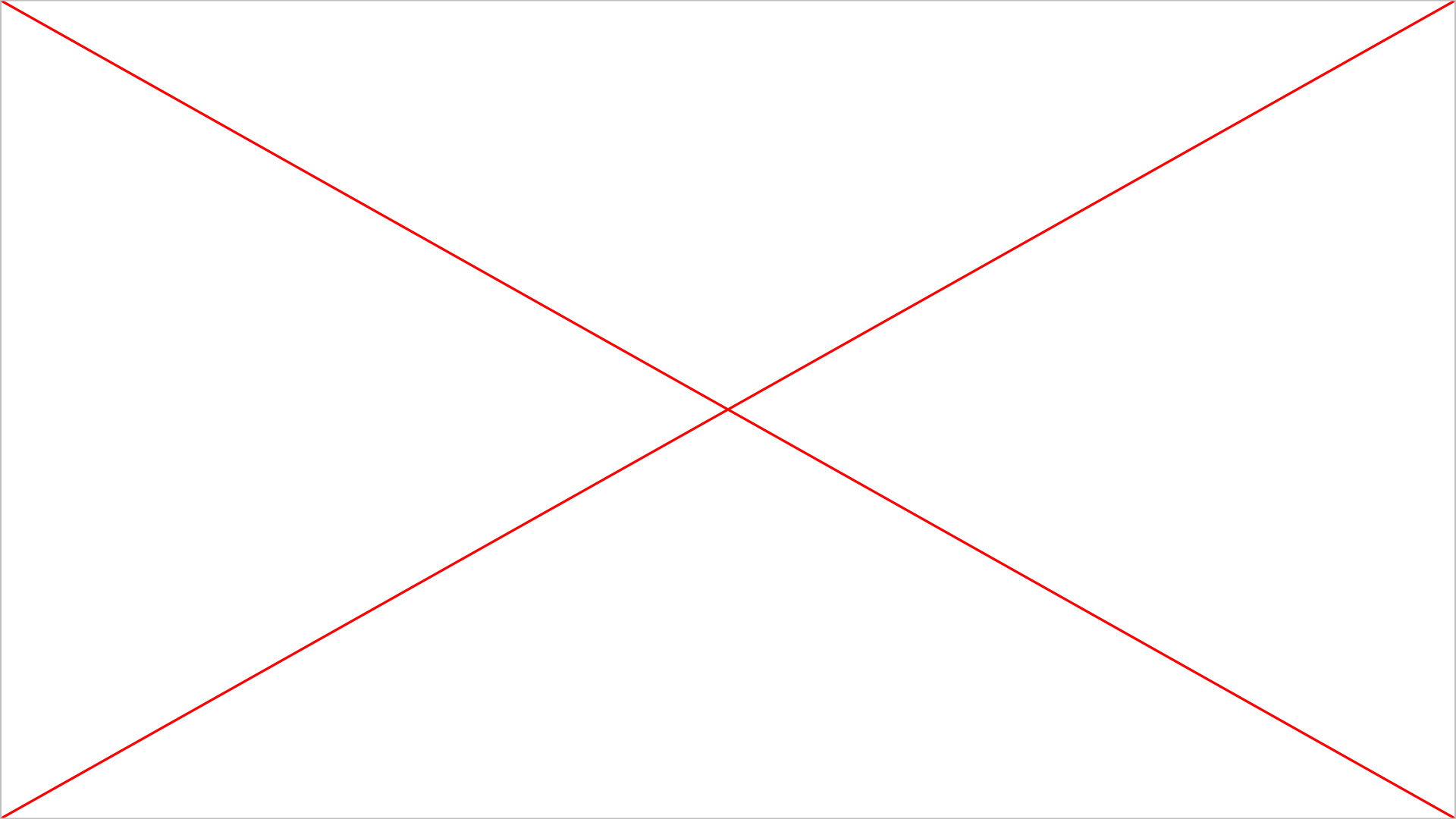


Things I wish I learned in Principal School

29 Years of Field Gathered & Tested Wisdom

Tim Bowman





'Actual' Room Demographics

- Current Position
- Urban or Rural
- Elementary or Secondary
- Years of Teaching/Admin Experience



A little about me:

- Grew up on a farm, 45 minutes northwest of Edmonton (A little town called Onoway)
- Taught 16 years in K-9 classrooms (Band, Music, Choir, Social Studies, Drama, Language Arts)
- 13 more years as a K-6 school administrator
- Worked in 5 School Divisions (Parkland, Red Deer Public, Northern Gateway, Wolf Creek, & Wild Rose)
- I've led schools through grade reconfigurations, report card changes, staff reductions, pandemic, sharing a school
- The last 7 years have been as Principal at École Rocky Elementary in Rocky Mountain House



Obvious to You / Amazing to Others



What is a leadership dilemma you are currently facing?



