

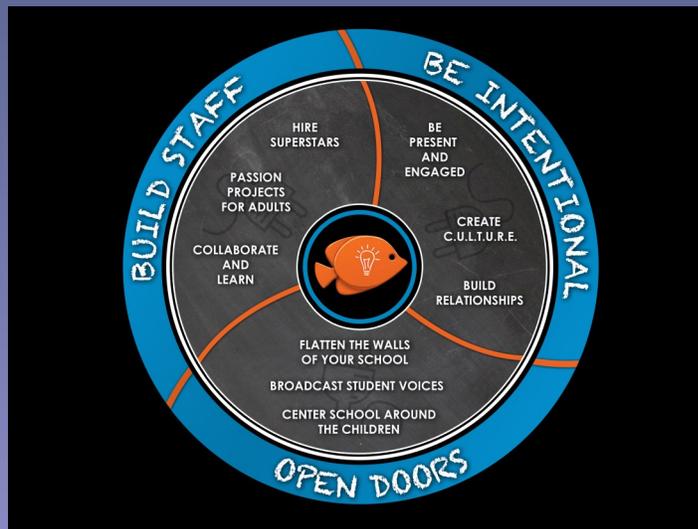
Hacking Leadership

10 ways Great Leaders Inspire Learning That Teachers, Students, and Parents Love

The role of the school leader has evolved over time and through that change, the amount of responsibilities and expectations on leaders has shifted. "A school leader needs to model transformative practices so that innovating becomes a norm and working with common principles becomes a collective goal for community members" (p. 13). There are so many expectations that are being asked of leaders, it is critical that focus remains on the most important aspects; building relationships, making connections, developing a mindset of growth, and exploring innovative leadership to ensure that changes made are focused on the future. Sanfelippo and Sinanis (2016) indicate that by developing effective interactions is the single most important skill in creating flourishing schools (p. 16). By identifying three components; build staff, be intentional and open doors, leaders are provided a framework that will allow them weave a tapestry of positive culture and success for all.

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<http://www.hacklead.org/>

- * THE PROBLEM
- * THE HACK
- * WHAT YOU CAN DO TOMORROW
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Hacking leadership is about transforming into a leader that can be defined as a visionary; someone who is able to evaluate and understand the impact that their leadership has on the school culture and making learning a positive experience.

➤➤ HQCK #1: BE PRESENT AND ENGAGED

The role of a school leader is transforming from the once traditional “boss, disciplinarian, supervisor” (p. 17) to visionary. A leader who is present and engaged is someone that invests in nurturing healthy, positive relationships, rooted in trust and respect (p. 18). As education and learning continues to transform so does the role and expectations of a school leader. It is recognized that stakeholders require more from their leader on a daily basis and as expectations alter so do the leader’s responsibilities. Rooted in trust and relationships, transformational leaders must step up and become a ‘lead leader’ who demonstrates a clear vision that encompasses the culture, tone and climate of the entire community and looks at each through a broader lens ensuring that what’s best for students remains at the forefront.

Just listen (p.20):

Set aside time every day to connect and check with various people on your staff. Keeping a list on your desk and intentionally seeking people out to connect with on a regular basis will help build relationships and will make people feel heard and appreciated.

Ask questions (p.20):

Never stop asking for input from stakeholders (staff, parents and students). Information gathering will help you to assess where you are at and where you are going. Using a one-on-one or a digital platform.

Make time for lunch with kids (p.20)

Creating opportunities to get to know the students in your building by sharing a meal together in small groups or one-on-one. This will provide them with a voice and will help you gauge where change needs to happen.

Celebrate in public (p.21):

Create a discourse of celebration within your community. It is important to get everyone involved in the celebrations, ensuring that everyone in the community can participate and celebrate should be a priority.

Get out of your office (p.22):

Slotting in times to get out of the four walls of your office to connect and build relationships with students, parents and teachers is incredibly important. Those tasks can always be looked at, at a later time. Being “visible, engaged, and present” (p.22) sends a message that those in the school are important and worthy.

“Example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing”

~ Albert Schweitzer, (p. 17)



<https://www.datanami.com/2016/09/23/past-present-future-finance/>

Blueprint for Implementation (p.22):

Step 1: Start every school day with personal interaction

Step 2: Use morning announcements to kick start community

Step 3: Cover classes to give teachers planning time

Step 4: Start voluntary club during recess

Step 5: Blog to be transparent and reflective

Step 6: Create a “dream team”

➤ ➤ HQCK #2: CREATE C.U.L.T.U.R.E.

