

The Next Generation of “Charlies”
by
Greg Plutko, Ed.D., Superintendent
Huntington Beach Union High School District

In the early 20th century, General Electric employed a young man by the name of Charlie Steinmetz. Over the years, Charlie learned a number of different jobs, provided a tremendous amount of support to customers and other employees, and ultimately became a mechanical expert for General Electric.

At the end of a more than 40-year career and with a great deal of recognition, Charlie retired. After he retired, General Electric used him quite often as a consultant. On one occasion when they were experiencing a problem with some equipment, which none of their experts could locate, they brought in Charlie. He spent several hours walking around the factory looking and listening to the equipment. After a while, Charlie took a piece of chalk from his coat pocket, marked an “X” on a certain piece of machinery, and then left.

On Monday morning, the direction was given to take this particular machine apart and ascertain whether this was the source of the problem. Sure enough, Charlie had accurately identified the problem and the solution. Several weeks later, General Electric received a bill for \$10,000. This was a rather large sum of money in those days and General Electric asked Charlie for an itemized bill. Charlie returned the bill with two items: \$1 for the piece of chalk and \$9,999 for knowing where to put the “X.”

The point of this story is that Charlie had developed an expertise, and as it turned out, this expertise and ability was essential for the success of General Electric. Charlie’s knowledge, willingness to learn, and ultimately his expertise, not only enhanced his success but also the success of General Electric.

I believe that one of the great opportunities we have as educators in Huntington Beach Union High School District and our state is our opportunity to develop the next generation of “Charlies.” Our students will need to be prepared to compete in a world economically, socially, and culturally different from the one in which we grew up. It takes the entire educational community of family, school, and city to support the process. Each of us possesses the expertise and skills necessary to enhance the preparation of our students. Our collective ability to motivate, communicate, and educate our students will create the next generation of “Charlies.”