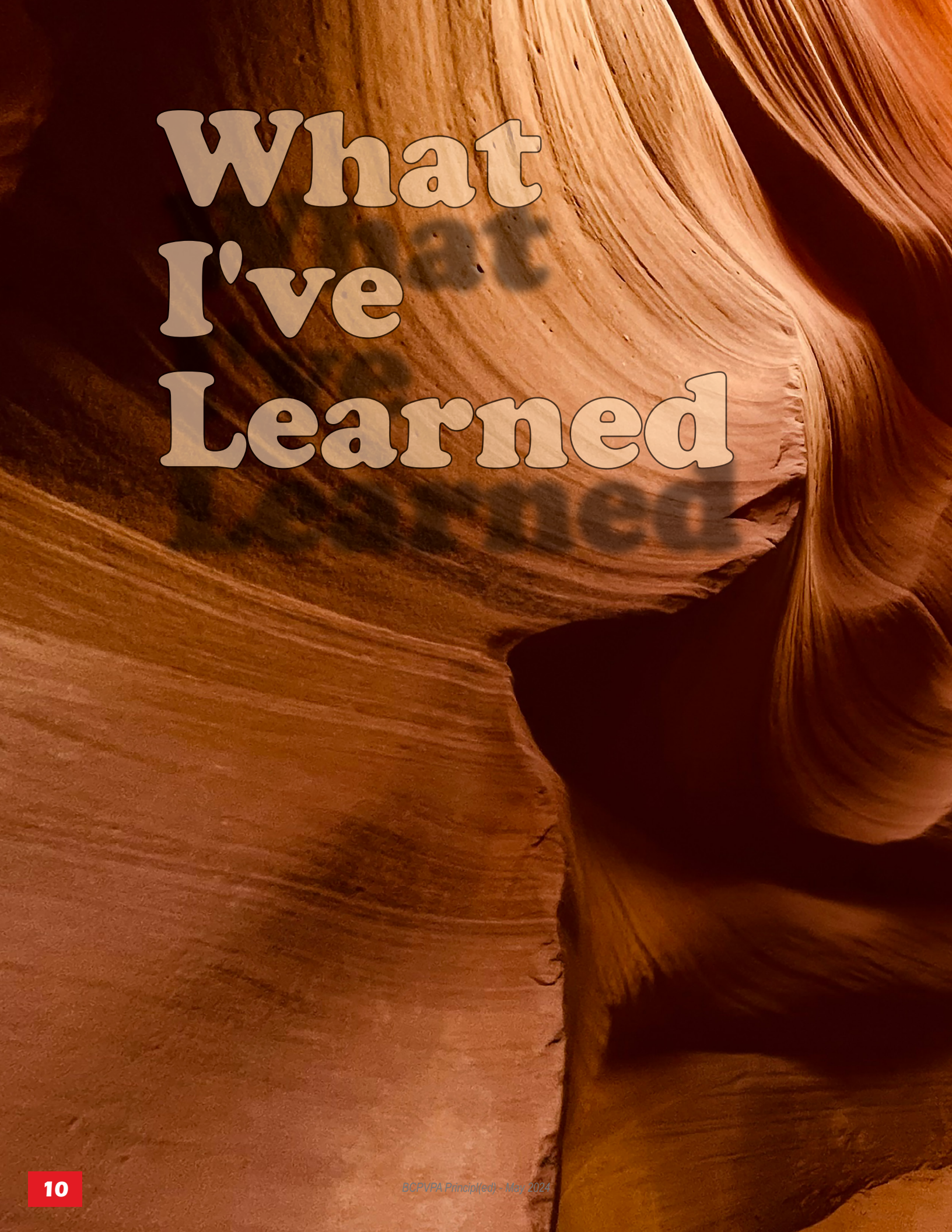




What I've Learned

**BCPVPA's Former
Director of Finance
Reflects on 34 Years
of Serving Members**

by

Carol Powell

Retired BCPVPA Director of Finance

The B.C. Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association opened its doors in January 1988, and I became the organization's first accountant in March 1989. The weeks and months leading to my retirement inspired me to think more deeply about what makes a non-profit organization successful. Here are the top five lessons I learned during my career with the BCPVPA:

