

**BECOMING  
A  
TOP 20 SCHOOL**

THE **SCHOOL NAME** WAY

Staff Journal

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TABLE OF

# CONTENTS

Preface .....	v
Chapter 1: Top 20s Live the Four Principles .....	1
Chapter 2: Top 20s Have a Clear Purpose: Knowing Why We Teach .....	9
Chapter 3: Top 20s Balance IQ and EQ.....	11
Chapter 4: Top 20s Live Above the Line .....	13
Chapter 5: Top 20s Know How to See Things Differently: The Frame .....	19
Chapter 6: Top 20s Value and Learn from Mistakes and Failure .....	25
Chapter 7: Top 20s Keep Stupid in the Box .....	29
Chapter 8: Top 20s Celebrate Confusion .....	33
Chapter 9: Top 20s Teach Through Multiple Intelligences.....	35
Chapter 10: Top 20s Promote Internal Motivation .....	37
Chapter 11: Top 20s Monitor the Impact of Grades and Assessments .....	39
Chapter 12: Top 20s Create a Culture of Belonging .....	41
Chapter 13: Top 20s Support Parents .....	43
Chapter 14: Top 20s Build Trust .....	45
Chapter 15: Top 20s Eliminate Negativity: Thought Circles and Tornadoes .....	47
Chapter 16: Top 20s Focus and Listen in the Zone.....	51
Chapter 17: Top 20s Resolve Conflict Heart-to-Heart and Practice Instant Replays.....	53
Chapter 18: Top 20s Establish Relevancy and Develop Star Qualities.....	57
Chapter 19: Top 20s Learn in the Moment and After the Fact .....	61
Chapter 20: Top 20s Give and Get Feedback.....	63

# PREFACE

The process of **Becoming a Top 20 School** consists of our individual journey and the collective journey of each member of **SCHOOL NAME**. The purpose of this journal is to support our individual journey by explaining the Top 20 practices and principles we want to imbed in our school community and providing personal reflections regarding our own participation in accomplishing the goals for **Becoming a Top 20 School**.

As we begin, let's clarify the purpose of this journey and establish some common language.

## THE PURPOSE OF BECOMING A TOP 20 SCHOOL

We certainly want to do our professional best as teachers and staff of **SCHOOL NAME**. We also want our students to do their best regarding their academic achievement as well as social-emotional growth. As important as this is, something else comes first: **Human being precedes human doing**.

Every student and every adult who enters **SCHOOL NAME** each day comes as a human being. The degree to which we are all able to be successful human doers is determined by the degree to which we're first able to be human beings. Although usually unconsciously, we each ask the question each day, "Is it safe for me to be me at **SCHOOL NAME** today?" If we answer the question with "yes," then our "doing" and performance will be remarkable. If we answer with "no," then our "doing" and performance will be minimal.

With this in mind, it is critical that we have clarity on our mission as educators, on why we do what we do, and on why **SCHOOL NAME** exists. What is our purpose? Although this most important question can be answered in a variety of ways, the simple purpose of what we do is **human development**. We are in the business of human development; the development of potential in our students, our families, and ourselves.

Because this is our purpose, we need a filter for our school. Filters allow certain things to pass through while blocking other things out. A filter for **SCHOOL NAME** is necessary so only those beliefs, practices, and behaviors that result in human development are allowed to be normative and habitual in our school. All other beliefs, practices, and behaviors are to be filtered out.

The strategy for **Becoming a Top 20 School** is to implement 20 Top 20 practices, all of which are intended to achieve human development. All members of our **SCHOOL NAME** community need to know and be committed to implementing these strategies in order to accomplish our purpose of human development. Although this mission may never be perfectly attained, it is always intentionally sought. Members of the school enjoy and celebrate growth toward this mission's fulfillment and correct thoughts, beliefs, and practices that are roadblocks to its achievement.

## TOP 20 AND BOTTOM 80 LANGUAGE

The 20 strategies that are to be implemented in **SCHOOL NAME** and are the focus of this journal will provide us with common language. In addition, we need to understand what is meant by the terms **Top 20** and **Bottom 80**.

"Top 20" means we are thinking, learning, and communicating effectively in the best interest of others and ourselves.

“Bottom 80” means we are not thinking, learning, and communicating effectively in the best interest of others and ourselves.