About Today's Presentation:

- When I am my most **successful**, these are the ideas and principles I lean into
- Some may be individual to my success, and others may be small nuggets that help you **unlock** your best work
- As we go, feel free to ask for more clarity or connect with me afterwards
- Today is a **60 minute sampling**. There might be 3 days of material here
- **I will need your help** today. While I might strive to be a polished convention presenter, this session - much like our leadership - is a work in progress



School Based Leadership

- The Principal role might be the most **rewarding** and most **difficult** job in the system (and it isn't getting easier)
- I don't think we are talking about leadership enough right now
- I believe there is a void of positive leadership in our communities
- Several of our political leaders are practicing authoritative leadership which is binary (with me or against me) / Schools are pluralistic (we take the ideas of many and find common ground)



The Early Hits:

- There are no silver bullets
- Showing up is a big piece
- There will be days you don't feel like enough
- You won't be thanked enough. . . but that's not why you're doing it :)
- You better know your why



Know your why.



2019 Assurance Survey

Measure	Ecole Rocky Elementary		Alberta		Measure Evaluation		
	2018-19	3 Year Average	2018-19	3 Year Average	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
Lifelong Learning*							
Education Quality	90.5	91.9	90.2	90.1	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Citizenship	77.7	85.3	82.9	83.5	High	Declined	Acceptable
Parental Involvement	79.1	79.5	81.3	81.1	High	Maintained	Good
Satisfaction with Program Access*							
Safe & Caring	87.3	89.8	89	89.3	High	Maintained	Good
Program of Studies	86.1	85.4	82.2	81.9	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
School Improvement	78.1	82.9	81	81	High	Maintained	Good
Program of Studies - at risk students*							
Work Preparation	69.3	77.3	83	82.6	Low	Maintained	Issue

*not reported on in 2019



2024 Assurance Survey

Measure	Ecole Rocky Elementary		Alberta		Measure Evaluation		
	2023-24	3 Year Average	2023-24	3 Year Average	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
Lifelong Learning	82.5	79.8	79.9	80.7	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Education Quality	94.0	93.8	87.6	88.6	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Citizenship	82.2	83.8	79.4	80.9	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Parental Involvement	88.7	87.5	79.5	78.9	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Satisfaction with Program Access	84.9	82.5	71.9	72.7	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Safe & Caring	89.8	87.4	87.1	88.1	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
Program of Studies	91.7	91.0	82.8	82.9	Very High	Maintained	Excellent
School Improvement	80.1	81.9	75.8	74.7	High	Maintained	Good
Program of Studies - at risk students	88.7	85.2	80.6	81.5	High	Maintained	Good
Work Preparation	94.1	91.0	82.8	84	Very High	Maintained	Excellent



Leadership Philosophies

- We are better, together.
- Everyone is working on something.
- Work that doesn't feel like work, is the best kind of work.
- Every child deserves a champion.
- If the adults are okay, the kids will be okay.
- Anchor yourself to anchor others.

