

Ten Things
Teachers and
Principals Can Do
to Improve
Classroom and
School Culture

Mike Roberts



So Who is This Guy?



- I've been a middle-school educator for 26 years!
- I've coached multiple sports for a total 48 seasons
- I've teach licensure courses on classroom management and literacy in the content area
- I've been an English teacher (21 years), an Instructional Coach (2 years), and an Assistant Principal (3 years)
- I am an author (*Hacking Modern Teaching*, *Hacking Classroom Management*, *Chasing Greatness*) and a presenter (including the URSA opening keynote a couple years ago)
- And perhaps most impressive of all...I have chaperoned 68 middle school dances!

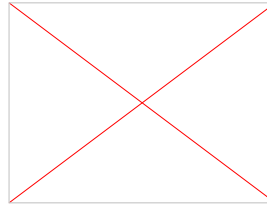
The world has changed a lot in the last 20 years. Has education kept up?



We can't keep using Blockbuster methods on Netflix students!

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"Kids are different today..."



Creating a positive school culture isn't about doing that one big thing -
It's about doing those 100 little things!

"Be Curious, Not Judgmental!" - Walt Whitman

What does this mean?

When issues arise with students/teachers/parents, look upstream for the cause rather than straight ahead at the problem. There is usually more to the story than first appears, and the only way to find this out is by asking questions.

What does this look like?

- Don't assume you know everything (Attend PD)
- Ask questions before offering solutions (Avoid 'why' questions)
- Listen more, talk less (Let students and teachers self-assess)

"In times of crisis, the wise build bridges." - T'Challa (Black Panther)

What does this mean?

When issues arise with students/teachers/parents, find common ground, and build from there. Focus on making connections rather than creating divisions. And whenever possible, celebrate the good!

What does this look like?

- Find places to build and strengthen bridges (Offer ten words of praise or thanks per day, 30 second-moments)
- Focus on the good things people are doing rather than pointing out the bad things they may be doing (Teacher / Student shoutouts)
- Look to solve the problem rather than to win the argument ("How can I help?")

"A goal without a plan is just a wish." Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

What does this mean?

When making curriculum/school change, have a map to help people understand where you are going. The more transparent you be about what you are doing, why you are doing it, and when it will be done, the better.

What does this look like?

- Use data to help drive decisions ("We are doing this because...")
- Start with a clear goal in mind ("Our goal in doing this is... and we will know we are successful when...")
- Celebrate the small victories along the way (Recognize small improvements that happen along the way)

"Defining ourselves by what we are NOT is the first step to knowing who we are." - Matthew McConaughey

What does this mean?

Be clear on what your "non-negotiables" are in your classroom and school. At the same time, be willing to change what those "non-negotiables" are.

What does this look like?

- Find something to take off your plate (Fewer assignments? Shorter faculty meeting?)
- Reflect on what is, and what isn't, working (Cell phone policy)
- Always look for ways to improve (Ask for feedback)

"Turn that me into us." - Ted Lasso

What does this mean?

Creating a positive school culture is about getting everyone moving in the same direction. People can do this in different ways, but they all need to be headed toward the same outcome.

What does this look like?

- Encourage and offer feedback on a regular basis (including after every classroom visit)
- Provide leadership opportunities for others (including students who struggle academically)
- Add more team-building / collaborative activities (Bingo)

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." —Theodore Roosevelt

What does this mean?

You have to be realistic about where your students/faculty are. Change comes in bite-sized chunks, and trying to do too much too soon may turn people off.

What does this look like?

- Target one change at a time
- Focus on growth (Positive emails and phone calls, removing tardies)
- Be patient (Change takes time)

"It is not our abilities that show what we truly are... It is our choices." - Dumbledore

What does this mean?

Regardless of whether you are a teacher or an administrator, the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to education has its issues. Offering choice is a way to create more buy-in from both teachers and students.

What does this look like?

- Provide a variety of assessment options (paper, podcast, video, multiple choice test, collage, etc)
- Offer choice when providing school-wide PD (by grade-level, by subject, by topic, etc)
- Recognize the positive choices being made (PBIS for teachers)

"Let excellence be your brand." - Oprah

What does this mean?

Establish your expectations, and help others reach those levels. Let your actions speak for you, but let your words reflect your actions. Finally, expect the best from every single person you surround yourself with.

What does this look like?

- Be present (in the halls, at lunch, at events)
- Be positive (don't get dragged down by negative people)
- Be consistent with discipline (throughout the school)

"How many times do I have to teach you: just because something works doesn't mean it can't be improved." - Shuri (Black Panther)

What does this mean?

JFK once said that "conformity is the...enemy of growth." Just because a system is working, that doesn't mean that it should continue on forever. In fact, I argue that if you have a system that works, there is no better time to try something new. That way, if it crashes and burns, you have something to fall back on.

What does this look like?

- Write down one thing at the beginning of each day that you will do that will make you better than you were yesterday. (Accountability buddy)
- Find news ways to get parents involved (parent night, PTCs, field trips, guest speakers, field day, career day)
- Establish traditions (class meetings, teacher variety show, end-of-year projects) that lifts up others

"Taking on a challenge is a lot like riding a horse, isn't it? If you're comfortable while you're doing it, you're probably doing it wrong." -Ted Lasso

What does this mean?

Change is hard, but it's part of getting better. Creating a positive school culture is about looking at the 'big picture' and making the needed adjustments to improve. Simply put, if something gets to be too easy, it might be time for a change.

What does this look like?

- Record yourself teaching (and discuss with a colleague)
- Get feedback on your interactions (with students, teachers, parents)
- Don't hesitate to ask for help or admit that you don't know

Creating a positive school culture isn't about doing that one big thing -

It's about doing those 100 little things!

And if everyone does their part, really cool things can happen!



Do your part, and take care of your umbrella!

Contact Information

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Books

- [*Hacking Modern Teaching*](#)
- [*Hacking Classroom Management*](#)
- [*Chasing Greatness - 26.2 Ways Teaching is Like Running a Marathon*](#)
