

OPTIMISTIC TEAMING EXERCISE #1

APPENDIX T

When it comes to aggressive, dangerous, or even annoying student misbehavior, there's a good chance your team is already at their wits' end. Being a quality educator is hard work on a good day. If they have been dealing with challenging behavior problems for any extended period, they're going to need a minute to vent.

In fact, the last thing they want to hear is, "Let's charge those optimism batteries!" (Trust us, we'll get there—that's the whole point of this resource!) However, we don't start there. We have found that teacher/team tension is like a balloon—and it's gotta pop prior to building optimism. Also, the best leadership is the listening kind. If we're going to lead in any capacity, it is best if we listen first.

This activity may take 30–45 minutes. Let your team know ahead of time.

OBJECTIVE: We need to abolish the practice of blame and prevent shame in our teams.

HOW: We will walk our team through some linear logic that will ultimately reveal the presence of some big problems called VUCA. We will discover how VUCA is to blame—not our students and not their parents. Once we submit that VUCA is causing our strife, we can finally abolish blame and (hopefully) prevent shame from taking hold of our teams.

STEP 1: Take 10–15 minutes to let your team vent their frustrations. Write down and label every behavior they are frustrated with. This works best on a whiteboard where everyone can see the list.

STEP 2: Make sure everyone has a chance to list what they're most frustrated with.

STEP 3: Take the next 10–15 minutes to ask the team why they think the behaviors are happening. Most of their logic will result in blaming parents (e.g., "Parents don't know how to parent anymore!" or "Screens are babysitters," etc.). They may also blame the lack of resources at school and the community (e.g., "There's just not enough support for kids anywhere," etc.). Our job is to listen. Interestingly, their logic is not flawed—just short-sighted.

STEP 4: Thank the team for sharing. Now, explain to the group that we're going to engage in what we call the "Never-Ending-Why" exercise.

STEP 5: Select any/all the behaviors they listed and ask the group why they believe the behavior is occurring.

STEP 6: Respectfully listen to their responses and continue to ask them why. It may look something like this:

Team Lead: Why do you think students struggle staying on-task?

Group: Their attention span is nonexistent! They're addicted to screens.

Team Lead: Why do you think their attention span is limited? Why are they addicted to screens?

Group: Because their parents gave it to them!

Team Lead: Why did their parents give it to them?

Group: Because they don't want to parent or discipline!

Team Lead: Why don't parents want to parent?

Group: Because they're overwhelmed and tired.

Team Lead: Why are parents overworked and overwhelmed?

Group: I don't know! Society?

Team Lead: Why does our society make it so hard for parents?

Group: Inequity? Capitalism? I don't know. . . .

Team Lead: There we have it! Weird, right? If we were to keep asking "why," very rarely does the answer fall on the shoulders of the child or even their parents. In fact, we'd discover that we're all just kind of existing and responding to these huge circumstances out of our control.

STEP 7: Introduce VUCA as the real reasons behind all of human difficulty. VUCA are the four components Martin Seligman discovered that are at the root of all human suffering. Work to tie all the problems our students, our parents, and ourselves are having to VUCA.

- Volatility
- Uncertainty
- Complexity
- Ambiguity

You may guide any curious team members to our book *Optimistic Teaming* for more details about how Martin Seligman discovered this. It suffices to state that Seligman's multiple years of studying how to help humans thrive in spite of the suffering of the world has led to their discovery.

STEP 8: Explain to the team that our job from this point on will be to battle VUCA. How do we battle VUCA? Fortunately, Seligman provided us with VUCA's antidote, PERMA.

STEP 9: Introduce PERMA

- Positive Emotions
- Engagement
- Resilience
- Mattering
- Accomplishment

STEP 10: Inform the team that in all of Seligman's work on helping human beings thrive and flourish, these five components are the contributing factors. In fact, in order to battle VUCA, we must engage PERMA.

STEP 11: Inform the team that every strategy we share or focus upon must improve 1, 2, 3, 4, or all 5 of PERMA.

STEP 12: Inform the team that while we will be battling VUCA on behalf of the student, we will also be battling VUCA on behalf of one another.

STEP 13: Explain that eliminating VUCA and providing PERMA is the goal and will always be the goal. Every behavior plan or strategy we create will have these objectives.

STEP 14: Take any questions or concerns.

These 14 steps help you as the team lead transcend blaming, shaming, and the helplessness that comes with it. With VUCA as our enemy and PERMA as our targets, we can begin to frame student behavior problems in their rightful space:

- Students act-out when they are faced with emotional, volatile educators.
- Students act-out when they are faced with uncertainty in the school setting.
- Students act-out when the tasks demanded at school are too complex.
- Students act-out when there is ambiguity about their purpose or meaning in the school setting.