

ADVENTURES OF CHARTER

SCHOOL

CREATORS



Leading
from the
ground up

TERRENCE E. DEAL &
GUILBERT C. HENTSCHE

with kendra kecker, christopher lund, scot oschman, & rebecca shore

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
PART I A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW	
1 New Issues in an Old Industry	3
2 Muddling through Enduring Issues	20
PART II A WORM'S-EYE VIEW	
3 Guarding the Mission	35
4 Growing Grass Roots	53
5 New Kid on the Block	61
6 A Company School	87
7 Clawing Your Way	101
8 A Fast Track in Harlem	110
9 A District School	128

GUARDING THE MISSION

Kathleen O'Sullivan, Odyssey Charter School

Odyssey Charter School, an independent public school chartered by the Los Angeles County Board of Education, is located in Pasadena and serves a diverse community of 240 K–8 students who learn best by doing. Kathleen O'Sullivan, the founder and a member of the governing board, piloted Odyssey through its first years of operation as the executive director and has worked with a multitude of organizations—federal, state, local, and private—during the past six years to bring her dream to a working reality. O'Sullivan is a highly skilled communicator, trainer, and facilitator who identifies a problem, works to solve it, and moves on to the next challenge. Over the past 10 years, she has developed expertise in workforce preparation, particularly with at-risk youth. She has over 25 years of business experience in public, private, and nonprofit settings in the areas of recruitment, employee development, marketing and sales, program development, fund raising, and grant writing, and she draws on her professional and personal experiences as a student, wife, mother, foster parent, and grandparent to create and sustain the vision of Odyssey. O'Sullivan and her husband, Michael, an architect, live in South Pasadena.

Odyssey Charter School is located in Pasadena, California. At the outset of our third year of operation, I am proud to say Odyssey's success is

a result of sometimes heroic efforts by many, while weathering the challenges and opportunities that await any new and innovative venture, admittedly by just hanging on one minute longer in many cases.

To understand Odyssey's vision is to understand how and why it was birthed. Unlike many charter school developers, my background is not that of a formal educator, nor did I intend to reform education from the perspective of academia. On the contrary, my motivation for venturing into this uncharted territory was driven by a passion that grew out of my 25 years of experience in the corporate, nonprofit, and public sectors, working for others and for myself, much of which involved training and development. By nature, I am an entrepreneur. I delight in finding innovative solutions that will make a difference, then empowering others to take ownership and grow the vision and the capacity for fulfilling it. Over the years, my work has resulted in successful and innovative programs that have been able to stand on their own as I have moved on.

As a result of my experience and observations in the workplace, and perhaps a bit of providence, I made a decision about 10 years ago to take my career in a new direction. I became immersed in the arena of workforce preparation and workforce development. I was determined to find creative ways to help at-risk youth prepare themselves for the world of work, and to assist adults who were trying to get off welfare and into the workplace. This was my most challenging and rewarding work. Most discouraging was my work with experienced and successful individuals who were suddenly and unexpectedly facing a career transition because their jobs no longer existed.

I found common ground among all these individuals, even though they seemingly had little in common. Regardless of their level of education, training, or experience, these individuals were rarely equipped with the skills that would help them transfer whatever knowledge and skills they had from one environment to another, whether it was from one subject to another in school, from school to the community, or from one job to another in the workplace. All had acquired knowledge but were ill equipped to apply that knowledge in a meaningful way, or transfer that knowledge into another context.

In addition, many of these individuals were lacking the all-important "soft skills" needed to become responsible citizens and successful in the

workplace—skills that help individuals succeed, whether they are the janitor or the CEO, inexperienced or experienced, at-risk or highly educated. They include such things as personal qualities, critical thinking skills, people skills, the ability to manage information and resources effectively, and an understanding of how systems work. These are all highly valued in the workplace, as well as essential to relationships, and yet they are given little attention in our educational system. Not surprisingly, those who seem naturally to possess these soft skills often succeed in spite of their education, training, or previous experience. Those who are lacking in these soft skills often fail, even if they are highly educated and well trained in job-specific skills.

