



**TOPIC: Visionary Leadership/
Initiating Change**

HOW DO YOU START WHEN BIG CHANGE IS NEEDED?

25

Michelle Rhee

*Founder,
StudentsFirst.org*

VIDEO SUMMARY:

As Chancellor of the D.C. Public Schools, Michelle Rhee describes what she faced upon taking the job: students performing far below grade level and administrative issues preventing needed supplies from reaching the classroom. She shares why she made the unprecedented decision to close twenty-three schools and how she dealt with the resulting criticism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Think about the work in which your team is currently engaged. As a team, identify one or two projects or situations where change is needed.

2. When Rhee started as chancellor, she was faced with an overwhelming array of problems, but she started by fixing basic issues—like payroll. Looking at the problem(s) you identified above, identify the basic issues that need to be addressed before you can really attack the problem.

3. Once basic issues were addressed, Rhee focused on teacher quality as key metric for student improvement. In the problem that your team identified, what key metric should your team to address?



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4. Rhee struggled between doing what was best for teachers and what was best for students. She decided to focus on the students. How does your organization make decisions when the interests of two stakeholder groups conflict? (Example: customers/ shareholders, visitors/members, youth/adults)
5. Rhee faced criticism for her choices—as every change agent will. Are there situations in which you’ve been avoiding bold action out of fear of criticism? What would help you move forward?