

“GOING FULL RUBIN”

APPENDIX L

If you were to boil our (successful) approaches down to their most basic and simplest form, it would be our creative problem-solving skills. We know there is an entire universe of smarter, more capable practitioners in mental health and education than us. However, when it comes to finding creative solutions for challenging student situations, we’ve definitely carved out a niche. What would you find in this little niche of ours?

- *ASPEN Crisis De-Escalation Program* (Totem PD, 2008)
- *ASPEN on the Bus: De-Escalation on the School Bus* (Totem PD, 2008)
- *ASPEN Plus: Advanced Behavioral Tactics* (Totem PD, 2019)
- *Bullyology* (Totem PD, 2012)
- *Chillax: Coping Skills for the “Now and Later” of a Behavioral Outburst* (Totem PD, 2017)
- *GPS: Good Parenting Strategies* (Corwin, 2021)
- *Happy Class: Tier 1 and 2 Classroom Management Strategies* (Totem PD, 2017)
- *Happy Kids Don’t Punch You in the Face* (Corwin, 2018)
- *IEP Zen: Peaceful IEP Meeting Management* (Totem PD, 2018)
- *Optimistic Teaming* (Corwin, 2024)
- *Parapro: Onboarding for Paraprofessionals* (Totem PD, 2017)

We literally can’t help ourselves. When we discover a creative solution, we share it. We slap a name on the solution, and we attempt to get it into as many hands as possible. We pride ourselves on this dynamic, and we’ve always done this better together than on our own. Way back in graduate school, one of our professors made us aware of our “unique synergy” and we’ve never looked back!

So it is with great pleasure we share a couple of our favorite creative problem-solving exercises with you. “Going Full Rubin” is a deliberate exercise in thinking outside the box. We love rock and roll music, and when we discovered Rick Rubin’s impact on rock, hip-hop, folk, and country, we also discovered his little nuggets of creative wisdom.

In this exercise, we want you to think of the problem you and your team are facing. Then, randomly pick one of Rick Rubin’s musings on creativity. You can randomly pick from this table, or you can cut them out and put them in a hat or coffee can. When we engage in this exercise, it helps us look

at the problems from a different angle entirely—and that’s the point. Creative problem-solving is all about opening as many doors and windows in our minds as possible. Each “Rubinism” has a corresponding number. The numbers help you and your team apply the “Rubinism” to problems school teams face.

“The Rubester Table of Creative Wisdom”

<p>“The reason to finish is to start something new.” 1</p>	<p>“Don’t let the voices in your head limit your creative freedom.” 2</p>	<p>“Meaning is secondary to intuitive response. Sometimes mindless play can hold more power than meaning.” 3</p>	<p>“What works for you one day may not work the next day, and that’s fine.” 4</p>
<p>“Allow yourself to be surprised by the process.” 5</p>	<p>“Belief carries disproportional energy.” 6</p>	<p>“It’s an extraordinarily difficult process to turn off the voices in one’s head.” 7</p>	<p>“Your self-expression allows the audience to have their own self-expression.” 8</p>
<p>“The work is to dance between the fun and the seriousness of the material.” 9</p>	<p>“The only competition that counts is with yourself.” 10</p>	<p>“Some mistakes are actually subconscious problem-solving.” 11</p>	<p>“Ideas don’t come from out of the blue and they don’t come merely from us. We’re tuning into them, remembering them, recognizing them.” 12</p>
<p>“Train yourself to see the awe behind the obvious.” 13</p>	<p>“Creative work isn’t all innovation all the time. Experience gives an archive to draw from.” 14</p>	<p>“In a collaboration, if the best idea gets picked, you win, regardless of whose idea it is.” 15</p>	<p>“The challenge of being forced outside your normal patterns can lead to new ways of thinking and behaving that open doors never noticed before.” 16</p>
<p>“Allow yourself to see where things go, without forcing them.” 17</p>	<p>“Not everything is for everybody.” 18</p>	<p>“The artist is the one who recaptures that child-like fascination with the world.” 19</p>	<p>“Don’t just ponder. Take action.” 20</p>
<p>“When editing or revising, practice non-attachment.” 21</p>	<p>“Holding your work hostage to your meaning is a limitation.” 22</p>	<p>“When receiving suggestions, you can also try the exact opposite and see what happens.” 23</p>	<p>“There is tremendous power in using the least amount of information to get a point across.” 24</p>

GOAL: Review and reflect upon the “Rubinisms” for their own merit. Each quote from Rick Rubin is worth pondering for its own sake. However, we know this resource is for teams facing tough student situations, so we added corresponding numbers to make a connection to common teaming dilemmas. Use the quotes for their own wisdom and use the numbers for application of problems.

1. “The reason to finish is to start something new.” This quote has so many applications, and feel free to consider and ponder them. The most immediate application is a reverence for the “journey over the destination.” Our work is truly never finished. Once we achieve one goal, we should move on to the next.

