

# CASE STUDY



CORNERSTONE  
SCHOOL

# CASE STUDY: Increasing Utilization, Productivity, Morale and Appreciation for Diverse Perspectives

**How Cornerstone School's focus on thinking preferences helped its administration realign roles and responsibilities, improve working relationships and accelerate career growth.**



## OBJECTIVE:

*To maximize productivity, working relationships and career growth potential by improving job fit and increasing self-awareness.*

Founded in 1993 by business and community leaders, Cornerstone is a Christian school located in Birmingham, Alabama, with an enrollment of approximately 275 low-income children in grades K4 through 8th. They have two administrative departments, Development and Academic, to address the unique issues they face as both a non-profit and a school.

The school holds academic accreditations with the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and AdvancED Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and is an International Baccalaureate World School.

Executive Director Dr. Nita Carr has led a major transformation since her arrival in 2007, when the school was suffering from the effects of inadequate funding and management. Over the next six years under her leadership, the school went from having no accreditations at all to becoming an International Baccalaureate World School that outperforms its peer schools by 30%.

In the wake of so much change, Dr. Carr turned her focus on developing the staff in the administrative departments. She says her goals have been to:

- Ensure people are in the right roles based on their individual talents and strength
- Improve working relationships and help team members recognize the value of the different perspectives their colleagues bring to the table
- Give people the self-awareness and tools to be able to grow in their careers



## CHALLENGES:

*To provide practical, effective tools that everyone would quickly understand, be able to apply and get value from in a unique, high-pressure environment.*

Because the school is funded by donations, no income is guaranteed—not even tuition. This means each year the administration must raise the entire budget to run the school, in addition to dealing with the demands of a rapidly growing student population and stringent academic standards.

With the increasing responsibilities required of her staff as the school was expanding and reaching for new milestones, Dr. Carr wanted to be sure everyone had the self-awareness and skills to continue to contribute their strengths to the fullest and move ahead. She also wanted to minimize conflict and communication breakdowns in the group to increase overall productivity and morale.

“I prefer to raise our own leaders because we’re such a unique situation,” she says. “I had some on the team that I was concerned might be ‘stuck’ or not in the right fit for their roles. Even though they were good, smart people, I wasn’t sure if they would be promotable.”

While she had already done some work with the team using a variety of assessment tools, she was looking for something that would be more practical, easy-to-remember and apply, and more relatable and appealing to an academic group.



## SOLUTIONS:

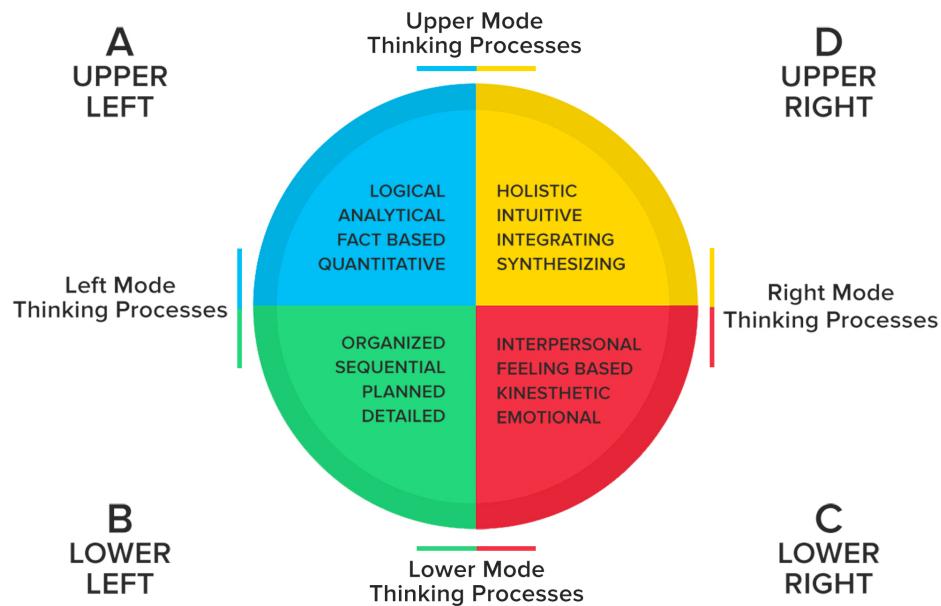
Building self-awareness and uncovering new insights about team members and how they collaborate through an understanding of thinking preferences.

