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LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT

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this month's interview

ALEX KOCH

HEAD OF COLLEGE AT WILLIAM CLARKE COLLEGE, NSW

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LEADING WITH FAITH, HUMILITY AND PURPOSE.

"Leadership isn't about having all the answers," he says. "It's about being open to the wisdom in the room."

For Alex Koch, Head of College at William Clarke College, the classroom remains the heart of education.

In an era defined by rapid change, digital disruption, and mounting expectations, true leadership is revealed not in the glare of the spotlight but in everyday moments-the kind that quietly build the character of a school community. For Alex Koch leadership is neither performative nor positional.

It's a practice rooted in purpose, humility, and the unwavering belief that the most valuable impact occurs at the heart of the learning experience.

Leadership That Listens and Learns

Alex's leadership is shaped by a deep commitment to listening-truly listening-to the voices within his school. Whether it's a student sharing a concern, a teacher offering feedback, or a parent raising a question, Alex sees each interaction as a chance to learn and grow.

"Leadership isn't about having all the answers," he says. "It's about being open to the wisdom in the room." This posture of curiosity and responsiveness has helped build a culture where people feel seen, heard, and valued.

The pressures of leadership are real and often intense, but Alex draws strength from his faith. "My identity and my value… is tied up in my relationship with God, not with what people think of the performance I'm doing in the job," he shares.

In a results-driven world, his confidence grows not from external accolades but from a deep sense of purpose, community, and humility. "I recognise my limits as a human," Alex explains, "and that I can't do everything. I'm okay to ask for support. "Sometimes, the stress of leadership melts away with a simple visit to the kindergarten-witnessing the innocent joy and enthusiasm of children is a grounding reminder of why educators do what they do."

Cultivating Resilience and Compassion

Leadership, for Alex, finds its most profound expression in moments of challenge.

Reflecting on crisis situations, tragedies that test the very fabric of a school Alex finds inspiration in the way community members show up for each other.

"To see the way the staff, teachers, and others can show support, not only to the student, but to the family is really wonderful." During difficult times, the school's collective character is revealed through compassion, resilience, and enduring support.

It's this same commitment to nurturing character over mere academic achievement that shapes Alex's vision for William Clarke College. "Teaching and learning is so important.

But more than that, we want to see students grow in their character…we want a community known for more than just churning out great academic skills."

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Alex Koch

"You won't always be understood," he says, "but you must always act with honesty and care."

Humility, Reflection, and Growth

At William Clarke College, recruitment is about more than filling roles-it's about building a team that reflects the school's values. For Alex, humility is a foundational trait.

He looks for educators who are not only capable but also self-aware, reflective, and committed to serving others. "I look for reflectiveness-how can the candidate show they understand themselves and have a desire to improve, I generally find that very impressive," he explains.

A passion for the profession and alignment with the college's mission are equally important, ensuring that new staff contribute meaningfully to the culture and direction of the school. This intentional approach to hiring is matched by a deep investment in staff development.

The college is looking to support each team member through personalised professional growth plans, being introduced in 2026. These will evolve over time, offering opportunities for feedback, challenge, and leadership. Staff voice is actively encouraged through engagement surveys, and middle leadership roles have been expanded to create more pathways for growth.

These initiatives are part of a broader effort to streamline processes and reduce unnecessary workload, fostering a sustainable, positive environment where teachers can thrive, Alex reflects. "There's always something to learn, and you have to be prepared for that."

Empowering Teachers and Fostering Professional Growth

Supporting staff beyond their job descriptions is a core part of Alex's leadership philosophy. He believes that professional growth doesn't just happen through formal programs-it also comes from seizing opportunities as they arise. "With those professional growth plans in place … we're looking to develop a skills matrix so people who want to progress know the things they need to develop in order to move to whatever next step is," he says.

Alex encourages teachers to take initiative and explore areas where they can contribute beyond the classroom. Whether it's leading a new project, mentoring a colleague, or trialling an innovative idea, staff are empowered to shape their own development. "In a school like this, there are plenty of things they can stick their hand up for… if they're willing, there's usually something they can voluntarily take on." This culture of agency and encouragement ensures that growth is not only supported, but actively lived out across the college.

Navigating the Challenges of Leadership

Leadership often involves making decisions that are both complex and deeply personal. For Alex, some of the most challenging moments come when he must choose between equally strong candidates for a role or make decisions based on confidential information that can't be shared. "I can only make the best decision I can, even though I can't always share all the information," he says.

These situations demand a steady commitment to integrity and fairness, even when the reasoning behind a decision remains unseen. Alex acknowledges that not everyone will agree with or understand every outcome-but that's part of the responsibility. "You can't please everyone," he reflects.

For those stepping into leadership, Alex believes key qualities include humility, a service mindset, and the courage to have difficult conversations. Just as important is the ability to listen well and hold firm to values, especially when navigating disagreement or uncertainty.

"Staff voice is something we've worked very hard to increase."

Prioritising Staff Voice and Sustainable Work Environments

"Staff voice is something we've worked very hard to increase," Alex explains, highlighting recent initiatives such as flexible work arrangements, staff engagement surveys, and a growing number of middle leadership pathways.

By listening to feedback and streamlining administrative processes, Alex and his team actively seek to reduce unnecessary burdens on staff. "We've looked to reduce the number of service activities…so that we can have a greater focus on them and not have lots of little piecemeal things happening across the year."

The result is a culture where innovative ideas are welcomed and the well-being of staff is genuinely prioritised.

Courage in Complexity

Effective leadership, Alex believes, requires the courage to navigate complexity. Whether it's making a tough call with limited information or standing firm in the face of criticism, he sees strength not in certainty, but in integrity.

"You won't always be understood," he says, "but you must always act with honesty and care." For Alex, leadership is less about being right and more about being responsible-especially when the stakes are high and the answers aren't clear.

Navigating Difficult Decisions with Integrity

Some of the most complex challenges Alex faces as Head of College involve making decisions that carry significant weight-yet can't always be fully explained. Whether it's a staffing matter or a sensitive student issue, confidentiality often limits what can be shared with the broader community. "Some of the most difficult ones I can't tell you about," he admits.

"You make a decision knowing things others can't know, and they might judge it based on what they do know—which is fair enough.

But that can be very difficult."
Despite the tension this creates, Alex remains committed to acting with integrity. His focus is on making the most informed, ethical choice possible, even when the reasoning must remain private. It's a quiet but resolute form of leadership-one that prioritises trust, fairness, and long-term wellbeing over short-term approval.

Looking Ahead: Embracing Change with Integrity

Looking to the future, Alex is both pragmatic and optimistic. He identifies generative AI as a force that will profoundly change education-raising both opportunities and ethical questions.

"The challenge for today's leaders is to ensure that new technologies are harnessed in ways that genuinely serve students and empower teachers, always keeping human connection and character at the core."

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What are you most proud of?

"Seeing colleagues step into new roles, take on challenges they once thought were beyond them, and thrive-that's incredibly rewarding," he says. Whether they remain at William Clarke or move on to new opportunities, knowing he played a part in their journey is what stays with him. It's a quiet but powerful legacy-one built not on personal accolades, but on the flourishing of a community he's helped shape.

Alex Koch is Head of College at William Clarke College in NSW, connect with him on Linkedin.