

Choose Your Battles and Plan To Win

By Marian Dodds

Home economics teachers need support and encouragement. If we don't start using more of our talents outside of our individual classrooms and in the political arena, we will be increasingly under attack. Many schools are losing home economics electives, especially in textiles. The stress of feeling powerless to change a situation is demoralizing and destructive. Out of this concern grew a workshop entitled *Choosing Your Battles and Planning To Win*. The workshop was presented to a THESA group in Castlegar in May 1983. We began by identifying problems of concern to home economics teachers. Not surprisingly, feelings of being taken for granted were expressed. Specific examples: short notice timetable changes, night school class problems, frequent interruptions by students and colleagues to borrow supplies, requests to do laundry, and graduation demands for large scale food service. Overall it wasn't so much the situation itself, but the feeling that these extra duties are expected yet unappreciated, that caused frustration.

We identified the key word in the workshop title – *choosing* - and spent some time discussing the importance of making conscious decisions about whether or not to put energy into tackling a problem.

Not wanting to become bogged down in the problems themselves, we used the "helicopter approach." The group imagined being up in a helicopter and looking down on the situation in the future, when the problem is solved. We described the ideal situation. This technique often helps us to see the overall picture more clearly, so that we don't become bogged down.

From this ideal image, a clear, concise, specific, measurable goal was written that could be put on a time line.

Then we analysed the factors supportive of the goal and those that would hinder reaching it. Through the analysis, the wide range of paths to the goal becomes apparent. An analysis of the negative forces helps put the opposition into a realistic perspective. As home economics teachers we have many forces that help us reach goals; often we don't realize the power of these forces or even recognize them as strengths others may not possess. As well as all of the teaching, counselling, public speaking, group facilitation, and human relations skills we possess, we are incredibly organized! To run a home economics program requires time management, budgeting, researching, resource management, conservation, and consumer skills, all done with maximum efficiency. (That our subjects are traditional female concerns has some relationship to our skills being unappreciated.) We do have these strengths and skills, which can be powerful tools to use to reach our chosen goals.

The next logical step in the workshop was to prepare an action plan. Plans were made to strengthen supporting forces, and decisions were made about which negative forces to counter and which to conserve energy on. For example, if the goal is to prevent further erosion of home economics electives in your school, and your analysis shows that lack of assertiveness in dealing with administrators is a negative force, then a logical first step in action planning is to seek help in learning assertiveness.

Whatever the forces, a detailed and specific action plan, tied to a time line, can help to keep things on track and in perspective.

Whether we choose to or not, we are continually making decisions about how to deal with problems. The process introduced in the workshop is one way to tackle a fairly large problem and succeed. After all, it is possible to eat a whole elephant if you do it bite by bite!

Marian Dodds is on leave of absence from Nelson School District. She will be Status of Women Coordinator for the BCTF for the next two years.