This may account for why so many young adults find entry into the “real world” so difficult, and why many experienced and respected professionals are at a total loss when faced with having to make a shift into a new career. Schools today are focused, if not obsessed, with measuring how much knowledge has been gained, often at the expense of helping students learn how to learn and to discern when it might be appropriate to unlearn something. With such a narrow focus, we undermine our ability to create lifelong learners and skillful thinkers. I became more and more convinced that we *must* figure out a way for our educational system, from kindergarten on up, to incorporate opportunities to develop these soft skills in a purposeful manner.

“Sadly, for my children and many others (including myself), school became boring, uninspiring, and all about compliance.”

My direct experience with the educational system has been both as a student and as a parent. I have been blessed with children (natural, foster, and adopted) who are bright, naturally precocious, curious, and very active. Like many children, growing up they were doers, and “why” seemed their favorite word. I’m sure my parents would voice the same about me, too. For children who continually challenge every assumption possible, school is rarely a safe, nurturing place. Worse, all too often these students are misunderstood and even mislabeled. They are no small challenge for the parent or for the traditional school system, public and private alike. Sadly, for

my children and many others (including myself), school became boring, uninspiring, and all about compliance.

There was one exception for me as a student that was to forever change my view of education. At the age of 16, I had the opportunity and privilege of performing with *Up With People* and becoming a student in their newly formed high school. I joined 100 students from around the world in the adventure of a lifetime. We traveled full-time, performing an inspiring two-hour musical wherever we went. Sixteen teachers traveled with us, mostly by bus, sometimes by train. The towns we visited throughout North America and the families and fellow students we stayed with during that year became our classroom. It challenged everything I knew about education and about people. All of us struggled for at least three months to figure out how to function in this classroom without walls, with the opportunity and responsibility of designing our own learning projects. I stayed on an extra year after graduation to do advance public relations. It called upon every possible resource I had, and then some. It provided advanced training in how to live and work with people who are different from me, and how not to give in to uncertainty and adversity, something I would call upon throughout my life. It was terrifying, enlightening, and extremely rewarding. I wouldn't trade those experiences for anything!

The idea to create Odyssey Charter School was first conceived in the spring of 1998. I had started a private consulting business, Purposeful Training Systems, LLC, in the beginning of 1997 and had just completed writing *Ready for Success*TM, a workforce preparation curriculum designed for at-risk students and welfare-to-work clients. My business partner, who had been an educator for over 30 years, was working with me to find creative ways to introduce this curriculum to the marketplace. We decided to attend an international conference on innovation to get some fresh ideas. One of the workshops we participated in was "Effective Intelligence." The presenters, Jerry D. Rhodes and his colleague Ian Wigston, gave a dynamic presentation on this research-based cognitive process, which addressed the soft skills that I believed were essential to prepare our youth for life and work in the 21st century. Effective Intelligence proponents assert that thinking is a strategic skill that drives all other aspects of attitude, skill, and knowledge. They say that thinking is the most "transferable" competence with direct and in-

direct benefits to *every* activity. My partner and I were both so excited that we made a proposal to Jerry and Ian that we work together to adapt Effective Intelligence for K–12 education. Jerry and Ian were both based in the United Kingdom, so we agreed to meet them in Washington, D.C., shortly thereafter to consider the possibilities.

About the same time, we heard about pending California legislation that would be more favorable to start-up charter schools. George Bernard Shaw, the British playwright and social reformer, is quoted as saying, “The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can’t find them, make them.” We were fascinated and intrigued by the possibility of starting a school from scratch. We soon found ourselves in the United Kingdom, working with Jerry and Ian to become licensed and accredited to use Effective Intelligence to design and implement a charter school. Naturally, the vision for the school, its target population, the mission statement, and the educational program grew out of our experiences—personally and professionally.

In writing the charter, the first thing we considered was the target population. My experiences with the *Up with People* high school gave me a true appreciation for Confucius’s saying: “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” While most agree that all students benefit by doing, there are students for whom it is absolutely essential to their success. Odyssey is designed specifically to serve these students, whose learning styles are not well suited for a conventional classroom that is focused on paper-pencil activities, lectures, textbooks, and standardized tests. Students who are bored, unmotivated, and underachieving need a more engaging, “hands-on” learning environment that respects different ways of demonstrating their knowledge and abilities and isn’t easily intimidated by their curiosity and creativity. An environment where, according to Plutarch, “The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled.”