The purpose of this language is not intended to compare one person with another or one group with another. Rather, it’s intended to help us understand two dimensions of our own self: Times when we’re being effective (Top 20) and times when we’re not being effective (Bottom 80). With that in mind, it’s important to realize being a Bottom 80 isn’t a bad thing; it’s a human thing. As long as we’re alive, we’re going to experience moments when we’re operating as Bottom 80s. We just don’t want that to become normative and habitual.

Throughout the journal, we will alternate the personal pronouns of “he” and “she.”

Thank you for your commitment to making **SCHOOL NAME** a place where the human development of students and adults is our passion and purpose.

# 1 TOP 20s LIVE THE FOUR PRINCIPLES

The degree to which the development of an individual's or a group's potential is actualized is influenced by the energy that individual or group experiences. Consider the following chart:

<u>Energy</u>		<u>Situation</u>
Positive	→	Positive
Negative	→	Positive
Positive	→	Negative
Negative	→	Negative

The chart suggests there are two situations in life: Those that are positive and those that are negative. The choice we have as human beings relates to the energy we bring to those situations. To every positive situation in life, we can choose to bring positive or negative energy. Some people actually bring negative energy to positive situations. Likewise, to every negative situation in life, we can bring positive or negative energy. Some people bring positive energy to negative situations. It's a choice.

The accumulation of all the positive and negative energy we bring to **SCHOOL NAME** forms the culture of our school. If the culture or energy of our school is positive, human development will flourish. If the culture or energy of our school is negative, human development will be minimized.

Members of a Top 20 school agree to live four principles that create a positive culture in which human development and potential flourishes. These principles establish the foundation of a culture of safety and trust.

## **PRINCIPLE #1: HELP OTHERS SUCCEED**

The first principle for fostering human development by creating a positive culture of safety and trust is to **Help Others Succeed**. This is our number one job as members of **SCHOOL NAME**. Everything we do is guided and directed by a pure intention of wanting the best for others and by doing what we can to help them attain what is in their best interest. This is the most important thing we do each day. It is a positive, infectious approach to our role in this community; one that creates a new norm for all involved.

### Reflection:

A. What are ways in which you currently help others succeed?

B. How can you help others succeed in ways you are not currently doing?

## PRINCIPLE #2: COMMUNICATE “YOU MATTER”

The second principle for fostering human development by creating a positive culture of safety and trust is to **Communicate “You Matter.”** A natural need for humans is to feel they matter. By being aware of this human need, we can be deliberate in communicating “You matter” and can avoid communicating “You don’t matter.”

Ways by which we can communicate “You matter” include:

1. **Helping Others Succeed:** By intentionally helping others succeed, we communicate to them that they matter. Any time we help others attain what’s in their best interest, we let them know they are important.
2. **Listening to Understand:** It’s wonderful when people agree with us, but we don’t have a need for others to agree. However, we do have a need to be understood. To not be understood means we’re alone. When we truly listen to understand others, we create a sense of belonging. It is easy to launch into talking or problem solving when in discussions with others. By doing so, we can inadvertently communicate the exact opposite of “You matter.” Rather, by being deliberate in our listening, we not only support people with whom we’re engaged in conversation, but also communicate clearly that they matter.
3. **Valuing Differences:** Each person is a unique human being. We each come from a different background, race, ethnicity, and family. We have different points of view, beliefs, gifts and talents, and weaknesses and limitations. When we value the uniqueness of others, we communicate “You matter.” In a positive culture of safety, members of the community know their differences bring great value to the whole. By valuing differences, we are opening our community for richer development and positive growth. When individuals of any given community feel their differences aren’t valued, they are likely to disengage. When this occurs, the community loses out on the gifts and contributions from those people.

To be a healthy and vibrant culture we need to (a) share a common purpose or mission and (b) bring our differences to the fulfillment of that purpose or mission. We are greatly limited if we all have to be the same. We are tremendously enriched when we share and celebrate our differences.

4. **Being Kind and Courteous:** Through simple acts of kindness and courtesy, we recognize one another as human beings. With a smile or in saying, “Hello” or “Thank you,” we communicate “You Matter.”

### Reflection:

- A. How do you specifically communicate “You matter”?
- B. How do you communicate “You Don’t Matter”?
- C. Who needs you to communicate “You matter”? How can you best do that?

