

Dr. Johnson nominated for “I AM AN ENTREPRENEUR” award! The following essay was submitted in behalf of Dr. Ronald E. Johnson in March, 2009.

Dr. Ronald Johnson tilted the airline seat back and glanced out the window to watch the ascent from Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He wondered why the man at the airport had insisted passionately that Johnson carry an envelope to America as a favor. Thoughts rolled back over the past two years during which Johnson had implemented and provided oversight of a pilot educational reform project to introduce value-based curriculum and an accelerated individualized learning program into public schools in Honduras and Nicaragua. Like any ground-breaking project, the Central American effort had challenges, awards, threats and promises. High level Honduran officials in the President’s cabinet had requested the project. Simultaneously, officials in religious and communist circles had opposed the project on the basis that it would likely disrupt status quo operations throughout Central America.

A few days after arrival back in his Texas office, an FBI official knocked on Dr. Johnson’s door. The agent flashed his badge and asked, “Do you recall a man who attempted to hand an envelope to you at the Honduras airport? Apparently an organization that opposes your educational project attempted to plant illegal drugs on you in anticipation that your reform project would be scandalized and therefore abandoned.” Shortly thereafter, a person with access to classified USA government information called to advise Johnson that he was being trailed every time he arrived in Central America, and that utmost caution should be exercised.

Dr. Johnson recalled an odd experience one night at the La Rhonda Hotel, where he stayed while in Tegucigalpa. In the early morning hours, he was awakened with an overwhelming impression to check out of the hotel as early as possible, and not to answer the hotel door when he heard whispering female voices. Persistent light knocking at the hotel room door was not answered. Later in the day, the wife of the attorney with whom Johnson was coordinating the educational reform project, flashed a newspaper headline: “Prostitutes Work La Rhonda Hotel.” Further inquiry by the attorney revealed that an attempted trap had been set to catch Johnson on camera with a prostitute in an effort to force termination of the Honduran reform project.

Because of the success of the Honduran reform project, officials in the Nicaraguan Department of Education requested that Dr. Johnson introduce an educational reform pilot project in Bluefield, a remote Communist-controlled village accessible only by boat or aircraft. The plan was to set up a school in which teachers from both the patriotic Contras and communist Sandinistas would demonstrate that the war-torn country could reunite under an educational reform project. A leading communist official from the village was assigned to coordinate the project. Her prominence was acknowledged because Cuban President Castro had directed that a house be built for her. Such an arrangement should have warned Johnson to turn down the offer. But, like

all passion-driven entrepreneurs, Dr. Johnson accepted the challenge enthusiastically. Numerous trips were made to Bluefield to set up the school, train teachers (including two communists), and provide oversight. Ironically, the communist official assigned to coordinate the project began to spend more and more time with Johnson, during which she asked probing questions about Johnson's Christian faith and personal value system. One day she requested a dinner engagement at the Bluefield Hotel. After the meal, she pushed back her chair, looked him in the eye and said, "I have known a lot of men in my life; many of them are dead." She proceeded to elaborate on the disappearance of specific men in Bluefield. Then she said, "What makes you different? I want to know why you are not like most men." Dr. Johnson proceeded to share his life story, including an experience in which he accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He told of the tragic murder of his parents and brother, and how their deaths motivated Johnson to spend his life helping fatherless teenagers.

The woman looked down at her empty plate and said softly, "Will you help me believe like you?" She allowed Johnson to explain God's process of forgiveness, faith and grace surrounding the atonement of Jesus Christ. The Bluefield project continued even though civil unrest escalated during the presidency of Mrs. Chamorro. Late one day, the communist lady rushed into the hotel to warn Johnson that an unruly crowd of rebels had gathered in the city square and was marching toward the hotel with weapons. She whispered, "I have arranged for you to hide in a fruit truck that will take you through back streets to the airport. They have shot up the boat and blocked the main roads to the airport; no one can arrive in or leave Bluefield. This is the best I can do for you; now hurry!"

The airport looked deserted, except for one frightened ticket agent who lamented that rebels had ordered that no commercial planes could land. The only other visible person was a middle aged man sitting in a dark corner. Johnson approached him to inquire whether he spoke English. He nodded his head as he looked nervously toward the ticket agent. A short conversation revealed that the man was a Cuban businessman. His assessment of the current situation was grave, that survival of two capitalists seemed doubtful if the rebels searched the airport. While speaking with the Cuban, Dr. Johnson noticed a small twin engine plane parked near the terminal. He also discovered two men playing checkers in a small office behind the ticket counter. Johnson pulled out a hundred dollar bill and suggested to the Cuban, "Those two men are probably the pilot and co-pilot of that small plane. Will you match this hundred dollar bill to bribe them to fly us to Managua?" The Cuban's expression radiated as he nodded and said, "Let's go ask them." At first, the men declined with speculation that the plane would be shot out of the air. Dr. Johnson waived the one hundred dollar bill and said, "You could buy your wife a lot of presents with this money." The two pilots looked at each other, shrugged and agreed to attempt a departure. They set up a scheme to pretend to be working on the plane and at a given hand signal Johnson and the Cuban were to run to the plane, dive in and secure their seat belts while the plane made a rolling take off. They watched for the signal. It came just before a group of rebels approached the airport. The two men raced to the plane and dived in! The plane roared to a rapid lift off and soared safely to Managua where the two escapees were warned that communist

rebels had surrounded the airport. An American commercial flight was about to depart and had one seat open. Johnson bought a ticket and flew to Houston. Sadly, the Nicaraguan educational reform project died.

