

On Seeking High Standards In Adventist Institutions

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Abstract:

The mission of an organisation is enhanced by meeting quality targets set by external bodies. Providing quality educational outcomes can be viewed in terms of our responsibilities at the international and national levels and to our clients. In a Christian organisation, the Creation and Calvary accounts provide outstanding examples of God's attitude towards quality issues. He has given us products of the highest quality. Both accounts are set within a global setting indicating our international responsibility. At the national level we have a mandate to cooperate with authorities and lead by example (cf. the prophet Daniel's account). At this level, Christ also left us an example urging us to be analytical, creative, authoritative, relevant and helpful. Christians are client-orientated. Interest in clients infers a keen interest in quality. The clients are our parent institutions and their constituencies, our students and the wider community. Our governing institutions rightfully expect us to deliver a quality product because God gave us quality products to market at Creation and Calvary. We must treat clients professionally, give them relevant skills and deal honestly with them. Our graduates will serve communities. Consequently, we are duty bound to teach them community responsibilities.

We are called to be ambassadors for a God who has set very high standards and our mission is thus inseparably connected to

quality assurance issues. However, this mission cannot be fulfilled through our educational institutions unless those who work in them experience and project the warmth of a personal encounter with Christ.

Introduction

There is perhaps no organisation in existence that does not serve clients of one type or another. How organisations relate to their clients resides in complex interactions among aspects of the mission, values, organisational structure, responsibilities to higher bodies, funding and remuneration arrangements and other factors.¹ Some institutions are able to project care and serve their clients well others never seem to progress.

If employees know that their task is important and vital to the successful delivery of a quality product which enjoys world-wide recognition, one might imagine that successful client relationships would flow from this knowledge. From my experience in a managerial position in a food testing laboratory, this is only part of the story. Our laboratory operated to the highest national and international standards to serve the interests of humanity through facilitating international trade. However, neither this knowledge nor the closeness of operators to the coal-face was sufficient to induce an entirely satisfactory client-orientated response from all individuals within the organisation.

Factors of prime significance in assuring good client relationships appear to be the relationship which exists between the workers in an institution and the proprietor (or management), the level of identification with the mission of the establishment and the sense that every part of the machinery, including individual responsibility, is important to the operation. Self pride and self interest do not figure grandly in caring institutions. If people develop a sense that they are creating a heritage for posterity by seizing the opportunity to develop, market and produce a quality product; then client relationships are likely to be excellent.

Within Christian education, some of the same issues exist. Some

consider that addressing quality issues which the world considers important detracts from the achievement of mission. However, exclusiveness and refusal to cooperate sensitively and constructively with other groups possessing differing philosophies can be seen as an obstacle to the fulfilment of mission to prepare a people to meet their Lord (*Isaiah 55:4, 5; Zechariah 8:20-22*).

In this paper it is argued that achieving quality outcomes assists our mission. God is the proprietor of our institutions² and each has a personal responsibility to Him for the energy and skill that is brought to the enterprise (*1 Corinthians 3:12-14*). We are preparing our clients for the eternal world. Perhaps these concepts can be introduced most effectively if we start at the creation account where God oversaw the production of many complex, quality products.

Christian responsibilities

God set a pattern for human activity during the work of creation. He provided an outstanding example when it comes to quality issues. The record says simply that His finished handiwork, in bringing the formless earth into an organised and beautiful state within just six days, was “very good” (*Genesis 1:31, NKJV*). This work involved not only the physical domain, but extended to the intellectual and social domains on the sixth day of creation. It was then that God challenged the newly made Adam to become involved in analytical and creative intellectual activity (*Genesis 2:19, 20*). The social and spiritual domains of knowledge which began to be constructed on the Friday of creation were highlighted and immeasurably strengthened on the seventh and final day of the creation experience (*Genesis 2:2, 3; Mark 2:27, 28*). It is worthwhile observing that the seventh-day Sabbath was also declared “perfect,” as it is part of God’s law of love (*Exodus 20:2-17; Psalm 19:7*).