When someone walks into a school there is a *feeling* that is had; the manner in which they are welcomed, the respect they are shown, the genuine way they are spoken to. When the culture of a school is positive it speaks highly to the value and importance that the leader places on it. It can be stated that when a leader exemplifies the school's culture, those same values will be permeated through the school to the teachers and the students. It is the influence in which leaders have on the entire school that manifests in the culture and impacts the school community so greatly.

CULTURE (p.34)

C-ommunication
U-ncovers
L-earning
T-ransparency
U-ltimately
R-eveals

If you get the culture right,
most of the other stuff
will just happen naturally on its own.
~ Tony Hsieh, (p.33).

According to Sanfelippo and Sinanis (2016), asking the right questions are an important starting point.

1. *What is the culture of the school?*
2. *What makes our school different than any other school?*
3. *What feelings and emotions are evoked when you think about our schools?*
4. *How can we continue to shape the trajectory of the culture in positive ways?*

(p 36)

Feed People (p.36):

It is important as a leader to recognize the opportunities when their community gathers, typically during meals. Leaders can often open up a door by providing meals or snacks, serving as an opportunity to start connecting and communicating. By intentionally having candies on your desk opens the invitation to come take one and perhaps start a conversation.

Define the status of your school's culture (p.36):

It is important that leaders assess, define and reflect on the status of the culture in their school. Involving staff and community will initiate conversations for growth.

Share the communication plan with families (p. 37):

Schools can no longer be stand alone entities; they need to rely on resources to share information to families. "Creating high levels of transparency through a constant flow of communication is critical" (p.37).

Name social media interns of the week (p. 37):

Providing student with the opportunity to share the amazing things that are happening within the school you empower them to create the narrative and share the culture of the building.

Blueprint for Implementation (p.38):

Step 1: Build ongoing communication with all stakeholders

Step 2: Educate families and staff

Step 3: Ask questions

Step 4: Hand the microphone over to the community

Step 5: Hone the vision

➤ ➤ HACK #3: BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

A leader that focuses on building relationships is someone that is considered to be intentional and authentic, and values those who participate in building and sustaining a positive culture. By cultivating relationships with stakeholders it will allow the leader to develop and sustain momentum (p. 49). Sanfelippo and Sinanis (2016) suggest that leaders should take a more systematic approach to relationship building and focus on the areas of **connection** and **reflection** (p.49). It is important to note that leaders will not connect with everyone in their building the same way however, being open and sincere will still allow one to build positive relationships thus impacting the overall culture of the building.

CONNECT:
Strive to balance
between real time and
virtual
connections (p. 49).



<https://beebetterseries.wordpress.com/2012/04/24/4-ways-to-create-connections/>

REFLECT:
Be intentional about building the relationship however also about reflecting on how it works (p. 50).

Use Google for scheduling (p.50):

Use a schedule to plan out when to visit classrooms to observe and have conversations with staff and students about the great things they are doing and learning.

Write positive notes (p.50):

Leave a handwritten note for staff members highlighting something positive that you have recognized them doing to impact the culture.

Conduct a hashtag review (p. 51):

Utilize social media and hashtags to your advantage, sharing things that you see from staff and community members and highlighting things that are happening within the school community.

Follow through on all commitments (p. 51):

Be sure to write things down, carry a notebook. A very quick way to lose trust and diminish relationships is to not follow through. Be sure to take notes and do what you say you will do.

Make 5 positive phone calls about students to start or end your week (p. 52):

Creating positive home relationships with families is critical to everyone's success. It reinforces your commitment to students as well as indicates that you are visible as a leader.

Target issues appropriately (p. 52):

When an issue arises ensuring that it is dealt with immediately is critical to minimize the side conversations and honors those involved.

Blueprint for Implementation (p.53):

Step 1: Build up momentum before the school year starts.

Step 2: Ditch the opening staff meeting

Step 3: Find places to celebrate the efforts of staff members

Step 4: Meeting the staff where they like to be

Step 5: Participate in the big events

Step 6: Take advantage of small events

Step 7: Be transparent about your growth

"Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships".

~ Stephen Covey, (p. 47).

➤ ➤ HACK #4: FLATTEN THE WALLS OF YOUR SCHOOL

When a leader flattens the walls, they are inviting people outside of the walls to see what is happening inside the school, and then use the opportunity to build momentum in creating and even better culture. Flattening the wall eliminates the possibility of people making assumptions about the things that are happening within the school and demonstrates to the community that they are part of the journey as well. "Educators who develop trusting relationships with the communities build a significant amount of social capital" (p.65). By inviting the community to be active participants you establish the school's identity, with them as part of it.



