

December 2009

Collaboratively Speaking

Winter Solstice Musings and Holiday Greetings

Recently, I attended the MASS/MASC Annual Conference. One of the keynote speakers was Clayton Christensen, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Business. Dr. Christensen is a noted author and parent of several children in the Belmont Public Schools. He has devoted much of his research to the question of corporate success and sustainability. His premise is “Why is success so hard to sustain?” An interesting question, particularly when we reflect on the many corporations that are ubiquitous and profitable for a while and then disappear from the corporate scene.

His thesis is based on a concept he names “disruptive innovation.” Disruptive innovation, he contends, creates a disincentive within organizations to continue to innovate and be risk-takers. Simply put, it is the notion that as success is bred, the creative aspect of the organization becomes encumbered by the bureaucracy it creates, the comfort of the status quo, and the risk-averse staff it attracts. He contends that understanding the customer is the wrong analysis, and understanding what job the customer is trying to do is a more appropriate lens through which product and service decisions should be made. He quotes Theodore Drucker, the noted economist: “The customer rarely buys what the company thinks it is selling.”

As I thought about that quote and Dr. Christensen’s remarks, I reflected on their import for our Collaborative programs, services, and initiatives. I wonder if our customers (the districts) or the customers of the districts (the students and staff) are buying what we think we are selling. We have opportunities to be far more entrepreneurial than our member districts. What services and programs will they need and want over the next decade? I don’t know the answer, but it certainly is a question we should ponder.

At our January 11 general membership meeting, we will have that opportunity. Lynda Foisy, the Associate Commissioner of Education, will share with us the direction in which the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is headed. Our task over the remainder of the morning will be to talk and share with each other how we wish to respond to and shape our vision of that future.

Seasons Greetings

Best wishes and much happiness to SEEM Executive Director George Flynn, who will retire as of December 31.

Best wishes to all of you for a happy and healthy holiday season and a happy New Year.

Meeting Reminders

MOEC General Membership Meeting: January 11 at 9:30 a.m. at The Education Collaborative
Snowdate: January 13