### PRINCIPLE #3: HONOR THE ABSENT

The third principle for fostering human development by creating a positive culture of safety and trust is to **Honor the Absent**. How we talk about others when they are not present is a powerful means by which we either build or destroy trust.

**Honor the Absent:** Speak of those not present, but in their best interest.

**Dishonor the Absent:** Speak of those not present, but not in their best interest.

Following are six ways by which we can Honor or Dishonor the Absent:

1. **Be a Problem Solver, Not a Problem Namer:** Effective cultures consist of people who are “Problem Solvers.” By making the choice to seek solutions, we move our community forward in a healthy manner. Ineffective, negative cultures consist of people who are “Problem Namers” who often dishonor the absent.

Example: “Tommy doesn’t do his homework and his parents don’t even come to parent conferences.”

Our school doesn’t need Problem Namers. Rather, we need Problem Solvers because we have problems that need solving.

#### Reflection:

A. In what situation have you been a Problem Namer?

B. How can you be a Problem Solver in this situation?

2. **Keep Our Lake Clean:** A second way we can Honor the Absent is to keep our lake clean. Think of a beautiful, clean lake as being symbolic for our life. It’s our job and duty to keep our lake clean.

Our lake becomes polluted when we Dishonor the Absent and operate as a Problem Namer or we allow and tolerate others to dishonor and problem name. By Honoring the Absent and by being a Problem Solver, we keep our lake clean and free of negativity.

If our lake is polluted, it’s because we have put up a “Dump Here” sign. We have communicated to others that we accept their negativity. However, if we want our lake to be clean, we have to put up a sign that reads “No Dumping Here.” **We need to be active and direct in communicating that we will not allow dishonoring, problem naming, or other negativity to spill into our lakes.**

We can do this by communicating that we are problem solvers. If someone says to us, “That new person on our staff doesn’t have a clue about working with students like ours,” we can respond by saying, “If that’s how you feel, let’s talk to that person so we can make this situation better.” The next time that person wants to complain, he won’t come to you. You have put up a “No Dumping Here” sign.



### Reflection:

- A. How have you been communicating a “Dump Here” sign? What has been the effect of putting up a “Dump Here” sign?
- B. How have you or could you be communicating “No Dumping Here”? What has been or could be the effect of that communication?

3. **Treat Everyone’s Name as Sacred:** A third way to Honor the Absent is to hold everyone’s name as sacred. A person’s name is what identifies her. When we dishonor someone’s name, we communicate “You don’t matter” and we break trust. When we honor someone’s name, we communicate “You matter” and build trust. Unfortunately, we live at a time when it’s very easy to trash someone’s name. It’s done frequently in emails, text messages, and through various social media. It’s an adult form of bullying.

We live in a larger culture we will refer to as Lake U.S.A. Although there are many wonderful things about Lake U.S.A., regarding the sacredness of name and honoring the absent, Lake U.S.A. is completely polluted. We have become a culture in which negativity and dishonoring is normative.

Why has this happened? Here are just a few reasons.

Think of Lucille Ball and comedians during her era. When they told a joke, they made fun of themselves. In America today, almost all humor is dishonoring. Someone who isn’t present is being made fun of. American politics is similarly characterized by negativity and dishonoring. Each of the major parties is on attack mode toward the other. Trash talking in the sports world is another example of the normalcy of disrespect polluting our lake and adding to the negativity our children see in so-called “role models.”

The need to treat everyone’s name as sacred does not mean we shouldn’t disagree with someone. However, our disagreement should not be at the expense of trashing someone’s name or dishonoring the absent.

### Reflection:

- In what situations have you Dishonored the Absent by not treating everyone’s name as sacred?
4. **Don’t Add Fuel to the Fire – Say, “Okay” or “I hear you”:** A fourth way we can Honor the Absent is by not adding fuel to the fire. When someone is complaining or saying something negative, he is expecting us to join in by complaining or adding more negativity. We can prevent adding fuel to the fire by simply saying, “I hear you” or “OK.” By doing so, we’re not adding more negativity to an already negative situation.
  5. **Say, “Ouch!”** Imagine seeing a soccer player getting hit in the face by a soccer ball or a hockey player being slammed into the boards. Our immediate response might be to say, “Ouch!” “Ouch” signifies the compassion activated in us when someone is in pain or has been hurt. Our compassion is a sign of our humanity. If we cannot feel someone else’s pain or suffering, then we’re losing our humanity.

