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Working with Ted

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I never worked “with” a boss before working with Ted at Brown University. I had always known of Ted—he was Dean at Harvard Graduate School of Education when I was a student there, just beginning my teaching career.

Ted arrived at Brown University in September 1984. I was working at Brown in President Howard Swearer’s office, creating seminars led by Brown faculty and local teachers for Providence high school teachers. Ted came onto the University campus in a gentle whirlwind. Horace’s *Compromise* had been published and the response was overwhelming. He had been receiving bags of mail and was, of course, responding to each and every teacher, principal, and superintendent. From the contents of the mailbags, his myriad school visits, and his writing was born the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), housed at Brown.

The Education Department suddenly became the place to be at Brown. We were meeting and collaborating with departments across the university. Professors from Comparative Literature, Biology and Medicine, and Judaic Studies were teaming with us on a variety of projects. Ted was a magnet. His large and hearty laugh, generous welcome, and invitation to “break bread” at any time day or night drew crowds. He generated ideas by the dozen and the financial support to give those ideas legs.

Ted was a model for our work together. He was optimistic and sunny. He always assumed best intentions, even when working with those who opposed his ideas. He liked a good challenge. He loved engaging in argument. He was a great teacher. Brown students flocked to his office. The numbers of Brown graduates choosing to become teachers soared once he arrived on campus. He and Nancy opened their home to classes and discussion groups. He tutored some students one-on-one. When I wanted to teach a course, he said, “Let’s do it.” I wrote a proposal and the next semester it was in the course catalogue. Eventually, we would teach a large undergraduate course together, with a whole crew of masters’ students as our TA’s and students in small groups designing and presenting their ideas for a “new American high school.”

Ted taught me to think big—in spite of my worry about details and follow-through. He asked hard questions and wanted those of us working with him to do the same. His expansive thinking made going to work every day an adventure. What next? Before e-mail, he wrote on yellow legal pads, his notes always ending with “Let’s talk.” I knew that the initiation meant a new challenge coming my way. After we had both left Brown, he continued to pepper me with opportunities for creative work in schools and in teacher education.

What was most remarkable about CES as Ted formed it was the simplicity of its ideas. Ted could always distill the most complicated of problems into a set of simple steps. And as he worked through one problem or dilemma after another, he engaged us in discussion and debate. What did teachers need—conditions, resources, support—in order to do the important work with kids? He cared about what we at CES thought and he wanted all of us working as close to the front lines as possible. And he continuously sought out colleagues—principals, teachers, and superintendents—and brought them to Brown. He cared most about what was happening for “kiddos,” as he often called them, in the classroom. His ideas were sensible and grounded in reality. Of course it made sense to have students demonstrating what they knew and could do. Of course it was the right thing to do to have teachers “coach” their students so that the kids could be the “workers.” His Common Principles were not always easy to implement, but teachers and principals used them to frame their work, their hopes, and their expectations. The Principles became the touchstone for changing schools to create solid opportunities for all students.

Today, 25 years after the founding of CES, in the school where I work, the language and ideas of CES permeate everything we do. Our students must all present annual Roundtables where they show their work

and talk about it. We expect all students to be the “workers.” Our teacher/student ratios are low, all students are known very well, and advisory is a strong piece of our program. And our goal in this small school is to send all of our students, who are very poor, to college.

Ted comes to mind almost every day. I remember to think big and to keep the kiddos in my sights. When we laugh together, I know that he would appreciate our merriment. I try to gather people as he has always done. He changed my life as so many others and he changed the schools in which we live and work. When I saw him just recently he said, “Next time you come, bring some of your problems, and we’ll talk about them.” I look forward to it.

Founded five years ago, Community Charter School of Cambridge is a public charter school, grades 7-12, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its goal is aggressive—to graduate all students and have them matriculate to college. The curriculum is intellectually demanding. Every student has an advisor. All students present a year-end public Roundtable of their work, and seniors fulfill 100 hour internships in local technology-based industries, hospitals, cultural organizations, and other non-profit organizations.

Paula Evans is Head of School at the Community Charter School of Cambridge and one of its founders. Previously, she was the Director of the New Teachers Collaborative, a freestanding teacher education program based at the Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, Massachusetts. She has been principal at Dover-Sherborn Regional High School in Dover, Massachusetts and at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. She taught at the secondary level for 17 years and taught education courses to Brown undergraduate and graduate students. Evans worked at Brown University in several different capacities—as founder and director of the Institute for Secondary Education, a collaboration between the University and local school districts; as director of Brown’s teacher education programs; and as director of professional development, first for the Coalition of Essential Schools and then for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. She was responsible for developing, leading, and supporting the National School Reform Faculty, a network of several thousand teachers and principals from schools across the country. She has published in *Daedalus*, *the Harvard Educational Review*, *Education Week*, and *Phi Delta Kappan*.

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