A few weeks later, Dr. Johnson felt a strong desire to attempt to replicate in America educational reform projects like those he had introduced in Central America. He had been Vice President of Development for 21 years for the publishing company that had been tasked to implement the Central American educational reform project. Johnson walked into the office of the president of the textbook company and announced a desire to resign to follow a dream of attempting educational reform in American public schools through free enterprise concepts.

The company president shook his head and advised that such a dream would become a nightmare...that American government school educators would not tolerate reform based on moral principles and individualized learning that challenged status quo classroom procedures based on state-adopted textbooks. Johnson agreed that the idea was “a long shot”, but needed to be attempted by someone, and that he was impressed to give it his best shot. Dr. Johnson resigned and moved with his wife and three daughters to a 16’ by 32’ hunting cabin in Zephyr, Texas. It had no kitchen, only one toilet and water was supplied with a windmill. The nearest town was 15 miles away. The Johnsons walked away from a comfortable salary, elegant split-level, lake-front home, Cadillac in the car port, and 21 years of experiences that had filled two passports and earned numerous awards, including recognition as Founder and Director of the International Christian School Convention, two meetings at the White House with President Ronald Reagan and a meeting with Guatemalan President Jorge Serrano. Dr. Johnson set up a makeshift office on a portable game table in a corner of his two-room rustic cabin, and began putting together an educational reform concept based on virtues, life principles and accelerated, individualized learning. It was designed to be implemented in vacant store front facilities, churches or restaurants with materials available primarily from local lumber yards, Wal-Mart and an office supply store.

Dr. Johnson wanted to try the accelerated, individualized learning concept in a public school setting, so he accepted a high school principal position in a rural Texas community where the superintendent was familiar with Johnson’s campus procedures manuals for private church schools. The superintendent was a lay preacher who had been praying for a way to help return moral values to American public schools. He authorized Johnson to implement a pilot project in the rural public high school, with the admonition that no public money could be used to purchase sectarian curriculum. They faced the challenge that no major textbook publishers produced self-study, values-based curriculum for core academic subjects. Such material was available from two publishers which supplied textbooks for sectarian schools. An arrangement was made to obtain donated material from one of the publishers as a participant in the experiment. Parents and students were required to request access to the material in writing.

A pilot learning center was set up in a vacant classroom and students were invited to volunteer to participate. The room was immediately occupied at capacity as students jumped at the opportunity to complete courses as rapidly as desired or as slowly as needed to earn transcript credit. Dr. Johnson and one of his daughters provided oversight of the project. It did well until local office staff and teachers began to complain that the project was disrupting status quo procedures. By November, Johnson felt confident that in spite of opposition by some faculty and board members, the project had proven the point that educational reform projects could indeed be implemented in some public schools if staff were cooperative and comfortable with the concept of individualized, accelerated learning based on moral principles practiced by successful people. Some influential staff were not comfortable, and pressured the superintendent to terminate Johnson's employment as principal. To avoid damaging his relationship with the superintendent, Johnson met with the Board of Trustees to tender his resignation effective at the end of the fall semester. The pilot project continued under care of a competent teacher through the spring semester.

During the spring, Johnson traveled across Texas visiting with superintendents, principals, board members, at-risk students, parents, pastors, and juvenile probation officials to assess what was and was not being done by public schools and faith-based groups to address the needs of father-challenged teenagers. He discovered that the number one identifiable factor in low academic performance and attendance in public schools appeared to be fatherlessness. Schools, churches and homes seemed adrift in efforts to address the domestic and scholastic issues which contribute to academic failures among father-challenged teenagers, especially among African-American and Hispanic students. Their drop out rate was in excess of 50%! Their incarceration rate was more than twice the percentage of students from father-stable homes.

Dr. Johnson learned that the Texas Legislature had recently authorized private entities to provide educational services to public schools. Conversation with the Texas Education Agency revealed that only one private entity in the state had set up a contract project with a public school in San Antonio. Dr. and Mrs. Johnson decided to explore the prospects of establishing a contract school in a storefront facility. In early August, a mailer was sent to numerous public school superintendents in central Texas. Dublin ISD agreed to establish a contract school project if it could open within ten days. Paradigm Alternative Center, Inc. was subsequently set up (in an abandoned Mexican restaurant with two bullet holes in the front windows) as a for-profit entity to recover at-risk teenagers. Six students enrolled on the first day. The contract limited enrollment to 21 students. The storefront school reached capacity enrollment with a waiting list within the first six weeks as students recruited their fatherless friends...prostitutes, drug abusers, homosexuals and homeless. Probation officers, pastors and judges were enthusiastic supporters of the one room school. Local newspapers printed success stories of students who had been recovered from the streets.

