SchoolHouse
LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT

LEADERSHIP LENS

ISSUE 21
AUSTRALIA WIDE EDITION

this month's interview

ELIE ASMAR

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL
MARONITE COLLEGE OF
THE HOLY FAMILY,
SYDNEY, NSW

READ ALL ISSUES
ON OUR WEBSITE

www.the-schoolhouse.com.au

EDUCATION
LEADERSHIP
MAGAZINE

SCHOOLHOUSE
AUSTRALIA
PUBLICATION FOR
EDUCATIONAL
LEADERS

INTERVIEW WITH FAITH LAMBETH & LIANA ZDRILIC

FROM CLASSROOM IMPACT TO ENDURING LEADERSHIP.

“It's not just an impact that you have for that couple of minutes or those couple of days, it's life changing, it's everlasting.”

Elie Asmar's journey into educational leadership began with a passion to make a lasting difference in young lives.

Starting as an industrial technology teacher, a pivotal moment came in a chaotic woodwork class where he patiently supported a disengaged student struggling with home issues. "I knew that my leadership journey was going to go down that path where I want to be able to transform lives of young students," Elie reflects, noting the student's later success as a teacher whose own children now attend his school.

This experience shifted his philosophy from subject delivery to holistic impact. "When you make that difference in a young student's life, that can be everlasting," he says, emphasising patience over discipline. Now Deputy Principal at Maronite College of the Holy Family (MCHF), Elie's approach continues to prioritise emotional support and long-term growth.

Faith as the foundation of authentic leadership

A devout Maronite Catholic, Elie integrates his personal faith into his professional role, modeling Christ-like values daily. "You have to live what you preach," he states simply, attending weekly Mass and praying the rosary each morning commute. This consistency extends to home and school, fostering respect, resilience, integrity, and collaboration among students and staff.

Elie views leadership as inseparable from faith, rejecting performative actions. "I try to be the fatherly figure here for students and to embed those Catholic values," he explains, using reflection to realign during challenges. His authenticity builds trust in a diverse community where the majority come from a Lebanese Maronite background, yet all appreciate the welcoming culture and school values regardless of background or faith.

Navigating modern challenges with education and preparation

Social media and device addiction pose significant hurdles, especially for Years 7-9 students new to phones and devices. Elie recalls phases of misuse, like posting "jokes" with unintended consequences. "It's like driving recklessly, not knowing how to control it," he observes.

The school tackled this through a dedicated pastoral program every Friday, featuring police liaison officers, ex-student testimonies, role-playing, and parent sessions.

Now embedded in policies, it includes wellbeing leaders trained for interventions and proactive discussions on emerging issues like deepfakes. "We're more equipped to tackle it before it gets too far." Elie notes, achieving measurable reductions while managing ongoing cases.

Balancing Stakeholder Needs Amid Crisis

During COVID, Elie prioritised reassurance and support over rushed operations. Leadership teams reflected before acting, focusing on individual impacts.

"We had to look at the individual first, provide that reassurance that things will be okay," he shares.

Teachers received mentoring for online transitions, while students and parents received adaptive plans to help manage these challenges.

This stakeholder-first mindset applies broadly: prioritise people, assess effects, and support through change.

"Put your stakeholders at the forefront," Elie advises, ensuring decisions serve students, staff, and families effectively.

‘Our school is very much a place where a lot of teachers stay, they love staying and they talk to us about wanting to retire here, it just has that community, that family atmosphere.’

Elie Asmar

“You know, we might hold different roles and responsibilities, but at the end of the day, we're all here for a common good and a common cause.”

Empowering early career teachers with pathways

New teachers receive buddies, mentoring, lesson observations, and pulse checks, not for scrutiny, but support. "It's more about reassuring them that there's someone there," Elie explains.

Deputy principals handle accreditation, while goal-setting is tailored to professional learning.

Opportunities like leading pastoral sessions or social clubs are the bridge to leadership.

Scholarship funds for masters degrees foster growth. This system eases transitions, builds experience, and retains talent.

Fostering a sustainable, joyful work environment

Staff initiatives address workforce pressures by deliberately prioritising wellbeing, with social clubs, multicultural feasts, feast day celebrations and end-of-term events all fostering strong collegial bonds.

Elie notes that the recently introduced staff recognition and benefits program, Perkbox, which offers a range of retail discounts, has been particularly well received: "I had a teacher say he saved over $1000 for a Samsung TV," he laughs.

