



Leadership Development

Anywhere, Anytime

Practical Tips for School Leaders – #43

September 11, 2020

Today's leadership tip comes from an article I read recently on the power of a teacher who is a warm demander. There are several recommendations for teachers which can be communicated by school leaders. School leaders are in a position in every action to model the four attributes outlined in this article. I hope you find this relevant and practical for your faculty.

The Warm Demander: An Equity Approach

“Warm demander” teachers expect great things from their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them reach their potential in a disciplined, structured environment.

Recently, I was talking with a high school student about his frustrations with a first-year teacher. The student said, “I like [the teacher] because he’s understanding, but he doesn’t require enough discipline. He tells us to stop talking, but he doesn’t really do anything to stop it. If I say, “I forgot my homework,” he extends the deadline, and he keeps extending it, so I don’t bother doing it. He needs to be more strict!”

He didn’t know it, but this student was asking for his teacher to be more of a warm demander – a key strategy for creating equity in the classroom. Warm demanders are teachers who, in the words of author *Lisa Delpit* “expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment.” In my two decades of working in public schools, the idea of the warm demander is the most important conceptual framework that I’ve learned, and it guides my interactions with students on a daily basis.

The staff at *June Jordan School for Equity* in San Francisco, where I am co-director, developed a four-part framework for how to become a warm demander:

1. Believe in the Impossible

Do you really believe that all children can learn? If you are not sure, read David Shenk’s *The Genius in All of Us* to help you understand that brain science is clear: “limitations in achievement are not due to inadequate genetic assets, but to our inability, so far, to tap into what we already have.” You also need to understand the cultural strengths and role models of your students’ communities. For example, can you imagine your Latina students being the next Dolores Huerta, Sandra Cisneros, or Ellen Ochoa? If not, you won’t be able to remind your students of their unlimited potential.

2. Build Trust

Warm demanders understand that learning starts with trust. To build trust, you must listen to your students, and learn about who they are and what matters to them. You must be vulnerable and share your true self – including smiling and having fun. As Pamela Druckerman recommends in her book *Bringing Up Bebe*, you should follow the example of French parents and be strict about things that matter, but within those firm boundaries (which Druckerman calls a *cadre* or frame), trust children with the autonomy to make mistakes and learn from them.

3. Teach Self-Discipline

My student who complained about the repeated extensions on homework deadlines felt disrespected by the teacher's actions because he knew that he ought to have been getting his homework done on time. Warm demanders demand that students demonstrate self-discipline – not because they seek compliance, but because high standards communicate respect. This does not mean micromanaging students, nor does it mean punishing students who don't meet your expectations. It means *teaching* discipline and normalizing the hard work and effort that lead to success.

4. Embrace Failure

Warm demanders teach their students to have a *growth mindset* and understand that real learning comes through failure. Since most of us hate to fail, *Jo Boaler* suggests three strategies to celebrate mistakes in the classroom:

- Create the norm that you love and want mistakes.
- Don't just praise mistakes – explain why they are important.
- Give work that encourages mistakes.

It's important to note that for failure to result in learning, it must happen in a safe environment, with guidance from someone like a warm demander teacher.

Through these approaches, warm demanders hold their students to high standards and provide the support that students need to get there, thus creating an equitable classroom.

Alexander, Matt. Edutopia, April 13, 2016