(<https://www.emaze.com/@AZIOORF>)

"Flattening the walls of your school entails eliminating the communication barriers so everyone feels like they are part of the school." (p. 66)

~ Sanfelippo & Sinanis (2016)

Blueprint for Implementation (p. 67):

Step 1: Connect online tools for ease of use

Step 2: Set goals for communication

Step 3: Plan the roll out

Step 4: Keep the momentum rolling

Step 5: Create a "dream team"

Find out where stakeholders spend their virtual lives (p.66):

In order to connect with families virtually, make it easier for them by flowing information through *their* online preference.

Create a calendar (p.66):

Create a list and invite staff to make additions to any events and/or great things happening in the school to share with the community.

Leverage the power of the #hashtag (p.66):

Create a #hashtag that would directly relate to the school narrative and culture. This will help with finding events and posts that can be shared with the larger community.

Questions to Consider:

- How are you building 'social capital' within your school community?**
- What needs to be done in order for you to create a presence on a social media platform?**

➤ ➤ HACK #5: BROADCAST STUDENT VOICES

Leaders will recognize this hack as an opportunity to share with the community the stories of the school by using the most important voices, from the students themselves. By reaching out to families and community members through several different ways, newsletters, recordings, social media platforms, we engage and enhance the trust and communication that we want to develop with families; inviting them to become active participants in the community and culture of the school.

“The impact of hearing a student’s voice expressing excitement over what the class learned in school can transform everyone involved” (p.74)

~Sanfelippo & Sinanis (2016)

Blueprint for Implementation (p. 76):

Step 1: Find your people

Step 2: Make the process easy

Step 3: Empower others

Step 4: Ease into it



Teach kids to podcast (p. 75):

Demonstrate to students the power of their voice. Teaching them how to use the tools appropriately will assist them in the long term and will help share the story of your school from those who are in it.

Send out a live stream (p. 76):

By embracing the tools that are available, we are creating transparency and opportunity to have deeper and richer conversations about the school culture, everyday.

Find your audience:

Know where your virtual audience is, engage with them on their platform.

Build your brand:

Everything that you do in the context of your school is about creating your school story which is the brand.

Celebrate kids:

Celebrate the work that all

➤ ➤ HACK #6: CENTER SCHOOL AROUND THE CHILDREN

A hack leader recognizes that student's are at the epicenter of school, they are the purpose of the whole organization. By providing them with opportunities to use their voice and share their opinions we empower them, and demonstrate the trust we have in them as valued contributors. This particular hack is really about thinking outside the box and encouraging students to participate and invest in every aspect of the school from staff meeting to hiring; if it is about them, we should include them. "When we create schools that work for kids, the tone of the discourse about learning changes so opportunities to innovate, create, and pursue passions become the norm rather than the exception" (Sanfelippo and Sinanis, 2016, p.8 4)



How do you develop student's voices in your school?

Ask for input (p. 84):

Invite students to participate from the very beginning, ask them how they want to participate and don't just assume you know.

Play that funky music (p. 85):

When assessing the times that are unstructured, allow students to choose their options. For example, playing music during lunch. Allow students to choose the music and have fun!

Exercise student voice (p. 85):

Be sure to acknowledge and celebrate every opportunity you can as it will then become embedded in your student culture. Look for every and all opportunities to have students use their voice.

Give kids choices within the curriculum (p. 86):

Working towards making learning about student-centered activities will enhance and engage students more as they will become empowered in their learning. "The standards and skills will be addressed when teachers are empowered to share control of the learning with the children" (p.86).

Blueprint for Implementation (p. 86):

Step 1: Create a shared decision-making team

Step 2: Encourage student participation on committees

Step 3: Create a brilliance builder lab

Step 4: Initiate a student EdCamp



U. (2018, July 31). *Students' Voice Isn't Considered in Academic Innovation - This Needs to Change!* [Cartoon]. Retrieved September 7, 2020, from <https://edtechreview.in/trends-insights/insights/3267-students-voice-isn-t-considered-in-academic-innovation-this-needs-to-change>

➤ ➤ HACK #7: HIRE SUPERSTARS

A leader is tasked with the role of staffing their school, perhaps the most important thing that they could do to enhance or diminish a school culture. There are often so many items that a leader could consider however a hack leader would prioritize candidates based on their ability to align with the vision, mindset, positivity and innovation. The ability to foster relationships, and promote communication between students, parents and the community should be at the forefront of any candidate. Superstar teachers make connections with kids, some of whom have not yet acquired the social skills to forge healthy relationships. They create nurturing environments that put students at the center of the learning" (p. 96).