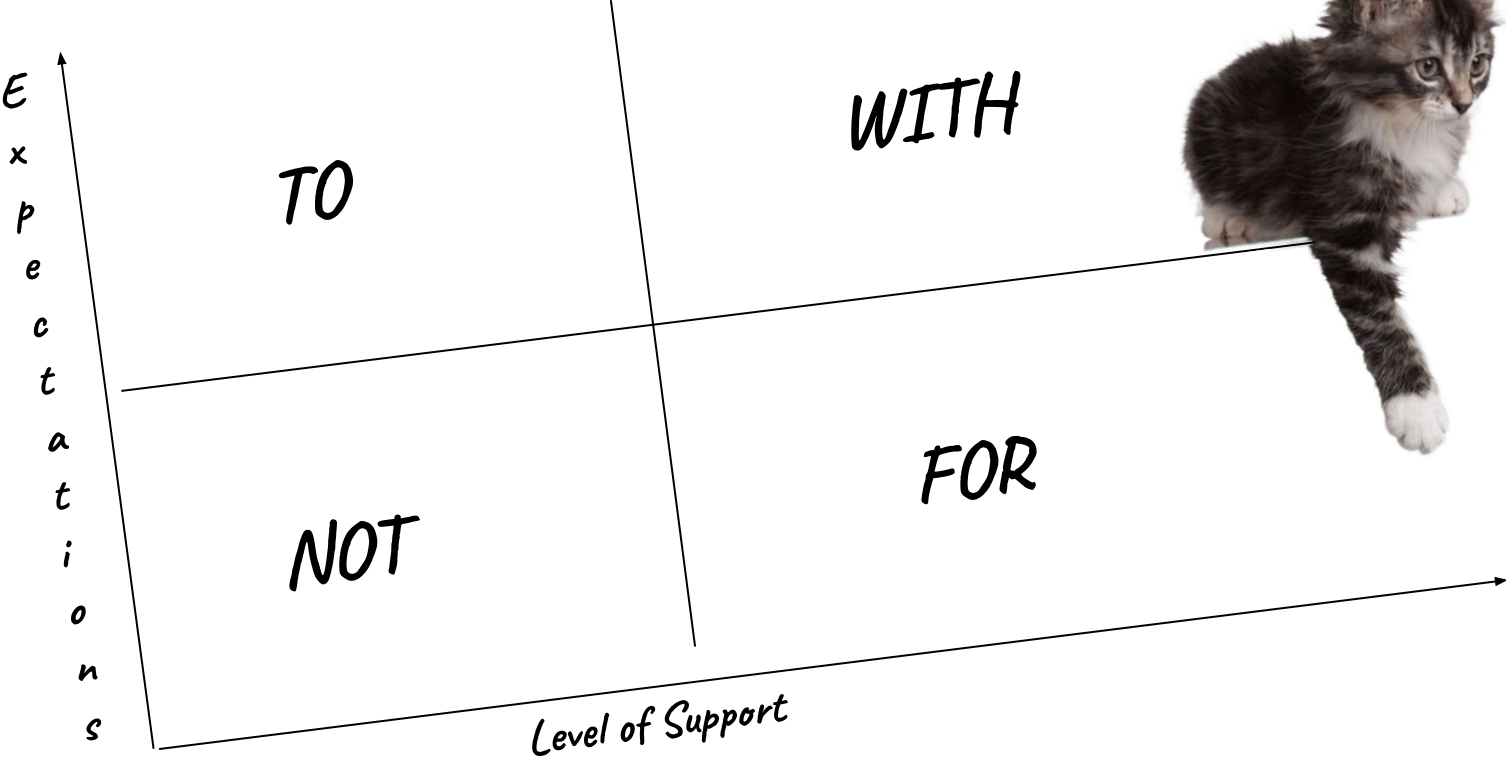


Quick Hits

- You don't need permission to be a school leader
- It comes with an office, but doesn't need to be an office job
- Our job is to raise the floor and ceiling of each person's abilities, wherever that floor and ceiling might be
- *"We need to make the positive so loud that the negative is near impossible to hear."* - George Couros
- The school's job is to make generational positive change
- The strongest force in the universe might be "Mom Guilt"
- The most powerful place to be is "With"



Not/For/To/With



Find your place

- There is a time and place for all things.
- Not every place will need you right now.
- The work that may be needed may not interest you right now.
 - Find a way to get interested in it, find someone who can partner with you, or find a way to move on.
- The best kind of work is the work that doesn't feel like work.
 - Mihály Csikszentmihályi called it a state of flow
- Destination matters
- People matter



One Hit Wonders!

- If you say **yes** to one thing, you are saying **no** to another
- **Even if**. . . not 'what if'
- Your most amazing strengths are also your biggest weaknesses. Ask yourself: "*Am I **too** _____?*"
- Some really good ideas need to wait for their **time** and **place**
- **Every problem has a solve**. It is about slicing the problem thin enough
- The lumberjack said that if his life depended on cutting down a tree in 5 minutes, he would spend the next 3 minutes sharpening his axe.



