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Tim Hadley:

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Vicki Davis:

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VICKI: Happy Thought Leader Thursday. You know, it’s a challenge when you’re a thought leader, not just to lead with your words. But in this case, today’s guest actually led with his head. Mr. Hadley shaved his head, a viral video <https://youtu.be/luL92zTy77c> . Let’s dig in. Tim Hadley, @MrHadleyHistory principal from Iowa is coming on with us. So Tim, you’ve had quite a bit commotion at your school. So why don’t you tell us what happened and what you did about it?

TIM: You know, I had a student – a young man – whose grandfather is fighting stage IV lymphoma. Over a weekend, a few weeks ago decided to stay in stand in support of his grandfather, he would shave his head. He showed it to grandpa, he was very excited on a Sunday. Met with grandpa, they had their family Christmas a little late in January, and came to school that Monday excited to share his new do with his friends and some of them didn’t share that excitement. They made some comments and kind of asked him if he had cancer and they said, “Hey, baldie.” Just things that weren’t supportive of what he was going through. And in retrospect, I don’t think the students were necessarily trying to demean his grandfather, I think the reality is they hadn’t taken the time to understand why he had chosen to get the haircut that he did.

So in response to that, I received a call from his mom that night and just said, “Hey, my son went excited to school, came home last night and just had a really tough day.”

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“And he went from having this huge amount of pride to just being crushed.” And gave me some names of some of the kids that made comments and what was said. And I took down those names and I thought about it and I just – you know, I’ve had situations before where just like any educator, I address with the individual, it’s a kind of better way to support one another. But as I laid in bed that night I thought, you know, maybe this is an opportunity to change this. And instead of addressing one or two individuals, address a group and kind of do a group thing, more of a group educational experience and really teach more of a life lesson.

So that night I texted mom and I said, “Hey, do you still have the clippers?” And she said yes. The young man’s name was Jackston and I said, “Can you send those with

Jackston tomorrow?” And she kind of hesitated and then said yes, and I’m sure she was thinking maybe I’m going to shave all the kids. I don’t know what she had in mind but I just said, please trust me. She said, I do. And I said thanks. And the next morning I caught Jackston coming off the bus and I said, “Hey buddy, can I talk to you? I said, first of all my apologies for the day that you had yesterday, it sounds like you really had a difficult situation and a tough day.” I said, “You know, I want to do something for you. I want to do two things. One; I want to show you that I too support your grandpa and two; I want to kind of educate your friends and peers in the right way to support someone.” So I said, “Would you be willing to cut my hair?” And he kind of looks at me, “Is that what you wanted the clippers for?” I said, “Yeah, buddy, what do you think?” He said, “I think I can do that.”

So I had an impromptu staff meeting, I told them and I think they thought their boss had lost it and they weren’t really sure but they were supportive. So one of the staff members filmed the event, and so I talked to the kids beforehand and I just said, “Hey, guys, I understood some of you made some comments to Jackson that weren’t maybe supportive and encouraging and I know that maybe someone of you here probably regret that. I just want to show an opportunity to stand with Jackson, so I’m going to ask Jackson to shave my head.” And as soon as I said that the kids kind of had a curious look and as soon as those clippers came on they were applauding, they were excited and they got into it and became very supportive.

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And from there I proceeded to shave my head. And I talked to him a little bit after about how we’re all a family and we’re all here to encourage one another and this is something that’s – the message here isn’t shaving your head but necessarily the message is going forward and really trying to be a positive impact in somebody else’s world. Take a second to ask behind the motivation of why somebody has done something before we make that quick judgment. And again, like I said, a staff member recorded it for the young man’s mother knowing that grandpa maybe would want to see it. It got put on social media and from there it’s been kind of a wild ride sharing our story around the world.

VICKI: You know, it’s so moving because you turned a situation that was very difficult into something that truly was beautiful. I wept when I saw it. I couldn’t even believe you had the time to call me back so that we could tell the story to teachers. And how did the other kids respond? Do you think it change their views?