One mission of Odyssey is to partner teachers, students, parents, and business and community volunteers to develop leaders and innovators for the knowledge-based global community in the 21st century. Another mission is to be responsive to the demands of the ever-changing, high-performance workplace. I was struck by an article in *Time* magazine in 1993, “The Tempting of America,” in which Lance Morrow was

quoted as saying, “America has entered the age of the contingent or temporary worker, of the consultant and subcontractor, of the just-in-time workforce—fluid, flexible, disposable. This is the future. Its message is this: You are on your own. For good (sometimes) and ill (often), the workers of the future will constantly have to sell their skills, invent new relationships with employers who must, themselves, change and adapt constantly in order to survive in a ruthless global market.” It is a stark reminder that the ability to cope with change and the ability to learn and unlearn may be the only job security on the horizon for our youth.

The design of Odyssey’s educational program was heavily influenced by the work of Jean Piaget (1896–1980). Piaget contends that “The principal goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done; men and women who are creative, inventive and discoverers, who can be critical and verify, and not accept, everything they are offered.” Odyssey is committed to facilitating life-long learning by skillful thinkers. The school’s learning environment supports a *thinking-focused* program designed to develop timeless, transferable skills within three interdependent learning components: character development, academic excellence, and future focus.

Keeping in mind our target population, we include in the learning environment a multiage setting designed to be student centered—focusing on what students need to succeed, engaging everyone as teachers and learners. Project-based learning opportunities provide a means for students to *take charge of their own learning* by actively planning, researching, and developing in-depth studies of topics of personal interest. Teachers and students evaluate learning on an ongoing basis through a variety of methods that honor different learning styles. A positive climate in the classroom is facilitated through peace education, conflict resolution, and peer mediation to build relationships and resolve conflicts. Parents are viewed as partners; Odyssey encourages and values parents’ participation in their children’s learning, at home and school.

By providing tools designed to improve the thinking performance of everyone in its learning community, Odyssey seeks to effect significant and fundamental change throughout the school, acknowledging that real change always requires a real paradigm shift in the way we think,

the way we teach, and the way we learn. The most distinctive and compelling characteristic of the school design is the powerful combination of Effective Intelligence and the MicroSociety® Program. Odyssey was awarded a \$150,000 grant to assist in customizing Effective Intelligence for K–12 education. MicroSociety® is a national school reform model that transforms classrooms by providing a real-world context for academic learning. It also provides endless opportunities for developing critical-thinking skills. Students collaborate with parents, business volunteers, and teachers to create functioning small communities. Students have jobs that help them learn to run businesses, apply technology, develop government and social agencies, and create cultural and arts organizations. Over time, students become immersed in the realities of a free-market economy, including the details of taxes, property concerns, income issues, and politics. MicroSociety® enables teachers to answer two persistent questions students ask: “Why do I need to know this?” and “How do I fit in?”

THE CHARTER

As a change agent who consistently challenges assumptions about what’s possible and consistently steps outside the box, I have been faced with numerous obstacles, land mines, and outright assaults throughout my life. My venture into the charter school arena has been no exception. The draft of Odyssey’s charter was completed in August 1998, and we began the dialogue with the local school district with high hopes that the local school board would support and approve it. I had been involved in the recent reaccreditation process for the local high school over the previous year and thought I had gained some valuable insight into the unmet needs of students and the ways in which a charter school might address them. Over the next seven months, there seemed to be productive meetings with district staff to address their questions and concerns about the charter. We thought they were good faith negotiations. There were many refinements and revisions to the charter. During the review process, a critical decision was made to locate the school outside the district boundaries in response to concerns that were raised about the possibility that students from outside the

district boundaries would be enrolled. However, we selected a site that was still close enough to effectively serve the students in the district who were interested in enrolling.

