

Question and Answer with Trenton Allen

What is the mission of the Katalusis Foundation?

The Katalusis Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing individuals in distressed communities with the education and training necessary to maximize their personal development, thereby creating agents of change instrumental to rejuvenating our communities.

Is there any significance to the name?

Yes, there is. As I began to sit and think about what words could describe the mission I wanted to achieve, I entertained a number of thoughts. Time and again, I always came back to this idea of a catalyst. It's actually sort of funny, since I was trying to stay as far as possible away from the science classes that I had taken in college. As you may or may not know, the purpose of a catalyst is to affect the rate of a chemical reaction and to do so without being consumed. In fact, a catalyst acts to lower (or raise) the amount of energy needed to activate (activation energy, AE) a chemical reaction. In this way, catalysts can help stimulate a reaction that may not have otherwise occurred. Another important characteristic of a catalyst is that it is not consumed, so it by analogy applies to the Katalusis Foundation, as we are not consumed but are able to continue our work because our function is to assist the reaction. As I searched for names I found that "catalyst" was not available so I thought about the process that I just described and researched "catalysis" but that name did not resonate with me. I continued my search and decided to explore the etymology of catalysis. It was then I found the Greek root, *katalusis*, and it stuck. The name articulates our vision - The Katalusis Foundation seeks to act as a catalyst in the lives of people by providing training and education that support their development.

So why are you doing this?

The reasons are fairly simple. Looking back on my life, I came to the understanding that I would not have been the same if not for people that were the catalysts in my life. Throughout my life there have been people who have come and gone whose collective impact has been central to my development. My interactions with these different people gave me insights on life and helped to shape the person that I've become. They assisted in the process of my maturation and development and in turn helped affect the course of my life. Don't get me wrong, I understand that not every person who influences is a positive catalyst. Catalysts by their nature can either accelerate or decelerate a reaction. So in thinking about the mission of the Katalusis Foundation in comparison to the realities in our world, I am always acutely aware of how some are so privileged to have good support systems while others are left to fend for themselves. In particular, I thought about the many distressed communities that exist around our country and, in a larger context, the world. What struck me was that there lay fallow an abundance of talented, skilled and gifted folks who for whatever reasons were not maximizing those abilities. I kept asking myself, "How can we change that?" Not to be repetitive, but it all comes back to the idea of a "Catalyst". In many of our distressed communities, the number of negative catalysts seems to outnumber the positive. The reasons for that imbalance can be debated by people for an eternity, but that doesn't change the fact that people who live in our most distressed communities do not have the same access to "positive/accelerating" catalysts. I wanted for Katalusis to be especially effective in providing such catalysts. After assessing the situation, I decided that if the Katalusis Foundation was going to be effective in our work to redevelop and revitalize our distressed communities, we were going to have to work to attack the problems from many directions.

So what is the Katalusis angle?

The Katalusis Foundation aspires to be one of the positive catalysts in our distressed communities. This will be achieved by focusing our collective energies on initiating and managing programs which are designed to address specific issues confronting members of our distressed communities. Our programs are developed with both a target population and goal/outcome in mind. While the target populations may differ from elementary age children to teenage parents to juvenile offenders, our ultimate goal is to help each of these constituencies maximize their individual development. To accomplish this goal we target certain areas of development such as leadership, problem solving and conflict resolution, which in turn creates that “spark”, or shall I say becomes the catalyst, which accelerates the development process and takes root in the life of the individual. While each program may be different in focus, they are all unified by the same core beliefs that serve as the foundation for Katalusis.

What are these core beliefs?

The Katalusis Foundation’s core beliefs have been established to serve as our guiding principles. We will continually strive to make sure that every last program that we create, operate, and support adheres to these established principles.

Katalusis Foundation Established Principles:

1. **Personal Responsibility:** we, as individuals are responsible for own actions. *While there may be extenuating circumstances, ultimately, we each are responsible for our own actions and decisions. We cannot afford to spend our time concentrating on placing blame, however well placed it may seem, because it is ultimately unproductive. Instead, we must be diligent in exercising our greatest freedom: choice*
2. **Personal Development:** Developing oneself to the utmost must be central. *We believe that everyone has the capacity and ability to achieve, but the development of our skills is dependent on both our desire to develop ourselves and the resources available to support that development. Personal development encompasses educating and training our entire being, mind, body and soul. If we are to be all that we are intended to be, then we must commit ourselves to this life-long process.*
3. **Community Responsibility:** All for one and one for all. E Pluribus Unum. *These cries are not just platitudes for us. As we continue to develop personally, the mark of success is not what we have achieved alone but includes consideration of those around us. We must always remember to be responsible to our fellow citizens of this country and the world, to be good stewards, and to help others to progress.*
4. **Community Development:** Develop thy community. *Personal development, itself, is not seen as the ultimate end. It is also the vehicle by which one becomes a more powerful agent in stimulating the development of our communities. We cannot turn our backs to the issues confronting our communities in hopes that they will dissipate without intervention. Personal improvement should extend to public improvement. This will be the measure of success for the Katalusis Foundation, helping individuals develop so that they can in turn transform our communities.*

So is this about personal or community development?