During the school's second year of operation, *USA Today* newspaper listed Paradigm Alternative Center as one of America's 58 most effective programs for recovering at-risk students. Pastors, businessmen, judges, and educators began to inquire about the pilot project. Johnson advertised a seminar, at which a dozen educators attended. Their questions prompted Dr. Johnson to begin writing a manual that would help entrepreneurs to start their own one-room high schools.

Curriculum was a major challenge. No secular publisher produced core subjects in a practical individualized, paper-based format. Moreover, the emotional needs of father-challenged teenagers were so paramount that regular instructional material simply failed to address the complex needs of most at-risk students trapped in grief, anger and bitterness. Dr. Gene Hood, a pastor-business man in Indianapolis, learned of Dr. Johnson's project and gathered "seed money" to enable Johnson to design and publish textbooks laced with positive life principles and character-building vignettes. Researchers, writers and illustrators were hired to publish *The People, Places and Principles of America*, a history course that would also serve as a reading enhancement course for under-performing at-risk teenagers. It was field tested to discover strengths and weaknesses with the content, format and the accelerated, individualized learning system recommended by Dr. Johnson. Results encouraged Johnson and Hood to expand the curriculum project to include other courses. Paradigm Accelerated Curriculum was founded to produce courses in science, math, language skills and history. Printing equipment was leased. Illustrators, editors and writers were hired to produce science and language skills for grades seven through twelve, and math for grades seven and eight, and for recovering 9th graders who were not ready for algebra.

Success often breeds opposition. During the third year of the contract school, certain local public school teachers and administrators began to criticize the presence of Paradigm Alternative Centers. A prominent businessman expressed displeasure at the presence of "all those losers in our community." Local board members and the superintendent visited the storefront facility to check out complaints. Their finding was that the pilot project was cost effective and beneficial to the district's effort to reduce drop outs and to increase assessment scores. For awhile, opposition from local educators was subdued.

The handwriting was on the wall, however. It was just a matter of time before status quo opposition would pressure the superintendent to close Paradigm Alternative Center. That foregone conclusion was punctuated by the fact that less than a dozen contract schools were surviving in Texas public school districts. Like other true entrepreneurs, Dr. Johnson looked at the size of the opposition to his dream and decided to take an aggressive position. He formed a 501 (c) (3) organization and filed a request with the Texas Education Agency to start Paradigm Accelerated Charter School. The Dublin ISD did not renew the contract at the end of the fourth year. But by then, the charter was approved and Paradigm Accelerated Charter School opened in the fall with twice the number of students who were enrolled in the contract project!

Dr. and Mrs. Johnson conducted a fact-finding tour in Arizona and Texas to discover how other charter schools were addressing the needs of father-challenged students. The tour revealed that about 90% of students in alternative school programs were father-challenged. Moreover, about 87% of students assigned to disciplinary alternative education programs were right- brain dominant. They were talented singers, artists, musicians, and dancers who did not perform well in conventional, lock-step, teacher-talking classrooms. Additionally, they were seriously depleted in knowledge of the basic virtues and life principles common among successful people.

Johnson and Hood decided to modify the Paradigm textbooks and learning system to address academic and domestic issues simultaneously so that father-challenged, right-brain dominant, at-risk teenagers could complete high school as rapidly as desired or as slowly as needed without dependence on certified teachers...and in a setting that resembled a home, business and youth center.

Dr. Johnson wrote ***Harriet Tubman's Other Railroad...Equipping African-Americans For Educational Choice***. The book outlines the opportunities, difficulties, opposition and challenges of starting alternative schools based on free enterprise principles. Johnson then began compiling a comprehensive ***Campus Operations Manual...How to Start A One-Room High School In 22 Days***. His manual is in the final stages of completion. It covers such items as start up priorities, budget, employee selection, office forms, curriculum syllabus, state and federal requirements, counseling and much more...more than 900 pages of practical help for the novice or experienced educator to replicate the four charter schools Johnson has started in Texas.

Paradigm Accelerated Curriculum was designed to meet the needs of alternative public school campuses for father-challenged youth; however, the home school and charter communities from Maine to Washington have begun to request curriculum and administrative assistance from Dr. Johnson. Naysayers continue to ridicule and oppose Dr. Johnson's dream to help entrepreneurs address the growing population of father-challenged teenagers. His answer was to schedule training session for anyone who wants to learn how to set up one-room high schools based on the contract, charter, or free enterprise models Johnson has started. He also wrote another book to equip pastors, counselors, teachers, parents and probation officers to teach father-challenged teenagers the basic "Laws" needed to recover from grief, anger, and bitterness associated with abandonment or abuse by biological fathers. ***Teaching Eagles To Soar*** is scheduled for release by Tate Publishers in May, 2009.

Entrepreneurs interested in replicating the Paradigm package can learn more at www.pacworks.com or corresponding at Learn@pacworks.com, PH: 325-649-0976, or P.O. Box 3159, Early, Texas 76802.