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During this time, we also began our community outreach. I recently came across a quote from Ellen Frankfort that says, “Choice has always been a privilege of those who could afford to pay for it.” This is especially true in the realm of education and is a particularly relevant issue as charter schools enter the market. Parents are conditioned when it comes to education. We had to introduce the community to the concept of school choice via “independent” public charter schools. We had to educate parents about what a charter school is and that a charter school is a *public, tuition-free school open to all* students. We learned that helping parents evaluate their choices, particularly those parents who historically have not had a choice, was more difficult than anticipated. All that being said, when the required charter petition was presented to the local school district, it contained far more signatures than the law required.

We held numerous mandatory parent orientation meetings to assist parents in determining whether Odyssey would be a good match for their children. We did not have a school to show parents, but we shared with them our vision and the distinctive characteristics of the school. My business partner engaged parents in an activity specifically designed to demonstrate the differences between a traditional classroom and what Odyssey intended to offer. At the conclusion of the orientation, parents were asked to carefully consider whether this would be a good fit for their children and whether they would be willing to be part of a start-up school, understanding there would be many expected and unexpected challenges. We later discovered that our efforts were subject to the limitations of words and the difficulty associated with helping others fully grasp something new and unfamiliar.

We formally submitted our charter petition to the local school board in March 1999. While we certainly anticipated questions, we were not prepared for the intense resistance and, in some cases, hostility. Of particular concern was the perceived liability for special education students and the decision to locate the school outside the district boundaries. There was an unrelenting flurry of legal intervention on both sides; however, no amount of explanation, even by attorneys, could overcome their fears. The charter was denied.

“We were thrilled. Odyssey became the first school in the state to be granted a charter by a county board after being denied by a local school district.”

Over 100 parents had come to the final hearing to voice their support for the school. Having the charter denied was incredibly frustrating and disappointing after all that had been invested and the strong community support that had been displayed. We had a second chance, however. California's new charter school legislation had a provision allowing a charter that had been denied by a local school district to be presented to a county board of education for approval.

Once again, the charter went through more scrutiny, this time by county staff. There were more refinements and revisions, more legal interpretations and recommendations, and more refinements and revisions. Then, on May 25, 1999, the county board voted to approve Odyssey's charter. We were thrilled. Odyssey became the first school in the state to be granted a charter by a county board after being denied by a local school district. But there was no time to revel in our success; it was on to the next challenge.

THE OPENING STAGE

At a time when most education workers had already made commitments for the fall, Odyssey now had to secure a director of education, teachers, and support staff for a school that was anything but typical,

where everyone would be a learner. Every employment ad ended with: “Only Learners Need Apply.” Interviews were designed to discern whether an individual was a good match for the school. Lacking a school to show them, we were again dependent on words, ours and those of the applicants. When the selection process was completed, we were confident we had found a dynamic team to birth the school. Yet not until “the rubber met the road” would we really be able to evaluate whether our choices were a good match for Odyssey. We would discover that not all were.

In July, the state formally issued Odyssey its status as a public charter school. During this time, the legislature and the California Department of Education were struggling with a new charter school funding model. It presented challenges for all charter schools in the state; however, yet again, Odyssey would become the test case for how the state would apply this new model to a school chartered by a county board instead of a local school district. More tweaking of the legislation was required, and then everyone scrambled to figure out how to put it into action. Systemic change is never easy, especially when what is new doesn’t fit into the existing system—by design. There were no easy or immediate answers.

Given the uncertainty of the funding situation, we sought to obtain private funding to ensure that the school could open in early September, as scheduled. We had no history as an organization, so it was nothing short of miraculous that a financial institution granted the school an unsecured \$250,000 line of credit, based solely on the anticipated public funds that, although delayed, were expected to show up by February. The private funds came just in time for the school to open as planned.

We had been fortunate to secure a five-year lease for facilities on a church campus across the street from the local community college. We had exclusive use of a two-story education building. Staff and parents labored for three weeks before the school opened to deal with significant deferred maintenance issues and to make the building suitable for Odyssey’s use. Everyone was relentless in his or her commitment to getting this done.