The broader staff engagement program further recognises and rewards teachers’ contributions beyond the classroom, offering targeted perks and awards for extracurricular involvement.

Essential qualities for today's educational leaders

Elie sees leadership as a vocation with purpose, demanding authenticity and adaptability. "You've got to be authentic and adaptable," blending relational compassion with authority as needed.

Micromanagement erodes positivity; instead, check-ins and support allow people to thrive.

Faith-based education moulds future leaders with values beyond academics. "We're trying to mould students to be prepared for the real world and become future leaders," he envisions, skyrocketing enrolments reflecting parental demand for character alongside HSC success.

Achievements and a message of resilience

Now in his early forties, Elie takes pride in accelerated success from head of college to deputy, despite sacrifices.

"I've been able to achieve my goal earlier than what I expected," he says, crediting resilience, growth mindset, and supportive networks.

His message is to seize opportunities, work with purpose, and lean on others. Leadership succeeds through relational investment, turning challenges into everlasting impact.

Vision for the future of catholic education

Looking ahead, Elie champions proactive preparation for evolving tech-driven challenges, such as AI advancements and digital ethics, while deepening faith integration to ensure students remain grounded in enduring values. Leadership meetings now address these biweekly, updating policies and pastoral programs to equip the community for future complexities. This balanced approach positions MCHF as a forward-thinking leader in holistic education.

Leadership meetings now update policies biweekly, embedding digital ethics into pastoral care. "I think we're more equipped to be able to prepare ourselves," he says confidently.

He envisions MCHF as a model for values-driven growth, attracting families seeking holistic formation. Expanding scholarships and wellbeing initiatives will sustain staff, ensuring enrolments continue rising. Ultimately, Elie aims for every graduate to emerge resilient, faith-filled leaders ready for society's complexities.

“We want to be able to create a workplace that our teachers can walk through the gate every morning with a big smile on their face.”

Overcoming teacher shortages through innovation

Teacher shortages remain a persistent reality, yet Elie views them as opportunities for creative retention. Beyond perks and wellbeing, the school leverages its family culture "We've got staff who've been here for 20, 30 years," he notes proudly.

Multi-cultural events and rewards for extracurriculars turn challenges into strengths, drawing recommendations.

By aligning hires with specific community and faculty needs during scarcity, such as seeking physics specialists to balance a biology-heavy department MCHF maintains operational stability.

Sustaining Personal Energy for Long-Term Impact

Elie maintains balance through daily faith practices and family time, recognising leadership demands endurance. He uses his faith practices to focus amid busy schedules. Weekly Mass with family reinforces his "live what you preach" motto, preventing burnout.

Reflection is key: after tough days, he pauses for prayer or journaling to realign values like resilience and integrity. "Sometimes it’s hard in education but that's what school life's all about," he admits humbly.

This rhythm sustains his passion after 19 years at MCHF, fuelling consistent, positive influence for all around him.

Family is a constant source of energy and perspective. Leading alongside his wife and raising their children strengthens his approach to education, creating a natural synergy between home and school that keeps him grounded and inspired each day.

“Having a supportive wife helps me maintain balance between my professional responsibilities and family life.”

Collaborative recruitment building lasting teams

Elie emphasises involving middle and subject leaders in hiring to gain diverse perspectives beyond executive decisions alone. For instance, when recruiting Leaders of Learning join panels alongside senior executives, providing insights into daily departmental dynamics.

This approach develops leadership capacity among middle managers while ensuring hires address precise faculty gaps. "We're not making a decision just because we need to tick a box," Elie insists, noting they even consult teaching staff post-interview for faculty-specific feedback.

For senior roles, parent representatives from the P&F association join panels, ensuring hires resonate with community expectations and contribute to MCHF's renowned family culture that sustains decades-long tenures.

MARONITE COLLEGE OF THE HOLY FAMILY

What are you most proud of?

"I've been able to achieve my goal earlier than what I expected, having risen from Head of College to Deputy Principal through resilience and purpose-driven work.

I’m proud of MCHF's family-like culture, low staff turnover, and soaring enrolments, which affirm the schools values-first approach. These milestones, including staff retiring happily after decades and students moulded into future leaders, fill me with deep satisfaction.”

Elie Asmar is the Deputy Principal of the Maronite College of the Holy Family in Sydney.

Connect with him on Linkedin.