



## LEAD Like a Pirate: Make Schools Amazing for Everyone (Even Teachers!)

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**Vicki:** Yes, we can *Lead Like a Pirate!* We have Shelley Burgess [@burgess\\_shelley](https://twitter.com/burgess_shelley) with us today. And we're going to talk about how we can make school more amazing, but maybe in a different way than you've heard it before.

Shelley, there's a lot of talk about making school great for kids, but what's YOUR thought – another thought – about maybe making school great?

**Shelley:** You know, one of the things that we talk about that happens, Beth Houf, my co-author, that I talk about like a pirate -- is this concept, that we want to make school amazing for kids -- but we also want to make school amazing for staff. And, a motto that we sort of follow and live by is that, we want to create schools where students AND staff are both running to get in, rather than out.

And so I think that we talk a lot about making school amazing for kids, and for our students, but not as much about how do we create experiences in a culture and an environment where our staff are also wanting (you know, waking up excited) wanting to come to work and creating those amazing experiences for kids in their classrooms.

**Vicki:** Why can't we have both? Why can't we have a place where students want to come to school, AND teachers want to come to school?

I really agree with you that maybe this whole "teachers finding meaning and wanting to come to school" is perhaps being left out of the narrative.

**Shelley:** Yeah! I agree. There's a section that we talk about, in *Lead Like a Pirate*, where we talk about this concept of really knowing, in the position that you're in, who your primary clients are.

And you know, we hear a lot, and we see a lot on social media, where principals and people in administrative positions talk about the idea that "We're going to do what's best for kids. And that's what we're all about." And you know, you see the sign that floats around, "Warning! This principal is going to ask what's best for kids."

You know, drilling down to, “What are the right experiences for kids?” is critical. But I think that in our role as school and district leaders, often our ability to do what’s best for kids lies in our ability to inspire the adults in our system.

And when you think about primary clients of a principal, for example... You know, I really believe that you have the most influence with the staff and the teachers. And doing what’s right for them, so that they in turn can do what’s right for, and what’s best for their primary clients – the students. So, that’s a critical piece of the message that we try to get across in the book, is “How do you do that, in your schools?”

**Vicki:** Well, and we’re all people of value. I mean it might be best for kids that I’m available online 24 hours a day, but I do have to sleep.

**Shelley:** (agrees)

**Vicki:** So, yeah, we want to do what’s right for kids, but honestly, sometimes I think it’s right for kids to know that I’m a human being. And I might need 10 minutes alone at my desk.

**Shelley:** Absolutely!

**Vicki:** Like, not during class. But, you know, during break. I mean, I need to go to the ladies’ room. I need a break at my desk sometimes, you know?

**Shelley:** Absolutely! I think that that’s another piece of the argument that we make sometimes, is that, “Where does it stop?” Just like you would hit it on the head, well you know, if I were available 24 hours a day for kids, that might be best. You know, if we taught 365 days a year, that might be best. If school days were extended 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 2 hours – you know, some might argue that THAT would be best.

You know, we’ve got to really think about – in leadership roles – that we can’t do what’s best for kids at the expense of what’s best and what’s right for the adults who work with us.

**Vicki:** Well, let’s face it. It’s not best for kids to have unhappy, complaining, whining, upset adults in leadership. How can you be a great leader if you’re upset about so many other things?

**Shelley:** Yep, yep, absolutely. I think that one of the places that we have people ask us sometimes, “Where do you start with that? How do you create that culture? What are some of the things that you do where staff is really feeling – creating that culture where staff is really wanting to beat down the doors to get into your school, and to get to work today?”

One of the things that we tell people first is this idea that you’ve got to – there’s a couple of things. First of all, you’ve got to recognize that, in your school, that **classrooms are where the magic happens**. You know, teachers are with kids – and I was a principal in an elementary school, so in our case, teachers are with that same group of kids for like six and a half hours a day. THAT’s where the magic happens. I can’t, as a principal, teach all 750 students who are in my school. But, boy, I can recognize that that classroom’s the place where that magic’s happening. And then I need to BE THERE. I have to BE in classrooms as much as possible to see what’s happening.

**Vicki:** So, Shelley, how can we turn this around? This is Motivation Monday, and we want to have this positive environment, but lots of us teachers – I mean, we are where we are. How can we all shift, so that teachers want to be there, too?

**Shelley:** Sure... you know, a piece of advice that we like to give to leadership in schools – and just know, too, when we talk about leadership, we don't just mean people who have a leadership title in their name. You know leaders are everywhere in every position in our schools and our districts.

But a great way to start – and we actually call it, in the book, we call it, “**dropping anchors of appreciation.**”

You know, I don't know that there are – that we can appreciate people enough for the work that they do in schools. You know, I'll just give an example of being in classrooms. You know, I was talking about that a little bit earlier. That recognition that that's where magic happens.

Well, how often do I visit a classroom with the “fix it” mentality? You know, hey, I want to point out something to do better, versus walking in with this lens of “I just want to appreciate the awesome things that I see going on in classrooms. Teachers are doing amazing things, around the clock, in their classrooms for kids.”

Taking a moment and approaching it with that lens of “I want to go and visit every classroom on my campus, or every department on my campus.” You know, if I'm a teacher I want to visit some colleagues or stop by the cafeteria. I want to go in with a lens of giving a message of appreciation – for something that I notice and something that I see... that someone's doing that's making a difference for another person, or whatever it might be.

But that's a place that we always talk about starting. **Stop looking for what's wrong.** Stop looking for what needs to be fixed. Pay attention to what needs to be appreciated and called out and noticed.

Do it. Go on those appreciation walks.

**Vicki:** I love that. Instead of “fix it” have a celebration mentality. So, Shelly, give us a 30-second pep talk to motivate us to help make our school a better place.

**Shelley:** When we think about schools, and the magic of schools, it's about the people. It's not about programs. It is about taking care of each other. It is about the relationships that we build. It's about recognizing that all of us are human.

All of us might have the capability of making a mistake, but also being forgiven. We have the capability to forgive, to do all those things. It's about building a culture where we respect each other, we treat each other well, we appreciate.

I don't know that I'm saying it right, Vicki, but THAT's the magic of schools. This is a people business. And we've got to take care of our people. And we have to take care of each other. And we have to build each other up, not tear each other down. If we can start there?

You know, “Motivation Monday”? What can I do today that's going to pick somebody up? Or, do something nice for somebody else, to think about them before I think about me. You know, what might that look like? As you start every day, or you start your week with that mentality, I think that's a great way to start that movement, to start in that direction.

**Vicki:** So, Shelley has given us a challenge. Let's BE the Motivation Monday in our schools. Let's be encouraging. Let's celebrate others. Let's be part of that leadership team.

It starts with us. Don't sit back and fold your arms and say, "Well I need a person in the front office to do this or that."

OK. You are the front. You're the front line.

So, let's encourage one another – and let's *Lead Like a Pirate!*

**Shelley:** I love it! Thanks, Vicki!

*Transcribed by [Kymberli Mulford](#)*