Austria and a strong Korean connection. It is all boundary- breaking; and we accept individual longer stay students, short-stay groups and teachers who wish to have a New Zealand experience.(Sumiko) We also work in liaison with the local High School International Manager to share marketing ideas.

My final example shows that boundary breaking leaders do not confine themselves to their own schools. Believing this, in 2003 I began working on my brainchild of having a New Zealand Association of Middle Schools Sports Championship event across four winter sports. This inaugural event came to fruition in 2004. It happened because change became a doing word not just a concept. I surrounded myself with people who would get in and follow through

with the tasks delegated to them. My role was to motivate, enthuse and co-ordinate to ensure that the end vision was fulfilled. In 2005 this event will include 8 sports and 2000 elite athletes.

Through coaching boundary -breaking thinking there are wonderful spin offs – highly skilled teachers, motivated students, senior managers monitoring results are excited and enthused by what is happening – great marketing for our school. Now the local high school has investigated and will run with a multi - media class of there own in 2005. This is great news for our students who will continue to extend their learning in multi media at secondary school. Some of our teachers move on and other school communities throughout NZ have a spin off benefit. Some go abroad and share their experience in international settings.

(slide 7) You cannot, as you can see, have a boundary - breaking school with just the principal breaking boundaries. Consequently, so that our boundary breaking vision is maintained I have it in mind when I interview for new staff. I give them, in advance, our charter, let them read it and assimilate the culture and direction of the school. The interview then becomes a discussion where the interviewee confirms that they are committed to our vision. This way I build the potential and capacity to maintain the outreach.

Of course, our newly appointed teacher programmes reinforce the message of “ownership” of the Boundary Breaking culture. New staff are coached by their tutor teachers who are in turn coached by their senior teachers. Thus Boundary Breaking vision permeates the school.

Our experienced teachers receive the same message through whole school professional development which is ongoing throughout the year. Everyone gets the same, consistent message.

I include all my staff in the decision making processes. I expect my Senior management to model the vision through their actions and being visible around the school. This is critical. I, myself, am around the school daily, talking to staff and students and articulating the boundary breaking culture.

Sometimes I face a ‘counter culture’. It is to be expected; but the shrewd leader will move on from issues when agendas are detected that run counter to improvement for students, and where it is obvious there is no real professional dialogue. I do try to be subtle about this!

It does not matter that I move to different rhythms, it matters that I have a deeply rooted conviction and desire to open the minds of the students and staff for whom I am responsible.

Effective schools are not built by those who hesitate, or look back behind them – they are built by those who have the energy to push forward.

So I hunt out my boundary breaking thinkers. What kind of person do I look for? (slide 8)

- That spark of personality that will engage others.
- The passion for learning.
- Loyalty.
- Preparedness to give that discretionary commitment.
- Intellectual curiosity.

The trick is to give them support as they carry out their daily practice and goals. I use Jan’s Coaching Professional Partnerships model.

The skills involved are on the screen here: (slide 9)

- Active listening.
- Reflective interviewing.
- Self assessment.

- Setting goals and objectives.
- Observing.
- Giving evaluative feedback.

These activities and projects I have described are not mere entrepreneurial activities with all hair oil and no socks, all marketing and image. Sure they are entrepreneurial, some generate income for the school, all have the support of the stakeholders and all have substance. The substance comes not from merely holding the activity but from the spin-offs for education beyond our school and in the raised awareness among parents and business. A kind of value system is built into these boundary breaking initiatives. Staff learn entrepreneurial skills, useful well beyond a classroom. Closer community relationships are the result. In effect, even young students are learning to break boundaries themselves. There are rich rewards for the boundary breaker. The staff that pursue those 'boundary breaking' directions are rewarded with the 'feel good' factor of seeing their students and themselves succeed, creating the 'what if' moments; and as a consequence the school becomes the 'could be' school that Jan spoke about- more flexible, more creative, more inclusive and more responsive.

I try to move my school, in the words of Robertson and Webber, from BASIC TO RICH ACCOUNTABILITY. I have tried to illustrate this in the examples I have given. My formula is - **RESOURCE IT. ENCOURAGE IT. PROMOTE THE REWARDS.**

I aim to keep the end vision in view. We would welcome any of you if you would ever care to visit us at school. It is not easy to describe in this short time the reality of boundary breaking.

As the chief leader and mover and shaker in my organisation I set the conditions, provide the resources and act as a catalyst for a change in mindset. I firmly believe that age is not the barrier, but a closed mindset is, as is a lack of energy. I work on mindset. If the mindset is right the energy flows from it. Obviously, I must show I value staff and their efforts. I offer staff scholarships for further study or travel with an education focus; each December at the close of our school year our Board stands the cost of a Xmas dinner for all 80 staff members at a local restaurant; I look at ways to reward teachers for their work outside of school hours, maybe include them in school trips abroad or by financial remuneration for work at the outdoor camp. Rewards help change. It does work.

I have watched individual teachers grow and experience the pleasure of self - critiquing with their colleagues and I have observed the culture of renewal and optimism begin to permeate my school. Our team is increasingly unified, synergy is manifesting itself to the extent that now quite a few of my staff are beginning to believe that nothing is impossible – they do push boundaries and reach for the moon. But it has taken time. The process never stops.

When I get back for the 2005 school year a new strategic plan for our four gifted and talented classes will be in the process of being implemented.

- A student wellness centre and technology facility will be in the throes of being built.
- Our Boys Class will be underway.
- The Multi media educational opportunity will be expanding from 2 to 3 classes.
- Our International department will be co-ordinating with our bi -lingual department in planning the trip to Thailand and the Shrewsbury International School with which we are establishing a cultural exchange.
- And so we go on...

I will be looking for opportunities myself to lead an educational institution perhaps outside of New Zealand. That is where I would hope to break boundaries next.

So as you can see –

Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon;

In closing, I'd like to return to Socrates who challenged current thought just as we are we doing here today. Socrates argued that, "the greatest wisdom a person can have is to know how much he is ignorant". That is so true. He encouraged in his students boundary breaking reflection and sometimes this meant challenging the city gods themselves. Luckily for us, today we are not condemned for boundary breaking thinking. We are encouraged, urged even exhorted. That is the difference between 399BC and 2005.

So I say to you all -Carpe diem - Seize the day!!

Gracias!

