

# Aim High in Leading

## Taking a Longer and Wider View

By Joe Whitefield

“**A**im high in steering.” That was the first principle taught to me in driver’s education class many, many years ago. While I do not remember anything else about the course, that phrase has always stuck with me. I still apply the principle to my driving today. I’ve even used it when teaching my children how to drive a car.

The basic premise in aiming high is that you should look as far down the road as possible when driving a vehicle. This provides many benefits—some obvious and some not. By looking ahead you have increased anticipation of impending conditions such as directional changes in the road, brake lights ahead, oncoming traffic, and so forth.

In addition to seeing the conditions ahead, aiming high also has the benefit of *widening* your view. This allows you, by using your peripheral vision, to see conditions that are beside you—such as improper handling of other vehicles or children or objects darting across the road. In short, there is a greater perspective that is gained from aiming high instead of looking only a few feet in front of the vehicle. Aiming high leads to better decision making and better driving.

**C** Completion  
**O** Organization  
**I** Innovation  
**N** Being Nice



LIKE THE DRIVER OF A CAR WITH PASSENGERS, MANAGERS AT ALL LEVELS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO DRIVE ON THE RIGHT ROAD, AT THE PROPER SPEED, WHILE SAFELY NAVIGATING THE PERILS THAT CAN CAUSE WRECKS.

For experienced drivers this seems elementary. We do it without thinking. And yet, how easy it is to become distracted, change the focal point to something other than the road, and suffer an accident or near miss. Having a full view that is both far and wide is essential to reaching a destination successfully. Aiming high does this for us.

This principle could just as easily apply to leading an organization as it does to driving. All organizations are on a road heading toward some destination. Like the driver of a car with passengers, managers at all levels have a responsibility to drive on the right road, at the proper speed, while safely navigating the perils that can cause wrecks. Managers should strive to take a long view when making decisions.

### SEEING WHAT’S AHEAD

When planning, how far ahead should an organization look? As far as possible, focusing on what can be seen clearly. The sightlines are typically defined by either a time period (one month, one year, five years) or by a series of projects or events (new facilities, renovations). In either case, excel in looking beyond the immediate frame of reference.

For capital projects, this means better programming and design processes. Beautiful buildings that are unnecessarily costly to operate and maintain are dysfunctional by design. Every facilities professional can relate to this problem. Functional and operational issues are lost when design and construction deadlines are pressing. The long view requires that building performance be a

main driver from the beginning.

For organizational initiatives, this means better communication. What is your current status? What is your desired status? What is the process and timeline for reaching the desired status? These things must be clearly visible to and properly understood by everyone involved so they can actively participate

in the process driving organizational change. More than knowing what is going on; people must know why it matters. The long view, well communicated, promotes the future benefits of the initiative making the current difficulties palatable.

#### SEEING WHAT'S AROUND

The broader view plays a critical role

in decision making by bringing peripheral issues into sight so they can be accounted for and properly addressed. So many negative things can happen to an organization that is blindsided. They key is to not get blindsided.

Organizations can be negatively impacted by numerous problems such as resource and time constraints, personnel issues, regulatory issues, customer and stakeholder issues, and weather. When unaccounted for, these issues can cause many problems for projects and initiatives, some minor and some major. Like many industries, educational facilities are facing the prospect of considerable turnover of personnel due to the projected flood of baby boomer retirements.

Short-term employment can lead to various forms of short-sighted management and leadership. The finish line for some may be within a few years or at the end of a particular project. Like every challenge, this can be managed by strong leadership whereby the long view is employed as much as possible. By aiming high in leadership, facilities managers can set the standard by modeling the process and expecting it from others.

Effective managers and leaders excel in making good decisions. Among other things, that requires both good information and good judgment. Decisions are based on the resources and information available at the time of the decision. Aiming high in leading provides a perspective that improves the information leading to better decisions and outcomes. Facilities managers should continuously look up and around to see things coming from all directions in order to make the necessary adjustments to keep the projects safely on the right road. Aiming high provides the wider view necessary to account for the conditions and issues that would cause problems and lead to wrecks.

*Safe driving to all. 🇺🇸*

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