Now imagine a colleague in the faculty lounge saying something that dishonors another person. Even though the person being dishonored isn't present, can we still feel the suffering this statement causes? If so, we need to say, "Ouch." By saying "Ouch," we remind everyone something has occurred that is not in line with the safe and trusting culture we want to maintain.

We need to say "Ouch" for two very important reasons. First, we want to keep our lake clean. We can't keep our lake clean if we don't activate our compassion when dishonoring is occurring. Second, our first job is to Help Others Succeed, including the person who is dishonoring. That person will not be effective or successful in our school community if she has a reputation of dishonoring others. We aren't helping her succeed if we allow her to continue to Dishonor the Absent.

The best way to establish "Ouch" in our school culture is for us to form an agreement with one another. In doing so, we actually ask one another to remind us by saying "Ouch" whenever we're speaking in a dishonoring manner.

**Reflection:**

- A. Why might you be unwilling to say "Ouch" when someone is dishonoring the absent?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. Are you willing to form an agreement to say "Ouch" (or some other word or phrase) when someone is being dishonored?

**6. Practice the 2-out-of-3 Rule:** We have three options. We can:

- (A) Say someone's name.
- (B) Say something negative.
- (C) Say it to someone else.

When we do all three of these, we're dishonoring the absent. However, if we only do two of the three, we are not dishonoring the absent:

**Doing A and B:** We can say someone's name (A) and say something negative (B), we just can't say it to someone else (C). In other words, we say it to ourselves or our cat.

**Doing A and C:** We can say someone's name (A) and say it to someone else (C), we just can't say something negative (B). In other words, we say something positive about the person.

**Doing B and C:** We can say something negative (B) and say it to someone else (C), we just can't say someone's name (A). In other words, we vent our frustration, disappointment, anger, or another feeling without naming the person it has to do with.

Professionally, we may at times need to say all three. Imagine a seventh-grade teacher is meeting with other seventh-grade teachers: "I'm concerned about Corey. Corey hasn't done homework for five days. And I noticed most days he's sitting by himself at lunch. Are you noticing anything about Corey that concerns you?"

This teacher is saying someone's name (A), saying something negative (B), and saying it to someone else (C), but seems to be honoring the absent because she is problem solving and looking out for Corey. If we want to be effective and if we want to build a culture of safety and trust, we need to be very clear we're honoring the absent.

**Reflection:**

- A. When was a time you dishonored the absent by doing 3-out-of-3?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. How could you have said this in an honoring way?

**PRINCIPLE #4: SEE THE PROBLEM, OWN THE PROBLEM**

The fourth principle for fostering human development by creating a positive culture of safety and trust is to **See the Problem and Own the Problem**. In a busy and fast-paced world, it is often easy to come across a problem that isn't our own and then move on without addressing it, because we expect someone else to take care of it. This major principle means we address problems we become aware of even if it doesn't fall in line with our job description. If we don't deal with the problem directly, we will at least notify the person who has direct responsibility for the problem.

For example, we may become aware that a colleague's teaching style is becoming a concern to parents. Rather than looking the other way, we encourage concerned parents to speak with the teacher, speak with the colleague ourselves, or mention it to a supervisor.

By seeing problems and owning them, we're actively and continually solving problems, helping others succeed, and creating a positive and safe culture.

**Reflection:**

- A. What is a problem you're aware of that you are not owning or addressing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. What is likely to happen if you don't address this problem?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- C. How could you address this problem?

## ASSESSING OUR CULTURE

Consider the four components of a safe and trusting culture.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Job #1: Help Others Succeed
- \_\_\_\_\_ Communicate “You Matter”
- \_\_\_\_\_ Honor the Absent
- \_\_\_\_\_ See the Problem, Own the Problem

To what degree are you experiencing these principles in our school? Give each principle a score ranging from 1-10 based on the following scale:

- 8-10 Significantly present in our culture
- 6-7 Often present in our culture
- 4-5 Seldom present in our culture
- 1-3 Significantly absent in our culture

### Reflection:

- What have you become aware of regarding living the four principles that you want to:

– Continue doing?

– Start doing?

– Stop doing?