Wellness

- Who looks after the Principal?
 - Agree with your staff to Protect the Quarterback
- The grass is greener where you water it.
- Create a life you don't need to escape from.
- Learning is a wellness builder.
- Don't pray it gets easier, work on getting stronger.
- Don't wait until your gas tank is empty to find a gas station.
- Schedule your days away at the beginning of the year
- Pace yourself to work past the start of a break
- Even 'bottom hands' sometimes need 'bottom hands'



Communication

- It is **not possible to over-communicate**. You can communicate something 18 different ways, across multiple platforms, in 8 languages, and someone will still claim they didn't know.
- Pictures are part of the communication - take lots of pictures and find ways to share them



Know who you are (and who you are not)

➤ Personality Test

- Myers Briggs - the value is self awareness & team awareness of default personality traits

➤ 6 Working Geniuses

- Work of Patrick Lencioni
- Wonder / Invention / Discernment / Galvanizing / Enablement / Tenacity
- You are likely really good at two. . . and two drain your energy
- If a project isn't getting off the ground, you're likely missing some geniuses



Creating Vision

- If we tore it all down, would we build it back the same?
- Start with the ideal in mind
- Create the vision 'With' people
- You can not repeat the vision often enough
- Vision work involves agreeing on values - spend a lot of time testing staff/community values



Pendulum Swings

- There will be pendulum swings until there is a sustainable solution
- The goal is to swing back **less**, using knowledge gained on previous swings
- Eventually, the swings will be very small as we get closer to the solution
- Inclusion is starting one of these swings now



Doing the Work

- The best principals are **relentlessly** resourceful. A 'no' in one place is not a 'no' in every place.
- After rumbling, we are unified behind the decision.
- Expect that it will start simple, get really complex and 'mucky,' but if you stick with it, we will develop **elegant simplicity**.



More Quick Hits

- **Direction** is more important than velocity.
- The value of the prize box is not the prize. . . it is the **interaction** that takes place when receiving the prize.
- Everything is about **trust**. Trust is a currency that is earned through doing what you said you would do, over and over.
- Most things happen through **evolution**, not revolution.
- When there is a rupture, there is an **opportunity**.
- Don't wait for the scream.
- Go with who is ready.



