Core Principles

Former US Secretary of State and boss of General Motors Robert MacNamara served under John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. During that time and also during his time in the army in WW2, McNamara was forced to participate in some of the most difficult decisions ever made by human kind.

For example while serving under the iron fisted rule of Curtis Le May (US General), McNamara was part of the mechanism which decided to drop incendiary bombs onto Japan. In McNamara’s own words, ‘We burned to death 100,000 Japanese civilians in Tokyo – men, women, and children… [U.S. General] Lemay recognized that what he was doing would be thought immoral if his side had lost … But what makes it immoral if you lose and not immoral if you win? LeMay said ‘if we’d lost the war, we’d all have been prosecuted as war criminals’. And I think he’s right – and I’d say – we were behaving as war criminals.’

While Secretary for Defence in the Johnson administration, McNamara was also responsible for the chemical bombing of Vietnam. ‘American involvement in the war in Vietnam was, he said: “wrong, terribly wrong” (1995). Indeed, 58,181 Americans died for nothing in that war in which over 5 million Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laoitians also perished [4.8 million others were exposed to Agent Orange [20 million gallons supplied by Dow Chemicals] resulting in 400,000 deaths and disabilities and half a million other birth defects]. He later questioned whether the involvement was justified or not.

The reason I raise these points is not really to do with war, but more to do with the fact that sometimes in life we have to stand for something where the outcome is a negative no matter how we look at it. Right or wrong, the fact is, we as citizens enable people like McNamara to make decisions on our behalf. We vote for them and trust them to act in essence as ‘we would act’. At JCS this is why we are focussing this term on core principles. Without core principles it is very difficult to know how to act in the face of extremely difficult decisions. Rather than make a decision, we tend to convince ourselves ‘we have no choice’. One of the principles I believe in is that there is always a choice. Even with a gun held to your head, you can choose, you state of mind. You can choose how to die. It might not be much of a choice, but it is a choice.

So to reduce the enormity of McNamara’s decision into our little school world, we are looking in depth at how each of us deal with difficult decisions and in the process we are hoping to change the way we deal with them. In essence to be the person you want to be in the future, you often have to give up the person you are today. Robert McNamara, openly admits to being responsible for millions of deaths and in the same documentary, he cries when describing the death of his wife and the burial of John F Kennedy. Curtis LeMay did not stop his fire bombing at Tokyo, he went on to bomb every major Japanese city on the map. Many have asked if the severity of his actions were proportional to the circumstances; some even suggest it was a cowardly way to end the war. What very few know about LeMay is that he, as a general, flew in the front of the front plane on every mission to ensure it was carried out properly. What very few people know about McNamara was that he also headed the World Bank’s funding of the World Health Organisation’s to improve public health caused the world’s infant mortality rate to decline 60% over the last 40 years. In the same period, the world’s average life expectancy has increased from 46 to 63.

What I am saying here is that when we put people in power, it is our responsibility to know what they do and if we don’t agree with it to speak out. Likewise, when you are in power, it is a responsibility to act on behalf of those who elected you. But above both these offices it is your responsibility to act in accordance to your core principles, which sometimes means stepping down from office and sometimes means stepping up to fight it.

Robert McNamara & Curtis LeMay
Welcome to Term Three

Parent feedback: There was a lot of positive as well as constructive feedback from parent evening. We know there are a number of areas we can improve on and the feedback was presented in an understanding but honest way that we feel we can work to develop.

Personal Development: A number of students are really bringing their ‘A game’ to Personal Development and this is definitely raising the bar and challenging the group. Jon is being challenged and this builds self-esteem and motivation in the student body.

Healthy: We are focused on health and fitness. In personal development Jon mentioned he would like to get to a point where people don’t cough. What this means is that people are taking responsibility for their health to the point where we are rarely sick as a group. Whilst this is a high standard to set it is something we are aiming towards. With more kids talking about exercise, healthy eating and quitting bad habits we can already see a shift in this direction.

Tidiness: We do not employ cleaners. Instead maintenance of the school is done by the staff and student body to foster a sense of pride and community. The School is looking cleaner and more organised than ever. This is a real credit to your kids and the respect and love they have for the school.

Fun: Work, school, life. We are working as hard, but there are definitely more smiles, hugs, positive comments and funny stuff. It’s a great place to be.

First Aid Day

First Aid day will be held on Thursday the 22nd of August. This is a great opportunity for your child to learn some basic life-saving skills and obtain Senior First Aid. These are skills that may one day save another person’s life. It is also an important qualification for many courses and jobs and so we encourage all students to attend for their own personal development as well as community contribution. We encourage students who have already obtained the certificate to attend again if they wish to hone and refresh their skills.
We have now commenced our second semester of DECV studies. Our VCE Students are now in week 5 of their Semester program. I commend the students on managing their work submissions and largely keeping up to date. The next step for our Seniors is to work at getting ahead in subjects, to allow for times when they may have difficulties submitting work and for those chasing an ATAR to commence exam preparation.

Our Yr 9-10 group has now completed the Launch Pad module. This module is designed to test the student’s knowledge and ability in a number of key areas. It is also a way for the students to learn about and navigate the online learning environment. I am aware that many students are having some difficulties and frustrations. However as always I encourage students to see the learning benefits. One being the age old’ lesson of the merit of doing something you don’t want to do when you don’t want to do it when you don’t see a point (welcome to adult hood). The other being the development of the online communications skills they are more than likely going to need in the many jobs they will have in their life time.

Holidays

It was great to see all of our students pass the first Semester of their DECV studies. This is a testament to not only the individual’s ability to extend themselves, but also to the group, who are now beginning to support each other in the formation of constructive habits. It was great to hear students keeping in touch with each other over the holidays and a number of students coming into the centre to catch up on work, touch base with staff, or make pancakes!!!!!
Thankyou

A kind warm hearted thank you to Hannah Bevan for her assistance and work over the past year. The Jon Carnegie School is a tremendously rewarding place to work as we have a very flexible and adaptive work and learning environment. But along with this comes a greater sense of responsibility that many people do not have to assume in their work place. Hannah continues to learn, grow and challenge herself. And in doing this sets an example for your children to follow; as they grow and are challenged themselves.

Parent Evening

Thank you to all the parents who attended the parent evening on Wednesday in the first week of Term 3. This was the best turn out we have had for a parent information session. Which shows us the support and interest we now have in general from our parent community.

The evening was held to share our Philosophy and Mission with the parent body and to give greater insight into what we do, but more importantly why we do it. It is this philosophy and mission; underpinned by a desire to provide a real life and meaningful education; that encourages kids to take responsibility for their actions and learn self-imposed rules and boundaries. In our society externally imposed rules and boundaries have their limitations. We live in a society that is increasing the ‘rights’ of young people, but not filling the void created by this. This would be done by taking responsibility itself for teaching them to take the responsibility required to earn and maintain these rights. When you can’t force a kid to get out of bed, this becomes almost an impossibility.

Game Show

Term 3 has seen the commencement of Game Show. Game show is aired in period 4 on Friday and so far has been a chance for students to exhibit their Pictionary skills, their strong knowledge in the area of Popular Music and Gaming and their perhaps less than admirable knowledge of Australian Trivia and music created before 1980.
A sneak peek into this year's VCE Art
Photography by Erin Houghton