The example that God left us is worth dissecting a little more. We will discuss this example and that of salvation under three subheadings.

1. *International perspective*

It has been said by some that external quality issues interfere with the accomplishment of mission. However, it becomes apparent that quality issues have been part of God's concern from the commencement of human existence. Creation was a quality product and the universe continues to be maintained by some very sophisticated precision management systems. There is no room for mistakes. Even today, after all the changes that sin has brought, the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen in Creation (*Romans 1:20*).

Christ was the Creator (*John 1:1-4, 14*) and when we link this with the advice of the apostle Peter (*1 Peter 2:21*) to follow His example, we can take three points into everyday life. First, our perspective must be international. Second, we are to strive in all our endeavours to deliver a quality product. Third, in the domain of education all spheres of human knowledge are to be developed if we are to achieve a quality outcome, viz, physical, intellectual, social and spiritual.

Our perspective must be seen at the global level for a number of reasons. The first is that God gave the human pair a global mandate in the beginning (*Genesis 1:28*). He repeated this at His ascension to heaven and emphasized that education is part of the gospel commission that includes all people (*Matthew 28:19, 20*). The redemption we have been offered represents a product of the finest and best quality. Christ's sacrificial atonement was perfect and complete (*2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:14-16*), an imperfect product would have been totally inadequate. All of us are engaged in marketing this quality product to all ethnic groups without distinction.

To enable this commission to be fulfilled on a world-wide basis, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come and be involved in a teaching function (*John 4:26*), and He would give gifts to His disciples which included the gift of teaching (*Ephesians 4:11*). The final instruction that God has chosen to give to the world preparatory to His second coming instructs believers to "tell the

good news of salvation and to ask people everywhere to respect and give glory to God, the one who created the universe or the proprietor of the universe" (paraphrase of *Revelation 14:6, 7*). It is impossible to consider this instruction seriously except in the context of the initial instruction given to the human race at creation and the affirmation of our task given by Christ at His ascension. In other words, our task to reveal God's ways is cast in the international context.

2. *National challenges*

The foundation of our work also is set in the context of national boundaries. How do we relate to national governments? We are engaged in a cooperative venture. We have a responsibility to help the nation achieve its noble objectives and lead by example. As Christians, we can foster national pride. We are called to abandon only those aspects of belief and culture which run counter to biblical norms on becoming Christians.³

Examples that relate to our attitude towards national authorities and their requirements can be taken from the prophets Daniel and Jesus Christ. Daniel, as a teenager, became a captive and was inducted into the tertiary educational system of Babylon (*Daniel 1:1-8*). This fine-spirited young man would not accept compromise, but he determined to cooperate in the educational vision of the alien nation. He determined that he would put in a first class effort. He was not content with second best. He and his friends prayed for and strove towards success, or a quality outcome, and they gained it under God's blessing (vs. 17-20). The second example relates to Christ's instruction concerning cooperation with national authorities. His advice was to give them due respect and cooperate with them (*Matthew 22:17-21*), as long as this did not clash with clear instructions found in God's word (*Acts 5:28, 29; 2 Peter 2:10*).

We need to believe that we can make a difference, that we can be instrumental in helping to raise the bar at the national level. Christ's teaching activities while on earth were analytical, creative

and always challenging. People continually departed after their encounters with Him and marvelled at His wisdom. In His teaching activities and other interactions, He was authoritative, relevant and aimed at helping the people in their everyday endeavours. He refused to participate in any attempt to overthrow the national government (*Luke 19:37-40*). His efforts were cooperative in nature.

3. *Client orientation*

Christians are impelled to become client orientated for, when they receive the word of God with joy, they cannot selfishly hide the information (*Acts 2: 41-47*). A client focus infers an interest in quality outcome or a just measure (*Proverbs 20:23*). We are to maintain a proactive interest in the recipients of our educational endeavours. In education there are really three clients – the institution/parent organisation, the students, and, in a sense, the wider community. We serve these clients variously through our teaching, research and community activities. We begin to serve our client's interests by accepting the challenge of meeting quality guidelines both at the national and/or international levels.

