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FOR YOU

Lead Like a Pirate

By Tony Sinanis, Erin Simpson, and Jessica Johnson

Educators, it's time to seriously consider embracing the ways of the pirates. That's right: pirates.

In his bestselling book, *Teach Like a PIRATE: Increase Student Engagement, Boost Creativity, and Transform Your Life as an Educator*, Dave Burgess presents a "pirate" philosophy that can revitalize the teaching experience and place the emphasis back on students and learning. Pirate, in this case, is an acronym that stands for: Passion, Immersion, Rapport, Ask and analyze, Transformation, and Enthusiasm.



Although the target audience for Burgess's book is teachers, it is clear to us that the "PIRATE philosophy" contains core ideas all principals should embrace, espouse, and model in their everyday actions.

Leading Like a PIRATE

In *Teach Like a PIRATE*, Burgess explains that pirates are adventurous entrepreneurs. In their travels to the ends of the earth for that which they value, they promote creativity and independence. Pirates also believe in the importance of traveling with a diverse crew, whose members pool their strengths to work towards a common goal. Educators, writes Burgess, should do the same.

How can a principal channel the PIRATE philosophy? Principals today are much more than mere disciplinarians or supervisors. A school leader must act as an entrepreneur: a person of vision who is able to inspire, empower, and motivate his or her staff under a shared mission and common goals. Today's principals are expected to be

PIRATES: transformational leaders who communicate a school vision that promotes sound instructional practices, permeates classrooms, and leads to high levels of student achievement.

While each component of the PIRATE philosophy applies to principals' roles as transformational leaders, three stand out as critical: Passion/enthusiasm, Immersion, and Ask and analyze. As the cornerstones of the PIRATE acronym, these concepts anchor the philosophy.

Passion/Enthusiasm. As leaders, if we are not passionate about the role we play, we cannot expect enthusiasm from our staffs, students, and school communities. Burgess connects the passion of a leader to one's willingness to explore new frontiers without a clear map. Our educational world today is filled with new frontiers, and passion must be a guiding force for us to move ahead and continue advocating for our students and their learning. When mandates, assessments, and managerial tasks attempt to take over, principals must lead with passion and serve as an example for others.

Enthusiasm is the tangible way that others can feel a leader's passion. Without enthusiasm, it is easy to fall into a routine that can negatively impact efforts and results.

Pirate Move: Focus on your ship. Burgess reminds PIRATES that we cannot allow that which is outside our control to affect our effort and enthusiasm. If we focus on uncontrollable outside forces as we sail the choppy waters, we are destined to

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sink. To counter this, a transformational leader must choose to focus on what empowers him or her and those around him or her.

Pirate Move: Commit to being “on.” Burgess writes that he always remembers to be “on” for everyone around him—students, colleagues, and the community. Being “on” means being present throughout each day with enthusiasm and passion. As educational leaders, we are being watched all day by every member of the community. As we make decisions, take action on issues, or listen to problems, our ability to always be “on” is critical to the success of the organization. It sets a positive tone that permeates our community.

Immersion. Immersion is the secret to improving at almost any skill. Become a better listener by fully listening. Get to know students better by spending time with them in classrooms, in the lunchroom, and even at recess. Become more knowledgeable about the Common Core State Standards by reading them, digging into them, and leading teachers to apply them.

Pirate Move: Learn with your crew. The best educators are continuously learning, especially with new initiatives and mandates. However, great principals lead their teachers to do so by immersing themselves into the learning with their teachers. What teacher wants to sit in professional development while their principal sits in the back corner checking emails? Apply the PIRATE philosophy and immerse yourself in what you expect your teachers to be immersed in.

Ask and analyze. Our actions as leaders are often spurred by the questions we ask and the answers we receive. Consider: Are you asking the right questions? Burgess reminds readers that the types of questions we ask determine the types of answers we receive. Leaders must ask critical questions that will lead staff members and students to tune into the areas that need our attention. The quality of our questions can be the difference between a mediocre staff meeting or observation review and one that sparks action, change, and growth for staff and students.

Pirate Move: Push the envelope. Burgess reminds educators that if we haven’t failed lately, we aren’t pushing the envelope far enough. “Safe” approaches can be a recipe for mediocrity. Try new ideas that may not work the first time.

Pirate Move: Adjust. Don’t be afraid to admit when an idea doesn’t go as planned or needs adjustments. Take the time to analyze situations so you know what to ask to improve it and how to respond. Try, fail, adjust. Repeat.

Guiding Teachers

Teach Like a PIRATE (TLAP) can be a powerful resource to use with your staff. After we read this book, we were inspired to share with our staffs, and our teachers were inspired to implement components in the classroom. So, where should you start?

- Host a staff book study. You may even want to dress like a pirate—that’s a hook!
- Highlight one TLAP strategy at each staff meeting, and have your teachers share how they have implemented it in their classrooms.
- Follow a #TLAPchat on Twitter. Seek out ways other schools are implementing ideas.
- Follow @burgessdave on Twitter and encourage your teachers to do the same. Ask Dave Burgess to Skype into a faculty meeting so he can inspire your team.

Just as Burgess explains in *Teach Like a PIRATE*, leading like a PIRATE allows principals to explore uncharted territories and brave new adventures. The leadership approaches we embrace each day should serve as an example to all around us. By applying these strategies in our roles and encouraging our teachers to do the same in theirs, we can forever transform education and make it a true experience for our students.

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Purchase a copy of *Teach Like a PIRATE* from NAESP’s National Principals Resource Center at naesp.org/nprc.