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## Seven Years. Six Things I Got Wrong.

Dear GGIS Families,

Last weekend, I quietly marked seven years as School Leader at Gems Genesis International School.

Seven years is a long time. Long enough to watch our first cohort of students grow from nervous beginners into confident young adults who have gone on to universities across the world. Long enough to have sat in this chair through three board exam seasons, one global pandemic, and more parent evenings than I can count. And long enough, I think, to look back honestly.

I am not writing to you today to share a list of achievements. Those will come in their own time and place.

***Today, I want to share something more personal: the things I got wrong, the habits I had to unlearn, and the lessons that cost me the most before they taught me the most.***

Here are six of them.

### **1. Mistaking Busyness for Productivity**

In my earlier years, my calendar was a war zone. Back to back meetings, sometimes as many as 14 to 16 appointments in a single day. I wore this like a badge of honour. What I did not realize then is that a packed schedule is not the same as an impactful one. The more I filled my day with appointments, the less time I had for what actually matters: people, problems, and possibilities. I have since learned that the most important conversations I have had at GGIS happened in the quiet moments in between, not in the scheduled slots.

### **2. Hearing the Student First**

I did not always do this. Adults talk. Leaders talk more. But what I have discovered over seven years is that on many days, our students have the best solutions, the sharpest strategies, and the most original ideas in the room. When I started bringing them into the conversations, whether it was about changes in the school, challenges we were facing, or choices we needed to make, things got better. Not easier, but better. I will not forget that again.

### **3. Saying I Trust the Team but Still Micromanaging**

I said the words. "I trust you." And I meant them. But my actions often told a very different story. Long reports. Excessive detailing. Rushing my team into areas that did not need their energy or their time. What I really needed was a system, not surveillance. Today, our leadership team writes weekly reflections and updates their OKRs, which are the equivalent of KPIs in the corporate world, and I review those with them monthly. That is it. And they are doing better work because of it.

### **4. Learning to Define Boundaries**

This one is still hard. As a School Leader, there are moments when I have to draw a line: for the school, for a student, for a teacher, or for the philosophy we believe in here. Not everyone likes it when that line goes up. And on most days, I have not particularly enjoyed drawing it either. But I have learned that boundaries are not walls. They are guardrails. They protect what matters most, even when they are uncomfortable to put in place.

### **5. Letting Go of the Fear of Missing Out**

Schools are trending now. Social media has made sure of that. Events, celebrations, theme days: the pressure to keep up is real and I have felt it. But this year, I made a decision: we go deep, not wide. We will not rush learning or experiences just to have content to post. Going deep means **letting go** of some things that look good on the outside but add very little on the inside. I am at peace with that choice, even when it is not the popular one.

### **6. Learning to Protect My self worth**

This is the hardest one to write.

At GGIS, we believe in servant leadership. No sofas in the front row at events. Running alongside the team. Being the first in line when something has gone wrong. I believe in this. I still do.

But I have also learned that service does not mean absorbing disrespect. On a few days, I have faced behavior I should never have had to: shouting, screaming, banging the table in my office, name calling, body shaming, all of it as a school leader. In those moments, I stayed quiet and carried on. I should not have. Trading your dignity for the sake of keeping peace leaves marks that do not go away quickly. That is a mistake I am naming here so I do not repeat it.

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Seven years in, I did not give up. Because the journey was far more rewarding than I ever imagined.

Thank you for being part of this journey. For the trust, the conversations, and even the hard moments that pushed me to grow.

Here is to the next chapter.

*With warmth, Shivani M*