

## **THE AMBUSH... “AND SO IT BEGINS”**

I recall getting an e-mail message from academic lead, Lindsey Joseph, one day in early February, and all it said was “and so it begins” with a forwarded message to her from Dr. Mitnick. I could see that Ethan had taken the final step to leave me out of his plans for the school. Ms. Joseph was letting me know that TenSquare was now officially side-stepping my authority by making deliberate changes to the staffing.

The ambush of TenSquare was swift and reckless. The conversation with John Goldman about bringing in TenSquare to help us was a short one. As the Executive Director, I was responsible for supporting the Board’s decision to bring in a team to help us make improvements. According to Goldman, by investing in an outside group, it would help assure the DC Public Charter School Board team that we were being proactive in making changes. Goldman credited TenSquare for the improvement in scores at the Idea School where he had also contracted TenSquare to conduct consulting services. At the time, it wasn’t clear to me that TenSquare’s ‘school turnaround’ experiences were limited to three schools in the DC area. In hindsight, my trust in my Board Chair was a costly mistake, not simply for the staff, but for the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, ARTS, and Mathematics) culture we were developing at WEDJ, so prevalent in progressive schools in the 21st century.

I was instructed to adopt and implement everything TenSquare recommended. Rather than meet with me to discuss TenSquare’s allegation, that I was not carrying out their recommendations, Mr. Goldman sent me a Board directive ordering me to comply with all TenSquare suggestions. I responded by letting Goldman know that I had already implemented many of TenSquare’s recommendations. There was no response to my follow-up note to Goldman. As difficult as it was to accept the poor practices the TenSquare consultants were promoting, I did follow the directive of the Board and at no time did I interfere with their recommendations. Questions or attempts at trying to help Dr. Mitnick view things in any other light than the ‘levering leadership’ perspective, fell upon deaf ears. If the staff members were resistant to TenSquare’s recommended changes, it was because they knew from experience that the teacher-directed approach did not lead to engaged students or learning that would last. Nevertheless, I did not stand in TenSquare’s way as we implemented a new schedule and tolerated the ongoing negative observations and coaching tips. At no time did Dr. Mitnick approach me to say that I was not cooperating with him.

Given the unfolding events and the contents of TenSquare’s original audit, that in my view may have bordered on defamation of character, I decided to contact John Cook, an employment lawyer. I met with Cook and after reviewing the facts,

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he indicated that TenSquare had the right to form their own opinions, valid or not. After reviewing the facts of the situation and the advice of Mr. Cook, I did not in all likelihood, at this time, have a case against neither the Board, nor TenSquare, but he thought it would make a good book. He suggested we remain in touch as events unfolded over the coming weeks.