The “labor and delivery” process culminated when the school opened on September 7, 1999. Odyssey’s 230 K–8 students, representing 167 families and coming from 12 different school districts within about a 15-mile radius, were diverse in every sense. Few knew one another before coming to Odyssey. About 100 other students were on a waiting list as a

result of the school's lottery process. The staff of 18 included 10 teachers who had spent three weeks in August getting to know one another and preparing to open the school.

School furnishings were still arriving the first week of school. While teachers were busy creating a learning community within their classrooms, the administration and staff were dealing with the logistics of the drop-off and pick-up of students in a safe and timely manner, class schedules, recess and lunch breaks, and how to make the best use of limited playground and eating areas. Because the school had no cafeteria, parents were packing lunches every day.

“To everyone’s surprise . . . a clear difference quickly emerged in educational philosophy and administrative style, and in short order my partner resigned.”

By design my role had been more intensive during the design and development phase; my partner was to take a more active role once the school opened. However, somewhere between the charter being approved, the hiring of staff, our three-week training, and the school getting underway, my partner and I found ourselves strangely at odds on core issues. To everyone's surprise, as the reality of a nontraditional classroom and related school culture evolved, a clear difference quickly emerged in educational philosophy and administrative style, and in short order my partner resigned. I suddenly found myself in a position where I had to assume much more responsibility than anticipated. During this same time, our director of education had an unexpected health challenge and was out for six weeks. However, we had recently contracted with a consultant to assist us with our special education needs and she was able to step in during this crucial time. It seemed as if I was working 24/7.

THE ODYSSEY ADVENTURE

In choosing the name “Odyssey” for the school, we may have set a course consistent with its definition, “a long series of adventures filled

with notable experiences, hardships, etc.” Over the next two years, like Christopher Columbus, we came to the realization that it may in fact be easier to discover a new world than to try to change the one that everyone knows so well. We gained firsthand knowledge that the difficulty is not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from the old ones. Getting the OK to venture out where our independence and potential success might be perceived as a threat, competition, or divisive was just the beginning of our odyssey. There were many difficult decisions to be made about how to set appropriate expectations, for ourselves and others, and the ultimate challenge of adequately preparing for a journey that was moving us into more uncharted territory than we could have imagined, with little lead-time and few start-up resources.

Over the years, I have come to realize that no amount of planning or experience can ever fully equip you for a new venture. Like Columbus, we left the familiarity of the shore on a new ship, with a new crew and 167 families on board (including 230 children)—all of whom had high hopes of a new world that would give them more freedom and opportunity (and fix all their problems in record time). We were learning to swim in the middle of the ocean, facing the natural perils of the sea and the indirect threats to our existence—efforts to undermine charter legislation, erode funding, and withhold or delay needed resources.

During our first year, best-laid plans immediately came face to face with the additional challenges associated with establishing a school culture from scratch, especially having opened with everything and everyone being new. This was especially true and understandable with the middle school students. They came to Odyssey with considerable baggage from their previous school experiences, coupled with budding adolescence, further amplified by being in a new school that not only lacked a history and reputation to define its expectations but had an education program reflecting a different philosophy. A quote from Pogo says it well: “We are confronted with insurmountable opportunities.” And we genuinely were approaching the challenges with that attitude, doing all we could to give change a chance. But change takes time and, more often than not, longer than some have the patience for. As a result, during the school year we were faced with turnover in some of our middle school staff and students.

“By the end of May, there was an attempted mutiny.”

The first significant wave of discontent on our journey was in February 2000. In addition to our governing board, our initial governance structure included a 15-member advisory board; most were parents. This proved to be a major mistake. Although these parents were incredibly dedicated and gave way above and beyond expectations, what began as valuable help soon grew into a sense of entitlement. A number of parents began to encroach into areas that were not appropriate for parental involvement, and soon they were attempting to micromanage the school. This small, yet powerful contingent of parents (who were primarily Anglo and from a private school setting) made demands to get the “undesirables” (those who didn’t look or act like them and, ironically, those who needed *Odyssey* the most) to conform to their expectations within three weeks, or they would be thrown overboard, so to speak. With the support of the governing board and staff, I followed our map (our charter), compass (the needs of our targeted students), and stars (our ultimate vision). Over the next three months, this stance resulted in waves of unrelenting attacks that at times became very personal and vicious.

