

I was a superhero this week. I stopped a moving vehicle from causing death and destruction.

I was leaving the Jayhawk Conference athletic meeting in Hutchinson when I saw a truck rolling backwards down a hill headed for a busy cross street. The truck was unoccupied and was headed for a collision with a busload of puppies and kittens on its way to cheer up sick kids at a children's hospital. Using my superhuman speed and strength I quickly positioned myself behind the careening truck and stopped its blazing path to chaos. I moved to the cab and set the emergency brake, saving untold lives and personal property.

This is the way I told the story to my daughters. I might have embellished a little.

I was at the Jayhawk Conference and there was an empty truck rolling down a hill. I did stop it, but it was going maybe 1 mile an hour. And while there could have been busload of puppies and kittens, I might have imagined that. However there was an unsuspecting tree that might have lost some bark had I not acted.

And I don't have superhuman speed and strength. The truck was rolling very slowly because it had just started to move on its own. Had I waited a few seconds, the truck might have built up enough momentum that it would not be too smart to try to intervene, or maybe not even possible for me to stop. Bottom line, it's easy to stop a problem if you catch it early enough, but if you wait too long, you might have a much bigger problem to solve, if you can solve it at all.

At Neosho County Community College we are constantly looking for issues, for our own trucks rolling down hills. We pull data on a variety of areas on a regular basis and study it closely looking things that need to be adjusted. Chief among these data processes is our Institutional Effectiveness Dashboard.

We gather 322 items from a large number of sources includes federal reports, state reports, internal surveys, environmental scans, self-assessments, accreditation assessments, audits, and on and on. Those items are broken down and applied to our purpose statements of student learning, student success, accountability to stakeholders, and meeting community needs. Each one of those 322 items are discussed at a series of leadership team meetings, looking at both good and bad news, and what we can do now and in the future to address problems before they build momentum.

We just completed the process and I'm happy to tell you that our dashboard indicated that we are doing great! All but one of our four purposes showed improvement over the year before and are some of the highest scores in five years. The purpose that went down only lowered a small amount, but that small decrease lead us to have some excellent conversations on what we can do to make things better.

For instance our score for "accountability to stakeholders" was the highest it has been in five years! Almost all of our data shows that we are doing a great job being good stewards of the dollars we are given, communicating openly with you, developing our plans, keeping our facilities safe, and developing our employees and trustees.

One of the areas that had the biggest increase this year was in meeting community needs. That score took a huge drop the year before. You may recall that we had to pare back what we were doing in the community due to the early days of COVID, especially pre-vaccine. We have been reopening campuses to outside groups and allowing our students to go back out into the community to help organizations in

their missions. That improved interaction shows in the data as student and employee volunteerism is up and lots of community groups are back on campus using our facilities again!

But while there are many successes in our data, there are some areas we are working to improve. While we do many great things in our efforts to embrace diversity at NCCC, the data indicates there is still more to do. We have tasked our diversity committee in helping us find new ways to show all students they are valued at the college and making sure everyone can be successful no matter their background.

With our dashboard now complete, we then present that to the whole college community, which we did at our all-college in-service. Everyone gets to see where things went very well and where we need to improve. At the January board meeting Dr. Robb, our Chief Academic Officer, showed the results to our trustees. The dashboard is part of my evaluation process when the Trustees grade my performance as I'm ultimately responsible for every aspect of the institution.

Next we study the results and use it to inform our strategic plan. The strategic plan is a list of initiatives we will undertake for the next 1-5 years. We want to make sure we are spending our time and resources in a way that can help move these indicators forward. The strategic plan becomes my "president's goals" that are literally written into my contract for next year so that I am held accountable for getting them done.

NCCC believes in data-informed decision making. We look at the situation with the best data we can find and use it to come up the best plan we can to get the biggest positive effect. Does it always work? No, that is why we constantly look for problems as early on as possible to keep small problems from getting big. We are always going to have big problems surprise us from time to time. But we learn from that and adjust for the future so it doesn't happen again, at least not in the same way.

After I stopped the truck and set the emergency brake I found the truck's owner and let him know what happened. His first reply, "Again!?! I should probably check that before I get out of the cab, huh?" Yeah. You should.

Next time there may not be a superhero around to save the puppies and kittens.

If you have any questions for me about this column or anything else please email me at binbody@neosho.edu.