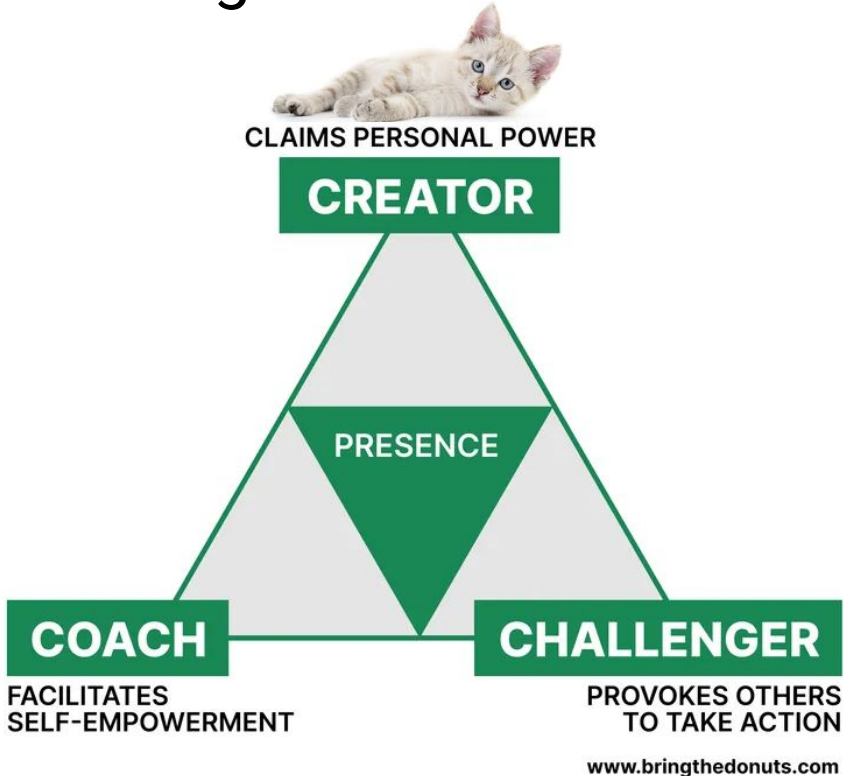
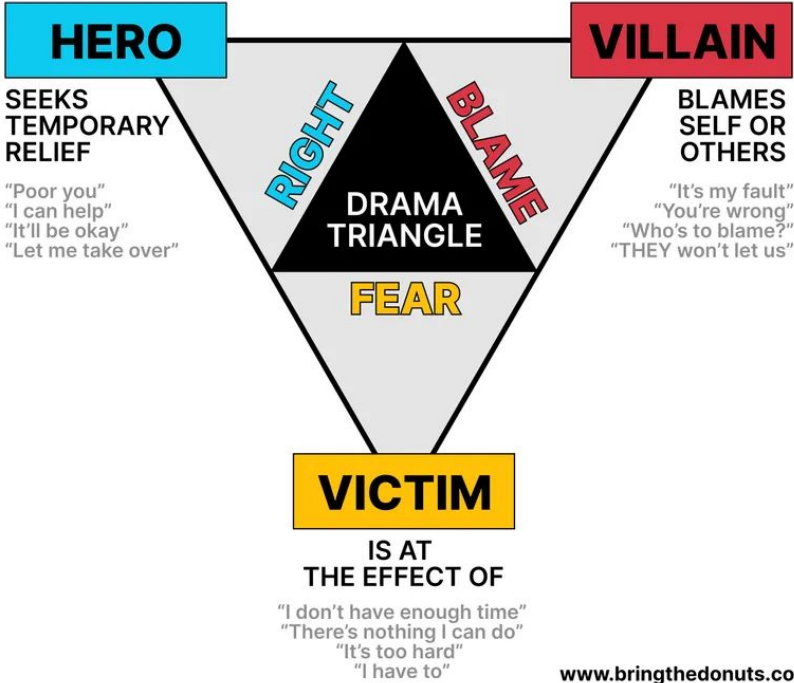
Think like a monk.

Book by Jay Shetty

- There is an opportunity to learn something in all things. Everything has a purpose.
- We often think of anger as negative, but anger shows us a personal boundary and gives us a jolt of energy
- If we were emotionally detached, looking from afar, what could we learn about the story/style/manner of:
 - The Edmonton Oilers
 - Mark Carney or Donald Trump
 - Taylor Swift



Drama Triangle & Empowerment Triangle



Difficult Conversations

- **Third Point Focus** - It helps to introduce a focal point that isn't you or the person receiving difficult news to the conversation. . . maybe another person, or a computer screen, or paper evaluation. Now it becomes you and the person working together on a problem
- “The story in my head”, “Tell me more”, “Help me understand”, “I’m curious”
- If you get to a meeting, and it turns out to be about something else, take the information and reschedule the meeting
- Always have **two staff** at potentially contentious/emotionally charged meetings
- Some meetings need to be short



The most difficult parts of the job



- How you handle these situations will define a lot of your success as a leader
- Really bad news
 - If it affects a lot of the staff, gather them together
 - Shoulder tap as much as you can, starting with the most affected, before the gathering
 - The gathering doesn't need to last long. It is for sharing the same information to everyone.
 - If it affects just some, a shoulder tap and then offer to take their class
- Possible Emergency
 - No one will question being cautious. They will question not being cautious enough.
 - In unfamiliar situations, use your best judgement. We will reflect as a team afterwards.
- Someone calling out your work
 - Accept it as information. More than likely, it isn't about the work, but there is relationship to repair.

On Failure

- We all have a failure number - the number of times we need to fail before we become wildly successful. Unfortunately, we have no idea what our failure number is.
- Don't take criticism from someone you wouldn't also take advice from.
- Remember the Empowerment Triangle. . . what can you learn?



Earning interviews

- Don't shirk on the interview thinking your career experience will win the job. The experience brought you to the interview. Interviews are an one-and-done tournament (but can set up the 'next time')
- The interview is the time to talk about yourself
- Learn to say your piece succinctly. Remember your audience.
- If you are being offered interviews, you are on the right track
- The interview is about finding the right fit for the position... sometimes I've interviewed on one position and been offered something even better
- Be you. You don't want a job you're not a fit for.



