



Stanford eCorner

Leaders Must Commit to Make Change

Wendy Kopp, *Teach for America*

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Wendy Kopp, CEO and founder of Teach For America, believes change happens where leaders commit to making organizational transformations, mixed with high-levels of energy and discipline. As in all business sectors, transformational leaders in education have an obsession with building strong teams and systems, and creating cultures committed to continuous improvement.



Transcript

And what I come to believe is that you know the most maybe the most certainly the most foundational difference in those places where we see transformational change happening is that the leader of those systems has committed themselves to a different mission. And most of our public schools and even private schools commit themselves too. They have committed themselves to the mission of transformational education like they have said to themselves, "We're going to put our kids on a different trajectory and that is a mission, I mean, I went to a public school in Dallas, Texas. It was always on those top ten list of top public schools in the country. You think that was a transformational school? No. Bunch of people, bunch of economically pretty privileged kids showed up at school on a path to graduating from college and came up the other and four years later on a path to graduating from college, perfectly good school not a transformational school. And we have the same thing going on in our urban and rural schools, right? We've got lots of kids showing up on a path not to graduate from high school let alone college and their coming out in the same way. So in order to make a difference in this, the most important thing we need is people to say, "We're going to commit ourselves to a different mission for our public schools in economically disadvantaged communities." And then to a company that commitment with a level of energy and discipline that you would find in any organization or any endeavor where people are taking on big audacious schools. So what you realized when you spend a lot of time in this context is that all the things that maybe many of you have seen in other sectors leaders who are obsessed first and foremost with building strong teams, with building a strong culture of excellence and achievement, with building systems where every adult in the system holds themselves accountable and then is committed to continuous improvement and ethic that look we're going to do whatever it takes to get to the end goal.