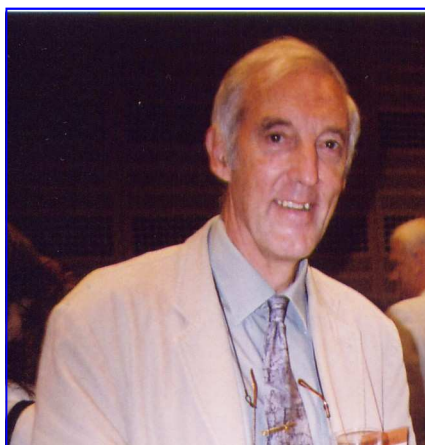


## A personal view by Professor George Walker

### Walker's Laws of Management

Many years ago, when I was concerned with the development of the whole curriculum, I proposed three curriculum laws. Walker's First Curriculum Law stated "If a particular group of students is required to study subject X then perhaps everyone should be studying it". This, you should understand, was in the earliest days of the concept of an educational entitlement linked to a common curriculum so I am not surprised by the tentative 'perhaps'. My Second Curriculum Law stated "The more words used in the title of a subject, the more intellectually suspect it is likely to be." This addressed a widespread view that simple descriptors like maths, history and geography would not be acceptable across the full student ability range. Instead we needed something more attractive like Man's Awareness of Time and Space (but ideally with a more challenging acronym),



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Well, all that was a generation ago. Since then I have become more concerned with management than with curriculum reform, and the temptation

to distil a few simple laws from a third of the century's experience is proving irresistible. So my first law of management states rather obviously "Never try to manage something that you are not in a position to manage." Not in a position may mean geographic distance and this was certainly the case with the IB whose activities are spread, often rather thinly, across 120 different countries. It may mean lack of knowledge – you cannot understand everything – or a lack of interest, since not all aspects of a complex organization are going to be equally fascinating. Whatever the reason, get someone else to manage it. It is called delegation and it is usually rather poorly practised.

**'Never try to manage something that you are not in a position to manage'**

usually to be studied as a Mode 3 CSE - remember? And Walker's Third Curriculum Law .... alas, I have long since forgotten.

My second law insists that the person in charge - the head, principal, director, CEO, whatever - should have a formal annual appraisal. Its precise form is not important, since it is unlikely to tell you anything about yourself that you do not already know. However, it will tell those responsible for your performance quite a lot they never suspected and that will help them provide much better support and advice. An annual appraisal is also a sound insurance policy. The high casualty rate amongst the heads of international schools is a statistic frequently discussed and deplored, but I suspect

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that few of the victims had insisted upon an annual appraisal and therefore had no formal evidence to present on the inevitable day of reckoning.

Walker's Third Law of Management says "Never take your eye off the bottom line." Inspiring though mission statements are, they look a little forlorn when the cash runs out. The CEO may be professionally incompetent, ethically suspect or just a rather nasty person, but the official reason given for dismissal will invariably be linked to financial performance. So my advice is never miss a meeting of the finance committee, and ring your financial director at least once a day to ask simple Janet and John questions like why the figure on page 3 does not match that on page 17 when it clearly should. The answer will either be deferred income or the fluctuation of currency exchange rates, but that should not stop you asking the

### 'Management should be fun'

question. Incidentally, the alert reader will have noticed that Walker's Law of Management 3 directly contradicts Walker's Law of Management 2. That is because management is never an exact science and in any case we all know that the exception that proves the rule.

And my final rule is that management should be fun. Sadly, fun is a thoroughly unfashionable concept. It has overtones of irresponsibility (which the dictionary definition of sport, amusement, jocularly and drollery merely confirms) and it appears to add absolutely no value whatever to the final product. Yet it is fun that gets us up in the morning, and fun that keeps us fresh as we pursue a challenging profession that has no final product and only brings perceptible benefits long after we are dead. So let me replace sport, amusement, jocularly and drollery with a new definition that combines enjoyment and excitement. And let me suggest that appropriate fun has its roots, for those in the business of education, in intellectual stimulus, a regular contact with

interesting new people (who, by definition, get younger as you get older) and a strong element of unpredictability and risk.

As I "retire" from the IB (and those inverted commas signify the prospect of no less work with far less pay) I realise how unusually lucky I have been over the past 40 years and, most particularly, during the last 15 when I have been part of the world of international education. Every day has brought fresh intellectual stimulus in the form of argument and debate, reading and writing, speaking and listening that has challenged all aspects of my understanding of my so-called area of expertise. Every day has brought me into contact with new people all around the world who have met me at unfamiliar airports, shown me proudly around their schools, taken me to eat new food, sat with me at conferences and argued with me across meeting tables. Every day has delivered something unpredictable and has challenged me

### 'He had fun'

to take the risk of an unexpected response. So, if I deserve any epitaph to mark the end of a 40-year career in education, let it be simply "He had fun".



*George Walker speaking at the December 2003 degree congregation at which he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Education degree by the University of Bath.*