Very few actual emergencies in education

- A lot of things get presented as emergencies, but most items can (and should) be slowed down
- When you don't treat it as an emergency, there will be an attempt to get someone else to treat it as an emergency
 - Mom & Dad DRAMA TRIANGLE!
- Chronic items (poor attendance, lack of progress) eventually need to escalate to an emergency. . . it is easy for them to fall into chronic inaction
- Our job is to neither **overreact** or **underreact**



When things are not working

- If someone is not responding to logic, **feelings** have been hurt. Addressing the feeling will help move things forward
- Be curious. Not judgemental.
- *"The difference between making a judgement and having empathy is understanding the story."* - Thomas C. Murray
- When someone is off their baseline, consider health, family crisis, or past trauma as possible causes (Least likely - they are trying to sabotage you)
- *"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoings and right doings, there is a field. I will meet you there."* - Rumi



What problem do you solve?

- Instead of asking kids what they want to be when they grow up, ask what problems they want to solve. Completely changes the conversation.
- Describe your job, not as what you do, but what you solve
 - For me: I build thriving, healthy communities



Custody Agreements and EPOs

- Guide people to the right resources (legal, RCMP, CFS)
- Remind parents the school's role is a safe place for their child's learning... don't get drawn into a Drama Triangle
- Request the custody agreement outlines who has educational decision making
- Request the school isn't the location of exchange
- Don't wait for the interaction to blow up. . . phone ahead



The Good Phone Call

- For every call of concern/discipline, try to make a phone call of celebration
- You will feel better, the parent/child will love it, and it will improve school culture
- **Script:** *“Hi, This is Tim Bowman from Rocky Elementary. I’m just making a quick call because your child is doing something amazing again. I noticed they were _____. Just wanted you to know they are making our school a better place. Give them a pat on the back and tell them to keep up the great work. Have a great evening.”*



Leadership

- *“In chaos, look for the calmest person in the room. That is your leader.” - Havander Singh*
- All high achieving people have coaches. . . it needs to be part of our leadership model.
- In unfamiliar situations, use your best judgement. We will reflect as a team afterwards.



Pulling it all together

Guiding Principles for times of uncertainty (from COVID)



- **Focus on the facts.** We can work with facts.
- **Model the way.** This is uncharted waters for most people. Find an anchor and then anchor others to you. Help them know the facts. Help them know we have this.
- **Continue to use common-sense and your good judgement.** It will take multiple tries to grow this out, but, we will carefully reflect and make improvements to our response. Your common-sense and good judgement is working, it will buoy us through this as well.
- **Be prepared to meet divergent thinkers, the angry, and the frustrated.** Try to help the divergent see the big picture - the more coordinated we get, the better this all works out. Try to hear out the angry and frustrated - they could be hurting. Offer to know their story. If they trust us to share their worries, we can try to help. But as always, focus your efforts where it will do the most good.
- **We know what this is - a Global Hold & Secure.** We haven't seen it at this scale before, but we know if we coordinate, work together, and communicate, we will find our way through.
- **We are into new territory, but we are still us** - us being the most resilient, caring, thoughtful, intelligent, resourceful, fun people I know.
- **Look for the opportunities** - anytime there is a disrupting force, there is also the opportunity to re-invent things for the better. Be open to taking advantage of these opportunities.
- **Look out for each other.** We all will need some breaks from the heightened awareness and rapid changes. Tell lots of jokes. Take breaks. Check in with each other often. Be honest and ask for what you need. Social distancing doesn't mean emotional distancing. Bottom hands sometimes need bottom hands and that's okay :)
- **BONUS - Lead with gratitude.** A generous word is never wasted.

Practicing Gratitude is Where Freedom Lies.

- An attitude of gratitude
- A generous word is never wasted
- Every person engaging in school leadership deserves a medal. Everyday that you show up, you are opening doors. This is amazing and generous work and changing life trajectories.
- *“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”* - Margaret Mead
- I see you! I’m glad you’re here.



Enjoy your convention!

I see you! I'm glad you're here.

Reach out if I can help:

Tim Bowman

Principal, École Rocky Elementary

Rocky Mountain House, AB

Wild Rose School Division

tim.bowman@wrsd.ca

[LinkedIn](#)