2. “Don’t let the voices in your head limit your creative freedom.” As we preach the value of self-compassion, one of the most compassionate things we can do to ourselves is let go of those negative thoughts and pursue something great.
3. “Meaning is secondary to intuitive response. Sometimes mindless play can hold more power than meaning.” When facing extremely stressful circumstances, it has been our experience that removing ourselves just a bit from the problem is helpful. We don’t want to ignore the problem, but we want to give it some space so we can think more clearly.
4. “What works for you one day may not work the next day, and that’s fine.” This perspective is the product of psychological flexibility. While we want our behavior plans to be implemented consistently, we should be prepared to pivot when necessary.
5. “Allow yourself to be surprised by the process.” It has been our experience that children and teams will surprise us more than disappoint us. We just need to be open and willing to accept new developments as they come.
6. “Belief carries disproportional energy.” This is such a mind-blowing observation by “The Rubester.” He understands how when we fortify our mindset toward belief in improvement, it happens. Belief is stronger than most everything we will face as teams.
7. “It’s an extraordinarily difficult process to turn off the voices in one’s head.” Rubin has identified what many have before: We can be our own worst enemy when we listen to all the voices in our head. When the voices in our heads are louder than our intent to act, we become paralyzed. In contrast, when we act, we can quiet those voices a bit.
8. “Your self-expression allows the audience to have their own self-expression.” Believe it or not, there is a performative act to teaming and working with tough kids. When we act as our authentic selves, we allow others to be their authentic selves.
9. “The work is to dance between the fun and the seriousness of the material.” Of all the “Rubinisms,” this one may be the most descriptive of our approaches. The situations we face can be extremely serious, yet if we’re always serious about everything, stress and anxiety tend to take over. Our work truly is a dance, and there’s nothing wrong with acknowledging the silliness or absurdity of the situations we’re in—and enjoying them!
10. “The only competition that counts is with yourself.” When we become competitive and comparative with others, we often feel less-than. When we become competitive and comparative with our own performance, we can actually facilitate meaningful change.
11. “Some mistakes are actually subconscious problem-solving.” This “Rubinism” is so deep, we’re not exactly sure if we understand it. However, at the center of his viewpoint is belief. According to Rubin, the “meaningful thing” is typically a discovery—not an answer. In other words, when we’re working to find solutions, allowing ourselves to fail may open a path to a solution.
12. “Ideas don’t come from out of the blue and they don’t come merely from us. We’re tuning into them, remembering them, recognizing them.” This quote is another example of Rubin’s creative viewpoint in #11. According to Rubin, the “truth” or the “meaningful thing” exists in the ether or on a frequency. In creative problem-solving, our job is to work curiously and tune-in to available frequencies.
13. “Train yourself to see the awe in the obvious.” Discovering the “awe” in mundane activities is so Zen-like and so mindful, the importance of this quote should be self-evident. Rubin understands that creativity doesn’t only exist in something “new.” Oftentimes, the solution is right there in front of us.
14. “Creative work isn’t all innovation all the time. Experience gives an archive to draw from.” The insight we can glean from this quote is how creative problem-solving isn’t always about doing something new, but braiding our experiences into the problems at hand.

15. “In a collaboration, if the best idea gets picked, you win, regardless of whose idea it is.” This “Rubinism” is practically custom-made for teaming. The concept here is it is better to “get it right” than to “be right.”
16. “The challenge of being forced outside your normal patterns can lead to new ways of thinking and behaving that open doors never noticed before.” There’s an entire book and philosophy coinciding with this quote: *Growth Mindset*. When we’re more flexible and open to growing and learning together, we all win.
17. “Allow yourself to see where things go, without forcing them.” It has been our experience that the successful behavior plans we end with are never the same plans we begin with. In other words, we need to be mindful and flexible every step of the way.
18. “Not everything is for everybody.” This “Rubinism” is straightforward. Teaming isn’t always about agreeing or consensus—nor should it be. Teaming is about trusting. Sometimes, we need to trust things we don’t necessarily agree with.
19. “The artist is the one who recaptures that child-like fascination with the world.” We tend to believe there is both an art and a science to teaming and behavior planning. Clearly with this exercise, we’re focusing on the art. Who are the artists? Our team! Fostering curiosity and intrigue in our teams helps fuel our efforts.
20. “Don’t just ponder. Take action.” Creativity (from this vantage point) is not just about creativity but also the creative act. Engagement plus accomplishment = bliss.
21. “When editing or revising, practice non-attachment.” This “Rubinism” translates very nicely to teaming and behavior planning. We must continually remind each other that “getting it right” is always better than “being right.”
22. “Holding your work hostage to your meaning is a limitation.” One of the main reasons Rubin has been so successful in the music industry is his flexibility and openness to the process. He consistently avoids attachment to a single idea or approach.
23. “When receiving suggestions, you can also try the exact opposite and see what happens.” This “Rubinism” is also known as “Playing the Devil’s Advocate.” We never want to be contrarian just to be contrarian, though in the creative process and the prospection process, countering ideas can open new doors.
24. “There is tremendous power in using the least amount of information to get a point across.” Creativity should not be synonymous with complexity. This should be particularly true when helping tough kids and our teams. When we can articulate the basics of an effective plan in the simplest way, success is almost guaranteed.