1. Remember the Purposes of the Organization

These are the guiding lights that determine the intentions and direction of a non-profit. BCPVPA's purposes are outlined in its Constitution:

- a) Represent, develop and promote the professional and economic interests and welfare of its members;
- b) Foster education leadership as a means of promoting and advancing education at all levels and for all people;
- c) Encourage wide communication and involvement among members;
- d) Maintain a strong organization through constant assessment of efficiency and effectiveness of its activities;
- e) Promote excellence in personnel practices;
- f) Render assistance to members on any matter, upon request and when not inconsistent with the policies of the Association; and
- g) Support and coordinate professional development activities for members.

These purposes are member-centric and are reflected in our mission statement of 'Serving members by supporting effective leadership in education through representation, advocacy and leadership development'. Everything that the Association does needs to align with these purposes, and this has surfaced two thoughts for me.

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The first is the importance of building a community of individuals who feel supported in their profession. Our Association has thrived on providing work-related support, space for community members to exchange ideas, and various avenues for member involvement. When addressing Chapter Council representatives at their November 2023 provincial meeting, I mentioned that the biggest reason for my 34 year tenure with BCPVPA was that I was doing purposeful work, and working with and for a community that has come to mean so much to me.

The second is the importance of remembering where we came from. I am a big fan of Simon Sinek's book *Start with Why*. In the chapter "The Origins of Why", under a section entitled "The WHY Comes from Looking Back", Sinek states that, "every company, organization or group with the ability to inspire starts with a person or small group of people who were inspired to something bigger than themselves." When British Columbia's Principals and Vice-Principals were no longer a part of the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF), effective October 1987, there was recognition that a new association was needed to support these education leaders. BCPVPA's purpose is echoed in George Buckley's President's Message in the January 1989 edition of BCPVPA's publication *Adminfo*: "I am grateful that we have a strong organization of dedicated principals and vice-principals to support each other as we move ahead... One of the key questions under consideration is that of keeping 'lean and mean.' We believe that the demand to keep 'lean and mean' is a demand from the members to engage only in those activities that are directly related to support for principals and vice-principals in doing their job".

I do not intend to offer a full history lesson, but instead to stress how much we can learn about the Association through an understanding of our early years. I would encourage you to read the article “In Their Own Words: The history of the BCPVPA” by retired BCPVPA Director of Communications, Richard Williams, to find out more about the BCPVPA’s journey.



In Their Own Words

2. Strategic Planning

One of my favorite quotes from all-time great Yankee catcher Yogi Berra is, “if you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.”

Planning is important for an organization to end up where it wants to be, and to prioritize the achievement of goals that fulfill one or more of its purposes. The use of resources is maximized by providing the most beneficial services for our community.

A Constitution, which outlines an organization’s purposes, is a foundational document for creating a Strategic Plan. Without consistent reference to this document, an organization could stray from its intent.

There was a lot of work to be done in establishing the Association, and our BCPVPA archived documents reflect the value of planning in those early years. Priorities were established that addressed both the needs of a new organization, and shifts in the labour environment. These priorities were addressed while the Association continued with the activities previously undertaken by the former Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Provincial Specialist Association of the BCTF. There was an amazing amount of work done to prepare the Association for a January 1, 1988 launch, and this was all possible because the individuals knew their priorities.

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A strategic planning committee was established, and Provincial Chapter Council representatives were included in the planning process. I used to chuckle each time one of BCPVPA’s Directors commented that we needed to get the ‘horse before the cart’, instead of ‘the cart before the horse’, when describing the need to set priorities before setting the budget. This was one of my first real-life strategic planning lessons.

In later years – as a strong proponent of strategic planning, and recognizing the need for it – I proposed that we develop a robust planning process that would follow a three year cycle. My involvement with this process was the most rewarding part of my career.