*“Thinking and learning styles seemed to make more sense from an educator/academic point of view. I prefer research-based versus psychology-based methods, so that was also part of what I liked about the HBDI®.”*

— Dr. Nita Carr, Executive Director

Bill Hart, an HBDI® Practitioner and Cornerstone School board member, was already delivering faculty workshops to help teachers learn how to build their curriculum, manage their classrooms and interact with all of their students more productively using Whole Brain® Thinking. When she learned about Whole Brain® Thinking and the HBDI®, which focus on thinking and learning preferences, Dr. Carr felt they would be a good fit for her team as well.

# The Whole Brain® Model



*“Thinking and learning styles seemed to make more sense from an educator/academic point of view,” she says. “I prefer research-based versus psychology-based methods, so that was also part of what I liked about the HBDI®.”*

In the fall of 2013 Hart conducted HBDI® Profiles and debriefs with the administrative staff. Whole Brain® Thinking concepts are now also incorporated into team meetings, informal communications and as a part of the culture of the administration.

“I saw that the teachers can really connect with it, and the staff is still talking about it,” Dr. Carr says. “It comes up at every meeting. It makes sense. You can dig in as deep as you want and get value no matter what.”

The recent acquisition of a high school, which will require a 20-person faculty and staff group that have never worked together, will drive additional culture-building activities, including conducting HBDI® Profiles with the faculty so the principal will have the thinking preference data on those who will be teaching for him.

Hart will also be working with the principal to help him focus on areas he’ll ultimately be responsible for that fall outside his thinking preferences. Additionally, teachers will continue to participate in in-service sessions on Whole Brain® Thinking concepts before the beginning of the school year.

## RESULTS:

Increased utilization, productivity and morale through realignment of roles and responsibilities based on thinking preferences, broader appreciation for diverse perspectives, and greater self-awareness, leading team members to proactively stretch and grow their careers.

“People think differently and operate differently. We need to make sure we have difference. I always knew each of these individuals was valuable but couldn’t always get everyone on the team to understand why. Now they get it.” – Dr. Nita Carr, Executive Director

Dr. Carr says that since the initiative was implemented, people have been constantly sharing stories about their preferences. Whole Brain® Thinking has quickly taken hold in the culture, and she now has a better understanding of where the fit is and the value of different perspectives.

The initiative has led to several realignments and shifting of roles and responsibilities, particularly as Dr. Carr discovered some people were being tasked with a large amount of work that was outside their areas of preference. For example, one staff member with a very low B-quadrant preference was being tasked primarily with detail work; another with a very high C-quadrant preference was having great difficulty challenging teachers and would avoid delivering bad news. Once these kinds of thinking mismatches were uncovered, Dr. Carr was able to reassign certain duties to create a better fit for everyone.

Additionally, one member of the development team recognized that her very strong preference for C-quadrant thinking, while valuable to her role, was limiting her ability to grow into a leadership position. She took the initiative to expand her thinking skills, become more adaptable and get more comfortable with structure and data. She has been able to improve not only her job effectiveness but also the impression others have of her. According to Dr. Carr, “This has changed everything for her. She totally turned it around.”

She adds that one of her key realizations was the value each person brings and the need to have a diversity of perspectives on the team.

“People think differently and operate differently,” she says. “We need to make sure we have difference. I always knew each of these individuals was valuable but couldn’t always get everyone on the team to understand why. Now they get it.”



Hart isn't surprised by the results Cornerstone School has experienced using Whole Brain® Thinking.

"I'm certified in multiple models, but there's a reason 30% of my business is the HBDI® /Whole Brain® Thinking," he says. "It's easy, easy to explain, everybody gets it and you have instant application. It's effective, it covers any aspect you want to address and you can take it as deep as you want and still get value. You don't have to know the other person's profile to be able to pick up clues and know how to communicate effectively with them."

Whole Brain® Thinking's impact is reaching the students as well as Hart continues to do in-service work with the teachers, who are learning to pick up clues about their students and be more whole-brained in how they connect, respond to behaviors, teach and design their curricula.

With more change and expansion on the horizon, Dr. Carr is enthusiastic about the future. "[The HBDI® Profiles] will give the new high school principal insights into his team that could otherwise take him two years to get."

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