

Core Question

Termie Land challenged leaders to think beyond mission statements alone:

What documents, systems, and habits help ensure that a school's mission is consistently understood, lived, and sustained over time?

Drawing heavily on Jim Collins' *Good to Great* and *Built to Last*, Land argued that exceptional schools move from aspiration to execution by creating a set of interconnected guiding documents that shape organizational culture and decision-making.

The Mission Is Important, But It Cannot Stand Alone

Land emphasized that a mission statement is only one piece of a larger ecosystem.

While mission defines purpose, additional guiding documents help people understand:

- What success looks like
- What graduates should become
- What employees are expected to do
- What values drive decisions
- What culture the school seeks to create
- What long-term vision the institution pursues

Without these supporting structures, mission statements can remain abstract and disconnected from daily practice.

MRA's Six Guiding Documents

Madison-Ridgeland Academy developed six interconnected guiding documents that collectively reinforce mission.

1. Mission and Vision

The mission defines the school's purpose.

The vision describes the future the school aspires to create.

At MRA, the mission and vision were revised to clearly articulate both the school's college-preparatory identity and its Christian identity.

2. Portrait of a Graduate

The Portrait of a Graduate defines the qualities students should possess when they leave the school.

Examples included:

- Lifelong learning
- Strong work ethic
- Christian faith and character
- Community engagement
- Ethical technology use
- Service to others

The portrait provides a shared definition of student success across all divisions of the school.

3. Characteristics of Professional Excellence

This document defines what excellence looks like for employees.

It establishes expectations for:

- Professional growth
- Commitment to students
- Innovation
- Collaboration
- Integrity
- Excellence in practice

The document is used during hiring, onboarding, evaluation, and professional development.

4. Patriot Values

The values document identifies the character traits the school seeks to develop and reinforce throughout the community.

Examples included:

- Excellence
- Compassion
- Honesty
- Respect
- Responsibility

These values serve as visible reminders of the school's cultural expectations.

5. Culture of MRA

The culture document describes the behavioral and relational characteristics that define daily life in the school.

Examples included:

- Family
- Faith
- Shared purpose
- Welcoming relationships
- Positivity
- Progressiveness
- Diligence
- Accountability

The goal is not simply to describe culture but to intentionally shape it.

6. Declaration of Faith

As MRA completed its transition to becoming a Christian school, it adopted a formal declaration of faith that clearly articulated its theological commitments.

Land described this as the foundational document supporting the school's Christian identity.

Guiding Documents Create Alignment

A major theme of the presentation was alignment.

Land argued that guiding documents help ensure consistency among:

- Trustees
- Administrators
- Faculty
- Staff
- Students
- Families

Rather than relying on assumptions, schools should clearly communicate who they are and what they value.

The documents create a common language that can be used across hiring, evaluation, strategic planning, and daily decision-making.

Mission Requires Repetition

Land repeatedly emphasized that documents alone do not change culture.

Leaders must intentionally and consistently reinforce them.

Examples included:

- Annual faculty presentations
- Orientation sessions
- Professional development activities
- Small-group discussions
- Visual displays throughout campus
- Hiring and onboarding processes

His philosophy was simple:

People embrace what leaders consistently emphasize.

Connecting Guiding Documents to Good to Great

Using Jim Collins' framework, Land demonstrated how guiding documents support organizational excellence.

Stage 1: Disciplined People

The Characteristics of Professional Excellence help define the kind of people the school seeks to hire, develop, and retain.

Excellence begins with having the right people who understand and embrace the institution's expectations.

Stage 2: Disciplined Thought

The Mission, Vision, and Declaration of Faith provide the philosophical foundation that guides thinking and decision-making.

These documents help leaders answer:

- Why do we exist?

- What do we believe?
- What future are we pursuing?

They create organizational clarity.

Stage 3: Disciplined Action

The Culture document, Patriot Values, strategic plans, and operational practices translate beliefs into action.

These tools guide behavior, shape experiences, and influence how the school operates every day.

Stage 4: Built to Last

The Portrait of a Graduate represents the long-term outcome of the school's work.

If students consistently embody the qualities described in the portrait, both the students and the institution are positioned for lasting success.

Strategic Planning as a Supporting Tool

Land described strategic planning as another mechanism for translating mission into action.

Strategic plans should:

- Reflect mission and vision
- Address institutional priorities
- Guide resource allocation
- Support accreditation goals
- Provide operational direction

However, strategic plans are most effective when they remain rooted in the school's guiding documents rather than becoming disconnected projects.

Internal Marketing Matters

One particularly practical concept was Land's emphasis on "internal marketing."

Rather than focusing primarily on external advertising, schools should continually communicate their value to their own community.

This includes:

- Reinforcing mission and values
- Celebrating successes
- Building loyalty and trust
- Helping families understand the school's distinctiveness

The goal is for faculty, staff, students, and families to become ambassadors for the institution.

Culture Is Intentional

Land argued that culture does not simply happen.

Schools can intentionally define, reinforce, and strengthen the culture they want.

By repeatedly articulating cultural expectations and recognizing behaviors that support them, leaders can gradually shape the character of the institution.

As he noted, when organizations consistently describe who they aspire to be, people begin to act accordingly.

Key Takeaway

Land's central message was that schools become "great" and remain "built to last" when mission is supported by a coherent system of guiding documents that define culture, expectations, values, leadership, and outcomes.

Mission provides purpose, but guiding documents provide clarity, alignment, and consistency.

When schools intentionally develop, communicate, and reinforce these documents over time, they create disciplined people, disciplined thinking, disciplined action, and ultimately an institution capable of enduring success.