

## FUNDING CASE STUDY:

### The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce

#### CONCEIVING THE IDEA

When Tonya Matthews traveled to the annual American Chamber of Commerce Executives conference in August 2009, she was not expecting to come across a game-changing idea for her Chamber. After all, the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce was one of the leading Chambers in the country in terms of its forward-thinking initiatives and membership engagement. However, as she watched Stephen R. Covey's presentation on the importance of bringing leadership principles to students, and watched elementary students discuss how their school was helping them be leaders, she knew this innovative idea had to be shared. The mission of the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce is to advocate a positive business environment and stimulate economic development for South Central Kentucky, and she knew immediately that this initiative would have a ground-breaking effect on the development of talent in South Central Kentucky.

Stephen R. Covey had just launched his newest book, *The Leader in Me: How Schools and Parents Around the World Are Inspiring Greatness, One Child at a Time*, which documented the impact of embedding leadership development into the core curriculum, activities, and culture of a school. When she returned to the office, she told the Chamber Executive team about the conference and her vision of how this could impact their community and their mission to develop outstanding talent for their workforce.

By teaching students leadership skills—the same skills that employers seek in top talent—they could create a human capital advantage for their community over the long run. As the Chamber President, Ron Bunch, put it “It's critically important to invest in people and human capital to raise the level of productivity and innovation. This strategy will have the most permanent effect.” And by starting with schools—where children and youth are already getting an education—the Bowling Green Chamber saw an opportunity to pursue its economic development strategy.

#### BUILDING STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN

In 2009, the Chamber President and Vice President spoke at length to Chamber partners about a new way to develop the talent their companies need—“Begin With the End in Mind” and bring *The Leader In Me* to all of our schools. The idea was received with enthusiasm. The Chamber Board agreed *The Leader In Me* could be a point of differentiation—a way to attract businesses and development, and to increase the quality of the workforce. One board member asked, “what else could we do that in 13 years, could significantly impact the workforce we have and meaningfully change our community in many respects?”

At that time, the Board recommended the Chamber meet with the Superintendents of the two

local school districts, as both districts seemed well positioned to embrace *The Leader in Me*. The City Schools had written into their strategic plan that 21st-century skills are the way to move forward. The County Schools were in transition and had a tremendous amount of energy to build strong cultures into their schools. The Board recommended that Chamber executives take note of that direction and approach the educators in a spirit of mutual benefit—the schools would have a way to meet their strategic goals, and the business community would have a well-educated and effective workforce. Luckily, the relationship that existed between the Chamber and the districts was open and collaborative in nature. As one district superintendent, Joe Tinius, noted, “the economy is what makes the whole system work. Business drives the tax base, which funds our schools and pays our teachers.” The initial reaction of both districts was positive and committed to further investigation.

As part of their research, a group of business leaders and educators traveled to Decatur, Alabama, where, as a result of a similar Chamber-led initiative, *The Leader in Me* was operating in many schools. The group was deeply touched by what they saw. Joe Natcher put it this way: “To me, the most important thing was taking a group to Decatur. We toured various classrooms and started getting tears as these kids looked us in the eye, shook our hands, and radiated confidence. We realized that every kid can feel important, step forward, and be a leader.” Another business leader, John Mark Fones, noted: “these were not just the really good kids we were meeting. You see a confidence in these children about who they are and the way they were presenting themselves. We were not intimidating them. I said to myself, ‘this is real,’ these kids understand what proactive is and what win-win is.”

Based on the stakeholder support developed on that trip, the Chamber Board voted to include *The Leader in Me* initiative in their strategic plan for 2010 and John Mark was voted in as the board representative to lead the initiative. Joe Natcher, 2010 Chamber Chair person, was the first official investor, sponsoring promotional materials that allowed the Chamber to get information into the hands of businesses and schools.

## FROM FACILITATOR TO FUNDRAISER

Even though it was clear the initiative was crucial to their mission to develop talent, it remained unclear what role the Chamber would play going forward. At first, the Chamber saw itself as a facilitator—building support from both the education and business sectors. Several schools began implementing *The Leader in Me* Process using Title I funds, but it soon became evident that if all or a majority of schools were going to implement, the Chamber must go beyond facilitator and embrace a role of fundraiser.

In the spring of 2011, the Chamber considered options to coordinate a capital campaign to raise enough money to help any school in the community implement *The Leader in Me*. In October of 2011, the Chamber asked the two school districts to present to an executive team of Chamber officers. During that meeting, Chamber executives determined that their organization would be the primary driver of the capital campaign. According to Chamber President, Ron Bunch, “it became clear to me we were the only ones with the strategic relationships to pull this off.

We couldn't facilitate anymore, we needed to own it and make it a priority." Talent is a primary driver of economic development and, as such, this initiative was imperative to the work of the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce.