"Celebrate your new teachers' strengths and abilities and nurture them so they help your school to flourish" (p.106).

Blueprint for Implementation (p. 97):

Step 1: Collaborate to create job descriptions

Step 2: Start with a conversation

Step 3: Ask fewer questions, conduct more conversation

Step 4: Conduct student-led tours

Step 5: Set up a site visit

Step 6: Integrate the new staff member

Step 7: Create a "press conference" to announce new team members

Step 8: Facilitate mentoring

Step 9: Invest time

Step 10: Revisit job descriptions annually

Start a Google Doc with job descriptions (p. 97):

Prior to hiring, create a document that would have descriptions of various roles within the school. This will provide leaders with a starting point in this journey as well as complete transparency.

Generate buzz about job openings (p. 97):

When you love where you work it becomes evident in everything that you do. Wanting to share that passion is important. Creating momentum for new opportunities, sharing on social media and any possible locations is critical.

Connect with local universities (p. 97):

Building connections and opportunity to new graduates should be something to consider. Highlight the great work happening and create a desire for others to join your winning team.

Discussion Question:

How do you invite and encourage your new staff to participate and add to the existing culture from their first day?

➤ ➤ HQCK #8: PASSION PROJECTS FOR ADULTS

Teachers have been creating passion projects for students, a trendy name for opportunities for students to research and engage in topics and areas of study that inspire or excite them. Sanfelippo and Sinanis (2016) recognize the value and the inspiration that occurs when an individual is engaged. By building relationships and communicating with staff, a hack leader is able to identify the passions of their staff and then work towards weaving those passions to the greater needs and initiatives of the school. The passion project aims to enhance learning in meaningful ways and ultimately can intrigue the students and teachers in the environment that they are in. Once the passion is determined by the learner, we can they start to create the parameters around it to ensure that it meets the necessary components. As leaders we want to demonstrate our love for learning so by striving to grow in areas of interest we model for our students and other staff how they too can take ownership of their learning and build their own capacity, on their terms.



Photo: <https://www.middleweb.com/20763/students-make-a-difference-through-passion-projects/>

Blueprint for Implementation (p. 112):

- Step 1: Identify the goals that your district deems essential**
- Step 2: Ask staff for input**
- Step 3: Integrate student data components into the goals**
- Step 4: Ask teachers to find a mentor**
- Step 5: Give teachers unstructured time to work on professional development**
- Step 6: Be flexible**
- Step 7: Provide quality feedback**

“This passion project approach serves as the impetus for our take on professional development in the form of collective learning experiences. Both aspects of professional development are essential to developing a well-informed, passionate, and cohesive staff” (p. 118).

Get teachers thinking about their passions (p. III):

Take the opportunity to engage in conversation with staff about what their passions are, beginning that dialogue is the first step.

Pass good resources on to teachers (p. III):

Once you have an idea of what sort of passions your staff have, be on the look out for articles and resources to help support just as they do students. Model for them the type of leader they can become for their students.

Provide opportunities for informal meetings (p. III):

Serve your school team through connections and opportunities to build capacity in their areas of interest and meeting their needs whether that be through things like “Lunch and Learns” or “Appy Hour” both informal sessions to support teachers passions.

»» HACK #9: COLLABORATE AND LEARN

One of the challenges that leaders face is providing opportunities for staff to participate in professional development. While often so contaminated with the ideas of managing and supervising the essence of growth and passion can be lost in timetabling, scheduling and supervisory tasks. In keeping with the idea from the last hack, leaders can support and encourage their teachers to participate in professional development that allows them to take ownership, seek out opportunities to share their passions and essentially learn from one another. Hack leaders want to create sustainable and meaningful opportunities where connecting with one another can be done to collaborate and learn from one another but that this will be embedded in the culture and modelled for students.

Blueprint for Implementation (p. 124):

Step 1: Take a reading on staff readiness

Step 2: Rebrand staff meetings

Step 3: Make collective learning the norm

Step 4: Start a collective learning community

Step 5: Initiate teacher-led sessions that support collective learning



<https://www.laurenmidgley.com/beliefs/gift-time/>

How are you cultivating collaborative growth amongst your staff?

Existing Knowledge:
areas teachers have already learned about and are implementing in their rooms.