TIM: Absolutely. I think, Vicki, a side effect from this that I didn’t realize would happen is that; one, I’d hope kids would apologize and they did. In fact, several young people whose names weren’t listed in the original phone call I received came forward and told me kind of in privacy, “Hey, Mr. Hadley I said something about Jackston” or “I had this thought about him and I want to apologize.” And so they asked to apologize to him and they did. Which I thought was very brave of them as well and I really

commended that atmosphere and that's a collective efficacy that we want to build in kids. Every educator talks about it every day, it's just great to see it played out.

But the byproduct that I didn't see, Vicki, or didn't anticipate was students began to share their own stories with their own struggles and at some point – and I know you mentioned you've seen the video. At some point I asked the kids in the room, I said, "Who here knows anyone with cancer or has been through this with a family member?" And every hand in that room went up.

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So this is something that affects us all and something that I think we all battle together and maybe it's not cancer, it's a financial situation or relationship and I think I walked away really truly understanding for the first time how deep and how connected we all really are and how much we really need each other from students all the way through to staff and how we all have a battle that we're all facing and we all need support in that. And in the end we only have each other.

VICKI: Here's my question. So I want you to think about teachers and I want you to think about the biggest mistake we all as educators make when we're dealing with bullying. What is your message to that principal or that teacher who's dealing with a really tough situation like you dealt with to try to not make those mistakes?

TIM: I think the number one mistakes we make as educators is immediately labeling a person who's doing the bullying as someone who has ill intent and malice in their heart. And I don't necessarily think that's true. I am by nature an eternal optimist and I'd like to think most people in education are or they wouldn't get up and do what they do every day. There's a lot of tough stuff out there. But at the end of the day I think we think this kid really means to hurt someone or this comment really means – and I think what we have to remind ourselves is we're dealing with kids, we're dealing with young people. These are kids whose frontal lobes aren't developed for another 15 or 20 years and we're expecting them to make adult-like decisions and get it right every time.

So I think first of all we have to have grace and the fact that they're going to miss the mark and secondly when they do I think we have to look behind the issue. I can't tell you, how many times, Vicki, in my role as either a teacher or a principal I had a kid one-on-one after they made a mean comment or did a mean thing to another student. I sat down – and I don't use it as an excuse, but definitely a conversation starter, "Hey, what's really going on here?" Nine times out of ten there's a deeper issue here. Maybe a parent has suffered loss or is going through a relationship issue or is going through some type of hardship, mom and dad has lot their job. This is a reaction to that.

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And again, I don't take that as a mask or I don't allow that to allow the behavior to continue. But I think until we really address what he deeper issue is, this student, no matter the amount of suspension or detention or whatever we do, until we begin to

take off the Band-Aid and really go into the wound, we're not going to be able to heal that student and get them in a place where they're going to be comfortable addressing others in a positive light.

The other thing I think we make as educators is we like to project our own experiences and the thing that we had in school on everybody else and we assume that everybody else's experience is really positive. Not everybody but most of us that got in education had a great experience in school that's why we're back. We want to provide that to kids. I think that's a great motivator. What we have to remember that we have kids in our buildings who at 9 years old get up and they're the sole provider to four or five younger siblings and they're getting them dressed, mom and dad is working two or three jobs trying to do the best they can, they're just not available to help. And here we are, we saddle them with all these other adult decisions when they come to school.

And I think we have to, as educators, really recognize what kids come in the door with and really unpack those right away and get to the essential things. And one of the things I'm a big believer **is I don't think you can capture the mind until you capture the heart.** And until we get into these issues, we're really not going to be able to get kids to listen to what we have to say if they don't think that we care about them as well.

VICKI: Educators, think about the difficult situations that you face. They're not as easy as you might think and I think we've gotten some great wisdom to motivate us to look a little deeper and to make great decisions when we're dealing with these hard situations.

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