



52 NIGHT HERON - CHAPEL HILL, NC 27517 - P: 800-874-1100 - E: PHIL@LEARNINGFORLIVING.COM

Sounding Off On School Culture |

Five takeaways from this week's School Culture By Design Podcast

Mini Podcast with Phil Boyte

"The Undiscussables: Three Areas To Work With Your Team to Help Navigate Hard Conversations"

- 1) When it comes to relationships – start small.** Initiate relationships with your leadership team. Once a month, take 15-30 minutes to have coffee, catch up and talk about life. Be intentional by having two or three questions you want to address. For example: ask about their health, family, summer plans, things they do for fun, etc. Then spread that to your staff. Who on your staff do you not have a relationship with? Make an appointment to leave your office and meet them on a more neutral turf. You can go on a walk around campus together. Amazing conversations can take place just by walking around with other people. This can even extend to some of your students. Are there some students who are "connectors" and "in-the-know"? Make a point to get to know them, so that when you have information that you want to get relayed to other students, they're a good starting point for those conversations.
- 2) Create an environment in your staff meetings where people feel safe to talk to each other.** Run your faculty meetings like a pep rally. Be like the emcee of the event, and then invite your staff to give updates on their areas of influence. That way you, as the principal, aren't talking *at* people – but you're facilitating the discussion. I use a triangle diagram to explain this to people at my conferences. At the bottom you have relationships, on top of that is trust, then engagements and then up from that is courageous conversations. You have to work to create an environment where people feel safe to talk. Make every other staff meeting a time where you have team-building activities! Also – recognize people can tend to fall into their comfort zone, and will always sit at the same table with the same people. Try to assign random seating so people are forced to get to know others they may not normally interact with. A fun, easy game to play is called "One at a time." Sit your team in groups of seven, and have them go around one at a time and share something about themselves that the other people wouldn't know. That builds a level of trust, which in turn, makes it easier to have hard conversations down the road.
- 3) Create "culture teams" on your campus.** (We have a PDF on our website for more ideas) Get 8-10 staff members to meet at someone's house to discuss, "how do we create a school that no one wants to leave?" Then at the meeting the following month, have each of those teachers/staff members invite someone else from the school with them to participate. Then you have 20 people. Then they invite another set of people, etc. Next thing you know, you have essentially the entire staff involved. People might not be able to meet every month, but they'll be there often enough that it will give them time to have relationships built outside of the school building. And that way everyone – from the secretary to the custodian to the math teacher – has a responsibility in developing the school culture. You can even engage parents and students in the culture teams.