Learning Goals:
topics teachers would like to learn about

Understandings:
what teachers have learned as a result of their professional

Talk to teachers about what they need (p.122):

Engage in scheduled discussions with individual staff members to learn about their passion and their vision, and ask what it is that you can do to help support them.

Make collaborating about learning the norm (p.123):

Maintaining a culture of learning for all, students and staff will demonstrate the power of connection and relationship. Continue to seek out opportunities where learning can be shared with staff not just during professional development days but during day to day interactions, in person or virtual.

Build common time into the schedule (p.123)

If leaders value collaboration, they will make it a priority. It is critical that opportunity and time be provided to support and establish the routines to develop the skills.

Create a collective learning chart to document learning (p.123):

Find and use a tool that is easily visible that will illustrate the learning that is happening. This will create opportunities for conversation and mentoring to occur but also creates a level of accountability.

➤ ➤ HACK #10: CHANGE THE MINDSET

As a leader we recognize that challenges will be faced, however it is in the approach that we take that will help determine how the impacted will be felt in the culture. When leaders allow negativity and toxicity to seep into their community the less possibility there is for success to be celebrated by staff, students, and parents. It is critical for leaders to recognize that not only do they serve but they are encouraged to promote; promote the positivity and promote the narrative that has been established by everyone in the school to enhance the learning, the collaboration and the community for all who participate in it.



“The time has come to hack leadership by embracing an Innovator’s mindset, an opportunity mindset, a growth mindset, a positive mindset, or whatever you choose to call the opposite of a deficit mindset” (p. 134)

Find out what parents want for their children (p. 137):

Opening the lines of communication with parents to discuss goals and is the “entry point for engagement”, use it to make the connections and squash the deficits that would pop up.

Talk to the Children (p. 137)

It is so critical to take an interest in the students to develop and foster authentic relationships. When you connect with them, you begin to hold them accountable all while them knowing that you are supportive and championing even during the difficult times.

Seek to understand what children can do (p. 138):

Every single person has gifts and talents, find out what they are, support them and encourage them, always.

Use data to identify strengths (p. 138):

Leaders are often data-driven however shifting our frame of mind to highlight the strengths we will be able to evaluate where we have began and where we are headed using those continued strengths.

Blueprint for Implementation (p. 124):

Step 1: Build capacity

Step 2: Model, model, model

Step 3: Encourage educators to learn something difficult

Step 4: Give kids access to diverse learning opportunities

Step 5: Celebrate the awesome things happening in your school

Questions to Consider:

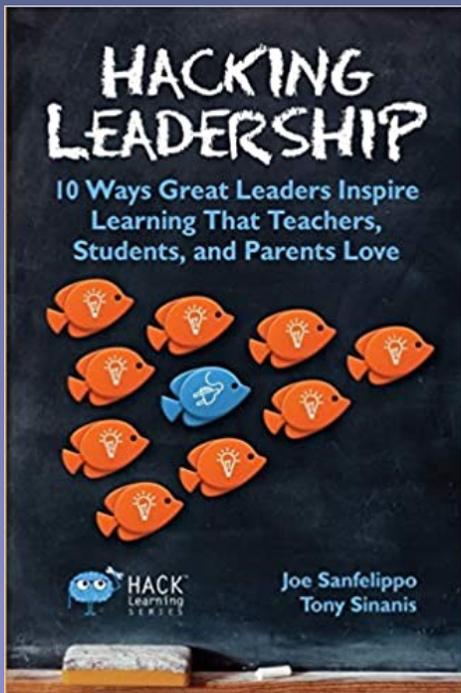
- How do you avoid *deficit thinking* among staff?

- Who is helping to contribute to a change in mindset?

»» CRITICAL EVALUATION

Hacking Leadership is a comprehensive, problem-based guide that succinctly provides strategies and tools that can be used immediately. Perhaps most effective is the components that addresses the pushback and comments from those that may not be willing or ready to actively participate in changing the culture. The quick and easy strategies offered will have you pondering how and what the many possibilities for change might look like in your school. There are a number of take-aways in every hack and will regardless of skill or knowledge, there is always opportunity for growth and reflection.

This book created the framework for leaders at any stage of their career to reflect on their own journey and address where they are at and how together with their staff, students and community they can strengthen their relationships, be more present and engaged, ultimately creating a culture that will permeate success and passion for learning.



Reflection Question:
When will you start your journey to
hack leadership?

Reference:

Sanfelippo, S. & Sinanis, T. (2016). *Hacking Leadership 10 Ways Great Leaders Inspire Learning That Teachers, Students, and Parents Love*. Cleveland, OH: Times 10.