

REAPING WHAT YOU SOW: BILL STRICKLAND

By Kathy Murphy, President & CEO of CEED



CEO, author, social architect and community leader Bill Strickland.

I recently had the privilege of hearing CEO (Manchester Bidwell Corporation), author (*Making the Impossible Possible*), social architect and community leader Bill Strickland speak in Halifax at a rotary luncheon. I had heard a lot about Strickland and his inspiring, provocative, and visionary approach to enabling communities and people. I was not disappointed. Bill's message of how we can transform perceptions, and in doing so enable and engage those in our communities who are most in need, is a belief I hold strong. His story was one we've heard before, but with a different ending. It shows that even a kid from Pittsburgh's ghetto can go on to lecture at Harvard and serve on the board of National Endowment for the Arts.

Strickland lives by his belief that the attitudes we have about others and the judgments we place on them can powerfully influence a young person. These attitudes can help them succeed or, in contrast, perpetuate a sense of hopelessness.

Some might say this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Henry Ford said "If you think you can do a thing, or if you think you can't, you are right." Our beliefs about what we see reflects on ourselves and others and can get in the way of our happiness and success. Our judgments and attitudes are powerful. Our job in life should simply be to give others a sense that they can be successful.

Without a doubt, an open mind can be a tough thing to shift towards. Leaders like Strickland understand the importance of creating positive and productive environments for all students. His philosophy of providing learning environments where 'at risk' youth can excel and break down barriers to success have a proven track record, with of thousands of successful students graduating from his schools.

The schools Strickland has built demonstrate the "best in class" for learning environments. Open air, natural lighting and clean, contemporary settings allow his students to

flourish. The building designs and the principles around creating a positive learning environment are based on giving the best to those who are least likely to expect it.

Andrew Francis from North Nova P3 School in New Glasgow recently visited us and shared how CEED's Entrepreneurship Education Curriculum helped those of his students who were disengaged with school and feeling left out and somewhat hopeless. Francis saw his students engaging and working hard, and realized they possessed all that it took to prosper in business. They were given the challenge of running a business, and as Francis set the bar higher and higher, he saw them meet and exceed their goals time and again. (You can find Francis' story on page 18.)

For me, his experience resonated with what so many people, including Bill Strickland, have proven time and again: set the bar low, and people will aspire to what you expect of them. Set the bar high, believe in their potential, and they will meet and exceed expectations.

In the spirit of visionaries such as Bill Strickland, examine your perceptions and how you project them. Remember what the Dalai Lama says: "Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive."



Strickland gives students in his schools the optimum environment for learning and growth.