All of us are engaged in giving glory and credit to God for the quality products given to the human race at Creation and Calvary. If our systems of delivery and attitudes do not do justice to the products, then we detract from the perception of God as the proprietor of the universe. This means that quality assurance is vital to fulfilling our mission as institutions. In support of this, there is an interesting statement penned by one of our pioneers: "God would not have us in any sense behind in educational work. Our colleges should be far in advance in the highest kind of education."⁴

We have a duty of care to our supporting institutions and the constituents. Our primary function is often seen as a teaching role. However, our teaching function can reach its highest expression only as we engage in research activities, for one who is informed only through the efforts and experience of others is not fully instructed. We remember well that Christ was a preeminent teacher (*John 3:2*) and His words were influenced by His experience,

experimentation and struggles of every day life (*Matthew 8:17; Hebrews 5:2*). In other words, He was fully informed. We should delight to search out the deep things of the natural world and to share them with others (*Job 39; Romans 1:20*), for research is an honourable and rewarding endeavour (*Proverbs 25:2*). Our students, too, are best suited for service when they are “directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields open for research in nature and revelation,” otherwise we will end up producing weaklings.⁵ As teachers, we cannot lead where we have not been beforehand.

The impact of Christ’s example on our activities perhaps becomes clearer if we paraphrase the well-known text in *1 Corinthians 3, verses 11 to 13* read as follows: “Jesus Christ is our foundation in all things. Do not bring unprofessional methods or sloppy work to the business of education, because it reflects poorly on the character and ways of Christ.”

In the business of education, the needs and aspirations of the students come first. We cannot go about our tasks as though these clients largely are irrelevant. If there is a main point that we can gain from the story of the prophet Jonah’s encounter with God and in his experiences on the way to Nineveh (*Jonah 1:1-15*), it is that no person is an island. Our underlying attitudes will become evident in subtle ways and eventually influences what we do.

Quality education has to do with providing for excellent outcomes. This means that the educational experience will be a happy one, the instruction will be professional, and the client will be given the opportunity to learn the skills which are both relevant now and which will give them an excellent basis for an on-going successful professional life. The basis for this attitude comes from a sound understanding of what Christianity means. The apostle Paul’s instruction to Timothy included the interesting advice that we should seek to live “a peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (*1 Timothy 2:2, KJV*) and he added in another passage the instruction that we should “approve the things that are excellent” (*Philippians 1:10, NKJV*). Honesty or giving a full measure and being interested in excellence should mark all our transactions (*Leviticus 19:36; Ezekiel 45:10*). God delights in us giving value for money (*Proverbs*

11:1); a quality education does just that too.

The last groups of clients are the people in the communities we draw our students from. We are duty bound to produce graduates of whom these communities will be proud. This pride perhaps will derive from several features displayed. Our graduates will possess skills that will allow them to function with distinction in their chosen careers. They will be convicted of their debt to humanity and will choose to work with diligence. They will have a broad view of their responsibilities to improve the societies they serve in; they will treat people from all ethnic and religious groups as being equal and valuable. They will sense that education has to do with more than intellectual accomplishments and that learning is for a lifetime. They will be optimistic people who can project hope to others. In other words, our graduates will begin to project Christian values, even if they have not yet publicly acknowledged Jesus. If this is our experience, then we can rest in the thought that we have not hidden our worldview from our students (*Matthew 5:14-16*) and that the full fruits of our witness will yet be realised (*Psalm 126:6*).

Ambassadors and proud of it

God wishes us to grasp the reality that we are to attain a high standard. He wishes to bless our efforts as we acknowledge the source of all knowledge and skill (*Deuteronomy 8:17-19*). Crystallising the idea that our mission is enhanced through addressing quality outcomes should encourage our staff to approach quality issues with greater enthusiasm (cf. *1 Chronicles 28:9*). We are ambassadors for a perfect God (*Deuteronomy 32:4*; *2 Corinthians 5:20*). He has charged us as follows: "May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, all that is pleasing to him" (*Hebrews 13:21*, NLT).