With that decided, the Chamber embarked on an informal feasibility study in the form of an event. The Chamber invited key influencers from various community institutions including the police department, the mayor's office, and the judicial institutions. Chamber officers and board members spent countless hours working the phones to ensure the invitation list was long and replete with local decision makers.

At the event, the Chamber outlined the goals of the capital campaign. The campaign was positioned as an investment in the 18,000 students in the community and in the future of the community itself. For \$88 per student, The Leader in Me could be provided to each student and maintained in the school for all future students. The Chamber then calculated a two-step option that if adopted would total \$3,000,000:

- Phase I: the first \$1.6M raised would go towards initial training and implementation for schools to reach Lighthouse designation and would be raised quickly;
- Phase II: \$1.4M would be then raised as endowment overtime and would go toward funding The Leader in Me when a new school was built.

The result of this informal feasibility study was strong support for and commitment to this initiative. Because it was about kids and the future of the community, people wanted to invest.

## THE FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

By January of 2012, the Chamber was leading a full-fledged capital campaign, with Rick Wilson and Ann Puckett serving as co-chairs.

- The Chamber Board decided the Chamber Foundation would manage the funds.
- A separate TLIM Chamber Foundation advisory board was established and comprised of private sector professionals and education superintendents with the task to oversee the funds.
- This advisory board would become the accountability arm and would allocate resources based on a school's readiness to implement.

At this time, many events, lunches, and other conversations began taking place with potential business donors. Most, if not all, recognized this could be something very significant, but were concerned about its long-term viability. John Mark Fones, Chamber board member, played an important role in approaching things strategically, best understanding the likely objections and how to best refute them. A large group of educators and community stakeholders (~300) were invited to attend *The Leader in Me* Symposium, where they toured schools, heard educator-led

breakout sessions, and generally got a feel for *The Leader in Me*.

In order to create momentum, the Chamber decided to treat the initial phase of the fundraising effort as a “silent phase.” Before announcing the campaign to a broader public audience, the Chamber committed to raise \$800,000 -or half of the \$1.6 million. The first milestone of this silent campaign was a “coffee hour” sponsored by Scott & Murphy Construction Group. There, Muriel Summers, principal of AB Combs Elementary School, made a presentation to the Chamber membership about the impact of The Leader in Me on her school and community. Local superintendents were in attendance and were available to answer questions regarding their level of commitment. Based on the success of this event, The Chamber then organized teams to target businesses at different levels of investments:

LEADERSHIP DIVISION	ADVANCE DIVISION	Heritage Division	Scholar Division	Foundation Division
≥ \$75,000 Investments <b>CAMPAIGN GOAL:</b> \$1.2 million	\$15,000 - \$74,999 Investments <b>CAMPAIGN GOAL:</b> \$900,000	≤ \$15,000 Investments <b>CAMPAIGN GOAL:</b> \$300,000	Parent Investments <b>CAMPAIGN GOAL:</b> \$300,000	Grant/Foundation Dollars <b>CAMPAIGN GOAL:</b> \$300,000

By July of 2012, the Chamber had \$450,000 of investment committed - well over half of the \$800,000 goal. Graves-Gilbert Clinic—the largest physician organization in the region, agreed to make a watershed investment of \$250,000. The CEO, Chris Thorn, remarked” One of the core values of Graves-Gilbert Clinic is to be leaders in our community. We achieve this objective on both an individual and corporate level. Partnering with the school systems in the Leader In Me program is an activity that signifies a commitment to one of the most basic cornerstones of our community: the education and culture of our children, the next generation. We are proud that our \$250,000 will support this very worthwhile program.” With that generous investment, the silent phase was concluded in August of 2012.

In September 2012, the public phase of the campaign was announced and the Chamber set out to raise the remaining \$800,000 to meet the initial goal of \$1.6 million for implementation. At that time, the TLIM South Center Kentucky website was released to the public (<http://www.the-leaderinmesck.com>), a full-time campaign coordinator was hired, and the advisory board began to make decisions about schools applying for funds.

## MEASURING RESULTS OVER TIME

Throughout the course of the campaign, the Chamber staff noticed something groundbreaking—a fundamental disconnect between conventional school metrics and the needs of businesses. *The Leader In Me* was developing skills that had never been measured before, but that positively affected the metrics that were being measured. With skills taught in *The Leader in Me*, the

business community sees less need for investment when those students arrive in the workforce. While only time will tell, key metrics to watch as these children progress will be the high school graduation rate, the college attendance rate, and the necessary remediation rate at the college level and in the workplace. To ensure this information is properly tracked, the Chamber has involved Western Kentucky University in designing a way to follow those students and measure the impact of this program.