By the end of May, there was an attempted mutiny initiated by seven families who enlisted the aid of those who had the power to end our journey (county staff, county board members, and local elected officials). We quickly scrambled to find our life preservers, naively thinking they were in the hundred or so families who signed a petition supporting the school, and in our thorough response to the complaints. But alas, it would take an exhausting six months of intense work, an unwavering resolve, amendments to our charter, and significant and costly legal intervention to preserve our school without compromising its vision.

During our first year, another significant wave came in the form of special education. While our director of education had 25 years of experience in meeting the needs of students with special needs, for practical reasons we had made a decision to outsource our special education services for at least the first year. Our commitment to our special education students was high; however, we were faced with unacceptable

turnover in service providers, now beyond our control. As a result, our relationship with the contractor was strained at best. This took its toll on service delivery.

We also experienced difficulties educating parents on the full inclusion model to which we were so committed. In addition, parent expectations were probably unrealistic for a first-year, start-up school. They were further complicated by the fact that most came to Odyssey with a long history of needs not being met by their home district. Of course, Odyssey was expected to fix these problems without delay. We were also faced with a higher than normal percentage of students with a wide array of special education needs. Worse yet, we did not receive any special education funding until the spring. Fortunately, we were able to absorb these costs with our loan. No doubt, all of these challenges contributed to two parents filing for due process, unfortunately in a hostile manner. Even more problematic, driven by potential or perceived liability, we suddenly found everyone in the system taking sides rather than working together to resolve all the related issues. Once again, Odyssey was forced to seek what turned out to be costly legal intervention, but we were able to settle the cases responsibly.

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In the end, we certainly echoed Friedrich Nietzsche’s words: “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.” We went into our second year stronger and wiser. The challenge of finding a good match, whether in our staffing or in our students, is by far the most important struggle we have, in light of the innovative nature of our charter. We learned the hard way that parents always filter the information presented at our two-hour, mandatory orientations through their own understanding, previous experiences, hopes, and desires, and in some cases with their own agendas. As we prepared for our second year, we regrouped and worked harder, and I believe smarter, to recruit teachers and students who were up for the new challenges before us on the next leg of our journey. As a

result of the sifting-out process at the end of our first year, we began the new term with about 70 new families and four new teachers. Nor surprisingly, it made a significant difference in the look and feel of our campus and our classrooms. We also made a decision to hire a full inclusion specialist and to contract out only special services (e.g., speech and language). This provided the stability our students needed and ensured that our special education services were in concert with the distinctive characteristics of our charter.

By January, we had reconfigured our governance structure, which resulted in one governing body. The governing board is a policy-level board and is truly a representative body. Stakeholders include three community members, the founder/executive director, one teacher and two parents (one K–4 representative and one grades 5–8 representative). This has proven to be a tremendous improvement and provides the support needed by the administration without encroaching on the day-to-day operations of the school.

By the spring, parents had finally recuperated from the previous challenges and were ready to put together a parent organization. They formed the Odyssey Parent Participation Group and established working committees to support various activities within the school, and they play an important role in the success of our school.

“There were remarkable turnarounds with students whom many would have gladly thrown overboard. It made everything we went through worthwhile.”

Throughout our second year, we learned to enjoy our journey. We built the foundation for a strong community by taking important steps toward embracing our differences and resolving our conflicts in a productive and respectful manner. Periodically, those who had abandoned ship at the end of our first year continued to criticize and attempt to undermine our efforts. Fortunately, it was ineffective in the light of the critical mass of supportive parents, a team of professionals who were united in their mission, and county staff who seemed to recognize our commitment to continuous improvement.

During our first two years in operation, in the midst of and despite all the challenges, students were finding success and taking responsibility for their learning. There were remarkable turnarounds with students whom many would have gladly thrown overboard. It made everything we went through worthwhile.