The role of administrators is to project the concept that quality assurance and the mission of the Christian church are inseparable companions. But it is more than this. They must live what they say and facilitate the accomplishment of quality outcomes. Such a result

will be impossible to achieve using methods that are flawed in their underlying assumptions and in their application. This is where critical analysis and an intimate knowledge of God's entire word is needed (*Isaiah 8:20; 2 Peter 3:3-7*). In tertiary institutions, we will be tempted to make claims for ourselves so that the statement "Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you" may be applicable to us (*Isaiah 47:10*, NKJV; cf. *Philippians 2:3*). As administrators and teachers, we will labour in vain if we do not experience and acknowledge God's saving grace in our lives and project our joyful experience to others including our students (*Malachi 3:14, 16-18*).⁶

Achieving quality outcomes

With these thoughts in mind, and with the assurance that we are seeking a high standard in all our undertakings,⁷ I will share a few ideas on how this might be achieved in tertiary institutions from my experience in industry and at the secular university educational sector.

1. Quality assurance system. The quality assurance system is linked to the strategic planning process. This means that policies are extensive and integrated, evidence is gathered, improvements are suggested and these are implemented. Staff are aware of their part in acting on the evidence and implementing improvements. In the right environment, they become proactive in suggesting improvements. Benchmarking in this area can be accomplished by studying and applying International Standards Organisation (ISO) procedures (accreditation to ISO 9001 level will give immediate benchmarking at the international level)⁸ and by transfer of experiences and knowledge among colleagues at other well-run institutions both inside and outside the church organisational structure.
2. Teaching and learning. Good teaching practices are valued. Achieving these outcomes is aided by systematic course reviews

assisted by outside assessors, open assessment practices, and commitment to ethical practices. Benchmarking may be achieved through involvement of staff from other well-known institutions in review procedures, in course assessment exercises and thesis assessment. Where professional associations exist, they can become involved in the accreditation process. Participation in national teaching award events is an excellent benchmarking exercise as are invitations to teach on an invitational basis at other universities of note.

3. Research and research training. Critical thinking and the generation of new knowledge are at the heart of a university's endeavours. The journey down this pathway is not optional, for good teaching cannot stand apart from research. Benchmarking in this area can be done in terms of research grants attracted, higher degree completions, publications in recognised international and other refereed journals (e.g., number of articles in Science Citation Index and Social Science Citation Index), honours received by staff, and collaborative ventures undertaken with other recognised universities and institutes. Memoranda of Understanding written with other institutions of note can be used as a benchmarking tool, especially where this involves joint research teaching and investigative activities.
4. Student services. Support services to make the experience of students pleasant and memorable and to help them reach their full potential are part of the quality assurance system. Benchmarking can be accomplished by exchanging experiences with other tertiary institutions, by applying ISO principles and seeking new ways of providing services to more effectively serve the needs of the students.
5. Service to the community. Some institutions serve larger communities than others. We draw our clients from up to around 40 countries. Providing graduates with generic skills valuable in every country is part of our community service. Graduate surveys are another form of assessing the impact and appropriateness of teaching programmes and practices in the business and service communities. Where programmes are more focused on

particular groups (nursing), then membership of advisory bodies and national and international bodies serve as good benchmarking tools. The information naturally needs to be fed back into the system and acted upon. Mention in the national and international media of student activities developed to serve the community can also function as a benchmark as can invitations to speak on these experiences at significant conferences and other forums.

6. Resource management. Management of physical infrastructure, information technology, human resources and financial and administrative processes impacts on all who operate at an institution. User friendly policies and procedures which are consistent with best practice in larger, internationally recognised institutions is an excellent benchmark. Many ISO 9001 procedures are applicable in this area too.

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