The answer is both. The Katalusis Foundation sees supporting personal development as our chosen conduit to creating a better community. We see the situation as one in which I, as a member of your community, can draw upon your gifts and abilities and you can draw from mine. That is what we want to accomplish, to help our communities that are in states of distress due to crime, drugs, poor schools, lack of jobs, and personal choices and priorities. As I stated earlier, we must take responsibility for what has occurred and is occurring in our communities. So we

want to create places where all people have access to an infrastructure that can help them maximize their abilities. Now with that said, we believe that to be successful in transforming our communities an inside/out approach to community development must be utilized. The idea here is that, it is not enough to transform the physical infrastructure of a community if the sentient infrastructure is not transformed as well. Put another way, we can rehab all the houses, create new jobs, repave the streets but if we don't deal with the personal development of those most invested in these communities, all may be for naught.

Please describe this inside/out approach?

The perspective behind this approach is fairly simple and straightforward. As discussed previously, we are focusing on the individual; this is where the Katalusis Foundation starts. The individual is the building block for families, communities, cities, states and the world. Individuals committed to extracting every bit of talent, skills, gifts, out of their being. Individuals who work to maximize themselves, thereby creating opportunities for communities that are primed for being successful, thriving places where the atmosphere is one of expected achievement instead of resignation to failure and malaise. Therefore, as individuals are the building blocks, we work to help individuals maximize all that they can be, so they can in turn affect their families by providing an example of leadership and direction. Acting as a catalyst for the individual, who in turn acts as the catalyst for the family, which in turn socializes and interacts with other families, in the final analysis acts as a catalyst in community development. As we know, a community at its basic level is a collection of families and the mission of the Katalusis Foundation is based on the belief that we can all, ultimately, affect the community, cities, states, and eventually the world that we live in. Hence, we as humans on this vast planet have a role and purpose and our individual actions or lack thereof eventually have ramifications that affect the larger world community. All told, this inside/out approach is central to what we believe and is the root from which all our work stems.

Why is your focus here?

We are focused on individuals because as I said before, communities are the collection of families and families are built by the individuals. So we work to develop programs that target a particular segment of our communities that we feel can use some much needed attention. This is why we developed the DELT(A)³ Academy.

What is the DELT(A)³ Academy?

The DELT(A)³ Academy, which stands for Developing Exceptional Leaders Through Academics, Arts and Athletics, is an educational leadership program, designed for elementary and middle school aged children. The focus of this program is to develop children as leaders in our communities.

So if you are developing leaders, then why do you focus on academics, arts and athletics?

That's a great question. When you look throughout history and compare the greatest and most successful leaders, certain common characteristics become extremely apparent.

First, they all had the ability to think critically and strategically about problems. They were problem solvers. They were able to think not only of what was best in the short term but to think of what would be needed in the future as well. *Leaders are thinkers*. For this very reason, we want our children to develop critical thinking skills. By that I mean the ability to take concepts and ideas and be able to process them and apply them practically to achieve solutions. In the ever-changing world, our children must be able to adapt and take the lessons that have been taught and apply them in new and useful ways.

Second, all these leaders have been able to communicate effectively to those around them. They were able to express their ideas, motivations and positions to audiences in a way that the citizenry was able to understand as well as support. **Leaders communicate effectively.** So what better way to develop these vital communication skills than to learn to express ideas, feelings, and motivations through the arts? While art, in all its forms, is not focused merely on communication, it is however focused on the expression of emotions, feelings and thoughts. It is our belief that the special ability of artists to connect with people on both an emotional and intellectual level is crucial to developing the communication skills needed by our children. It is our aim to develop leaders who can channel that artistic expression into clear communication of thoughts and motivations.

Lastly, all these leaders were able to evaluate what was best for their community as a whole. **Leaders consider the entire community.** So that is why we incorporate athletics. Utilizing athletics not only builds fitness but more importantly it develops an understanding of community. While playing team sports, players should/must remain focused on the goals of the team and that is to win. While playing a game of basketball, it doesn't matter if you score 40 points if your team loses by twenty. Conversely it doesn't matter that you scored two points or cheered mightily on the bench if your team wins. Because the goal of playing the game is to win as a team and whatever role is necessary for the team to win is ultimately what is needed. Team sports help to teach the concept of community and the understanding that the success of your community is what matters. A good leader understands the community and must make decisions that are best for the community as a whole. The ability to separate personal concerns, identify issues and focus on the larger community is what separates our best leaders from the mediocre ones.

For the Katalusis Foundation, these qualities profile the types of leaders that we want our children to model. We want our children to become effective leaders in their lives, their schools, and their families.

Will this be your only program? No. Currently, the DELT(A)³ Academy is our flagship program, but there will probably be others as well. If we determine that a particular segment of our distressed communities is not receiving the necessary resources then we will definitely work to figure out a way to act as that catalyst.

For more information please visit www.katalusis.org