The governing board graciously granted me a study leave at the end of the school year. The winds appeared calm; there seemed to be a fair sea before us—was that land on the horizon? As I reflected on our first two years, I felt blessed that we had come so far. We had a strong team, including our governing board, staff, parents, and students who were well equipped for the next leg of the journey. I invited our director of education, who was not only a valued colleague but had quickly become a good friend, to join me toward the end of the week to strategize preparations for the fall. That is when I learned she had been offered an opportunity to be part of a new special education school and hoped I would support her in that move. After I caught my breath, I realized that she and Odyssey were in a different stage of development, and perhaps our needs were now different.

It was almost July. How were we to find just the right educational leadership? As has happened so often in my life and the life of our school, providence set in. An individual immediately came to mind, but would she even consider a change, let alone on such short notice? As I began to reach out to others who might know of individuals who might be good candidates, her resumé appeared on the top of the stack. Within weeks she was on board. As an experienced educator who has been a leader in the field of progressive education, she brings the depth of knowledge and experience we need to enter the new world with the tools and resources needed to fulfill our vision.

We also had a change in our administrative support at the end of our second year. Our new office manager/registrar was learning the ins and outs of school operations. As the founder and executive director of the school, I had maintained my 24/7 role for over two years without a significant break. While I realized it wasn't healthy, I found it difficult to break the cycle. I was looking forward to entering the new school year with a strong leadership team that would help me shift into a new role. I was hopeful that these two new individuals would be capable of carrying the day-to-day operations and leadership at the school. The governing

board was affirming that I needed to move back into the development mode. I envisioned becoming the ultimate “resource choreographer.”

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What happened next not only forced the issue but was life changing and may have even been lifesaving for me. On the last day in July, we held a parent orientation meeting in the evening. It was late and I was tired. I was carrying things down the stairs to my office when I lost my footing, hit the concrete ground full force, and shattered my right heel. I spent the first six weeks in bed, three months in a wheelchair and crutches, and will be on crutches for several more months. While I would never wish this on anyone, it has shown me so much. I have certainly gained a whole new perspective on mobility issues. And I have finally been able to let go of the 24/7 role. My laptop, e-mail, and phone allow me to work from home, giving me time to regroup and prepare for my shifting role.

My new colleagues rose to the occasion in every way. They provide exceptional leadership and allow me to support and mentor them in their new roles. The real blessing for me personally and professionally has been to see the growth and maturing of the governing board, parents, staff, and students as they take ownership of the vision and make it more and more a reality every day. As I am becoming more mobile, I will be moving out in the community and am excited that my dream of becoming the “resource choreographer” will soon be realized.

In our third year, I believe we have finally made landfall. What challenges do we face as we embrace the new world? We have no doubt made many mistakes in our first two years, and we will make new ones as we seek to make this new world our own. Mahatma Gandhi was adamant in stating: “Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes.” California’s charter school legislation offers Odyssey and others the freedom to innovate in exchange for greater accountability, and yet, with innovation, mistakes are a guaranteed part

of the process. They are absolutely necessary if real and lasting change is to take place. We often find ourselves in a precarious position—under a high-powered microscope that zooms in on any and all mistakes, in a system that is historically “risk adverse.” All too often, the system’s reaction to something new and unfamiliar, especially when mistakes are being made, is to legislate it back into something that fits the standard paradigm. Learning how to survive in these waters and finding creative and constructive ways to work together for the benefit of the children will be essential to our very existence as we move forward.

Adventures of Charter School Creators: Leading from the Ground Up takes you inside the world of individual educational entrepreneurs who have created charter schools from scratch and lived to tell about it. Individuals and teams across the country tell stories of the victories they enjoyed and defeats they overcame to create their schools: an Episcopal priest working in the Pico–Union community of Los Angeles, a corporate attorney in Miami, a manpower training specialist in East Saint Louis, the chief financial officer of a major African American church in New York City, and a retired military officer in North Carolina, as well as experienced school teachers and administrators. From these stories, Deal and Hentschke extract and examine the issues of school leadership that are peculiar to school leaders who have chosen to create schools from the ground up. This book:

- examines entrepreneurial leadership as a concrete manifestation of school leadership.
- sheds light on the concrete differences between leadership in relatively autonomous start-up charters and relatively dependent traditional schools.
- anchors charter school leadership within the context of general (noneducational) leadership and distinguishes it from what is typically associated with school leadership today.

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