

## **Gary Thompson - Shortened**

**Gary:** My name is Gary Thompson; I am the director of Toledo Technology Academy. It's the ace public high school in Toledo Ohio, Toledo Public Schools district.

**Cheryl:** And how long have you been doing that Gary?

**Gary:** Seven years.

**Cheryl:** Now, I know you've been working with Susan for what, about three years? You've been working with her for quite a long time since you first started working with her. Am I correct on that?

**Gary:** Yeah, I think its five years.

**Cheryl:** Well, tell me a little bit about when you were first working with and even as you've been working with Susan. What are some of the challenges that you are facing?

**Gary:** Challenges we were facing were probably typical of any school, we were looking at something that made sense for the students, that they could use to organize and the process of doing their work and keeping it in a fashion, and they could access it easily. Everyone organizes differently, everyone processes differently and we noticed that our students didn't have a plan of attack that served them in being successful.

So one of my teachers, actually, my math teacher had heard about Susan Kruger and said let's take a look at this. The teachers, first the math teachers and then one of my humanities teachers adopted the process and since that time over the years we have infused it throughout the curriculum.

All of the teachers use the same process with the students and with the parents so everyone knows how it works, how they can use it for their success. So it's really been a process for us too, first a very neat process or methodology that we could purchase and use but we've seen the advantages moving through the years of incorporating it throughout the curriculum.

**Cheryl:** So you started out actually with kind of a focus group that as you realized the results you were getting then you were able to take it to more of a full school wide initiative at that point.

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**Gary:** Yes, it works for students and we saw that. We have an inner-city urban population, many of our students don't have the economic advantages or financial advantages of suburban schools. This actually is not a very costly method to employ and we were able to continually purchase it for our students and it works for them. Watching it move through the student body and being able to observe it over a number of years students continue to use it, implementing it throughout the curriculum made sense to all of my teachers as they watched it work for the students.

**Cheryl:** The parent piece of this, tell me a little bit about how that has helped having the parents support you in this initiative.

**Gary:** Well, we probably do more parent conferences than certainly any high school in northwest Ohio. Getting parents on board to help with students' homework is a challenge at times. Not many parents are particularly comfortable with saying, "I am going to sign up to help my child with calculus or AP physics," but giving them a process they don't have to be a content expert to use. Here's what will help your student move forward, has really works for all of our parents. It's simple, and it's easily understood by all of the parents no matter what the demographic is and makes sense. That's a huge benefit to using the SOAR process. We have a really diverse student population and along with that comes a very diverse parent population. So giving them all the tools that they can use and to some, is just comes naturally but to others it's like oh, well I can be involved. This is a good thing and maybe they haven't done that in the past. There so many of the parents that don't know how to get involved. This is a really great way to put that component even more solidly in place. It crossed any sort of economic demographic involved.

**Cheryl:** Now, one of the things I know that's a main objective that Susan has with SOAR through the study skills is to help the students realize that they can be strategic with their learning. Now have you found that to kind of go across the board in how they approach learning and organizing, just the principles of this. And in any other ways do you see any evidence of that outside of the actual process of study skills? Has it been helpful to them outside of that?

**Gary:** Outside of just the study skills and organization pieces? Huge, having one binder for them, just one simple place where they can reference their work, use it for studying forward being able to find it. I don't know if you've looked into a 15-year-old's backpack recently, normally, they're very disorganized and very much of a mess.

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So this is a system that kids can use, it facilitates their being able to access their organizational process. It's easy. It doesn't require taking 80 hours of and in service for a student to use. Many of my students have said that we are in urban inner-city school with all the same challenges and opportunities that urban school districts are facing across the nation so many of our students don't necessarily come from a background where they are just taught organization or correct study skills. And this is, as I said earlier, a very easy to use methodology for them and they adapt to it really quickly.

**Cheryl:** Well, as far as your experience with working with Susan personally, how has that been, working with her and with her company?

**Gary:** Wow, she is very hands on, very knowledgeable, and yet very accessible on a personal level and very easy young lady to work with. I truly appreciated having her in my building, she's been there quite a few times – it's been a number of years ago but instant relationship with students, able to establish the relationship and that's the most important part of establishing a process, being able to establish the relationship with the people involved.

She did the very same thing with my teachers and with my parents, just a very, very easy lady to work with. She has huge credentials and could very easily be intimidating, she does not come across that way at all, and just a regular person, easy to relate to and that facilitates her process being used.

**Cheryl:** But do you found her responsive as well to your requests and to getting back to you on things, that sort of thing?

**Gary:** Absolutely, I e-mail her any time something comes up and she immediately gets back to me about it. Once again being an urban school district, financing is sometimes a challenge and we've come up with different scenarios and ways of using her materials and she's immediately figured out how to make that work for us. I would just encourage people to ask any questions that occurs to them about utilizing the methodologies and the materials and make sure that they aren't hesitant about doing that. Her response is fantastic and I learned a lot from her.