I observed several benefits:

1. The planning process opens up in-depth conversations about our environment, where we are, where we want to be, how we will get there, and how to measure our progress. It identifies the resources needed, areas of responsibility, and timelines. *Yes, Yogi: we know where we are going.*
2. Monitoring the plan enables an adjustment to our actions if necessary.
3. The process sparks strategic thinking, and not just when the plan is being developed. Conversations over time can become more meaningful as we look towards fulfilling the Association’s goals.



L to R: BCPVPA Board Director Heidi Grant, Carol Powell, BCPVPA President Brian Leonard at November 2023 Chapter Council Meeting

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4. The cart is no longer in front of the horse. The budget building process used by BCPVPA involves reviewing the plan to identify the resources needed to meet its goals. One of the questions consistently asked of the Budget Committee is whether the budget aligns with the Strategic Plan.

3. Adaptability

The environment in which an organization operates changes, and this necessitates the ongoing monitoring of changes and the development of adaptive strategies as needed. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact on how things were done. BCPVPA rose to this challenge through the quick implementation of alternate ways of doing business, such as a new approach to utilizing technology. Chapter Council meetings, the AGM, Board, and Committee meetings were held online when in-person meetings were not possible. Our provincial Connecting Leaders Conference and IDEAS Forum moved to online formats. Chapter Presidents who were unable to gather for a provincial meeting were offered online 'Town Hall' sessions throughout the year to receive updates, and for opportunities to discuss issues.

In British Columbia and beyond, there are increasing challenges for Principals and Vice-Principals due to the pace of educational change, the increased use of technology, and the volume and complexity of the

work. Our 2023-2024 Strategic Plan illustrates our willingness to adapt so that we can better serve our members. It includes the Member Health goal that "Principals and Vice-Principals have the support and resources required to maintain and improve their overall well-being", and this is just one example of how our strategic planning is responding to change.

4. Collaboration on all Levels

Collaboration on all levels includes collaboration amongst staff, members, and sector partners. This creates a conduit to hear the opinions of individuals who bring various expertise and lenses to the work, and leverages resources to achieve the goals that are important to the organization. Collaboration is powerful in strengthening relationships.

Internally, collaboration can help with development of our office team. Instead of working in silos, individuals can work on items that are related to multiple program areas. For example, while the focus of Member Well-being falls mainly in the Member Support Services program area, Communications contributes to designing messaging and advocacy information that can lead to clearer understanding and more support from the Ministry of Education & Child Care and school districts. Professional Learning and Development consistently integrates well-being content into the Association's educational programs.

A wonderful example of the power of sector partner collaboration is the Association's recent involvement as a leader in the development of the Foundational Management Modules. This was achieved through a consortium of education partners, and directed by the Ministry of Education & Child Care and the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA). The Ministry and BCSSA provided an opportunity to create a program that was strengthened by many sector partners bringing their unique expertise to the table. The project benefits the education sector and fulfills a need that was identified by Principals and Vice-Principals in past strategic planning sessions.

5. Effectively Manage Resources

There is a reason that purpose (D) was included in BCPVPA's Constitution:

(D) Maintain a strong organization through constant assessment of efficiency and effectiveness of its activities;

I will state the obvious: it would be difficult – or impossible – to achieve the goals that are most important if the resources are not accessible.

Achieving a balanced budget in 2023 was increasingly difficult due to rising costs and demands. It is critical that we consistently review our services, how they are being provided, and how effectively they are supporting our members. We always need to prioritize.

I would argue that as a service organization, our most important resource is our employees. To achieve continued success, it is necessary that we recruit and train the best staff possible.

Summary

Through my thirty-four years at the BCPVPA, I received the gift of knowledge and understanding. I had the opportunity to recognize the effectiveness of the five components discussed in this article, alongside hundreds and thousands of other moments of learning. I believe that these five lessons have made the Association what it is today, and continued attention to these tenets will lead to continued success. I will carry these lessons with me, along with the many moments and interactions that I have enjoyed with our members, far into the future.



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