

1 TOP 20s ESTABLISH FOUR CORNERSTONES

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 that we experience 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 bring positive or negative energy. Some people actually bring negative energy to positive situations. Likewise, to every negative situation in life, we 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 our family or school forms their culture. If the culture or energy is positive, human development will flourish. If the culture or energy is negative, human development will be minimized.

Members of a Top 20 family or school commit to establishing four cornerstones that create a positive culture in which human development and potential flourishes. These cornerstones establish the foundation of a culture of safety and trust.

CORNERSTONE #1: HELP OTHERS SUCCEED

The first cornerstone 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 our family and school. 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 in your family or school succeed?

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

CORNERSTONE #2: COMMUNICATE “YOU MATTER”

The second cornerstone 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 avoiding communicating, “You don’t matter.”

Ways 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, “You don’t matter.” 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.” Members of a positive culture of safety and trust know their differences bring great value to the whole. By valuing differences, we are fostering development and positive growth in our family and school. 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?

CORNERSTONE #3: HONOR THE ABSENT

The third cornerstone 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’s teacher doesn’t know what she’s doing and doesn’t give my son enough individual attention.”

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 must put up a “No Dumping Here” sign. 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 teacher at our school 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 platforms. 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 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. 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 hearing someone dishonoring 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 family or school culture is for us to form an agreement with each other to say "Ouch" whenever dishonoring takes place. By 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.

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 is honoring the absent because she is problem solving and looking out for Corey. If we want to be effective and 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?

CORNERSTONE #4: SEE THE PROBLEM, OWN THE PROBLEM

The fourth cornerstone 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 cornerstone means we address problems we become aware of even if they aren't our responsibility. We either deal with the problem directly, or notify the person who has primary responsibility for the problem.

For example, we may become aware that a student in our school is becoming involved in inappropriate or illegal behavior. Rather than looking the other way, we can speak to the student, his parents, or someone at school.

By seeing problems and owning them, we actively and continually solve problems, help others succeed, and create 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 cornerstones 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 cornerstones in our school community? Give each agreement 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 cornerstones that you want to:

– Continue doing?

– Start doing?

– Stop doing?

