



VALUES-THEMED ARTICLE: Summer 2018

Preparing Students for a SMART Journey Ahead as Leaders



Q: What's going to enable students to make smart choices as they prepare for their journeys after school - and aspire to become leaders of tomorrow?

A: Great, creative schools that cultivate a culture of leadership and smart, outward-looking teachers who instil passion in all their students.

Aspirational students on the verge of leaving safe, supportive school environments will need to know themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, be aware of what ignites their energy and passion, have a vision - and understand what it takes to be a leader.

Know yourself

Since one's work is likely to take up a significant slice of one's time, it is important that throughout their school careers, students are constantly exposed to a broad curriculum that gives them plenty of opportunities to venture outside their comfort zones and try out all kinds of experiences so as to identify what they enjoy, where their talents lie and conversely what they don't find stimulating and don't excel at.

It behoves students to reflect on the peaks and troughs of their experiences and their feelings - highs and lows. Critical thinking and the insights gained help to zone in on what is life-enriching and good for their wellbeing and what they should probably avoid.

Few of us are conscious of how our personal values reflect our priorities, what we treasure most, and how they act as guideposts for our thought processes, our decision-making and our actions when we face junctions in life, major and minor. However, we are empowered and energised when we deliberately live by values that resonate with our true, inner selves and those that are in alignment with our moral compass. If we go against them, we haemorrhage our energy and are weakened. It is therefore vital that students gain a good grasp of their core values. The free [Personal Values Assessment](#) made available from the Barrett Values Centre is an enlightening tool that can steer students in worthwhile directions at the outset of their post-school careers.

A vision and goals

For students to succeed, they need a vision of where they are heading and goals that will act as milestones along the way. Every journey requires planning and a SMART framework can assist with preparations and generate informed choices.

S	Strategies	A SWOT analysis (examining personal internal Strengths and Weaknesses and external Opportunities and Threats) is conducive to students determining clear objectives, ensuring they know how to manage personal factors well with growth mindsets, while taking on board external factors that will inevitably impact their voyage. The exercise can expose elements they might encounter along the way, which students can begin to consider so as to be well prepared for creatively and advantageously exploiting them, should they crop up.
----------	-------------------	--

M	Motivation	<p>Motivation sets the tone. It's important for students to spend a while identifying the critical differences between leaders and managers. Leadership cannot be taught like management but it can certainly be learned and enhanced through coaching and mentoring.</p> <p>Some people may not seem to have the flare and qualities to be an inspirational, enthusiastic leader, who nurtures followers so they too flourish and succeed but, when they latch onto what they are passionate about, their whole demeanour can change - and hence it's vital not to underestimate students' potential.</p>
----------	-------------------	--

		<p>Leaders set direction and facilitate progress, transformatively guiding and directing groups of people or organisations. They have personal charisma that attracts followers. They need to create trust and therefore personal integrity is critical. They display passion that sells their endeavour and are driven by achievement. They are fired up by the excitement of their vision and are not averse to taking risks, opening up new roads. They give credit where it's due and accept blame when things go pear-shaped. Failings provide food for thought.</p>
--	--	---

A	Ambition	<p>For students to succeed, they require strong desires, commitment and determination to reach their destinations. They need to consider what it takes to be successful so they can figure out appropriate learning strategies, develop necessary skills and capacities and reduce the chances of acting blindly, wasting precious time, resources and opportunities.</p> <p>Students will need to determine the most effective routes to achieve their desired outcomes. However, flexibility is key especially when they need to revise some of their plans and possibly explore new solutions to problems in order to triumph in navigating their way through life's challenges. Some essential learning will feel tedious and some will be exhilarating and it will all take time, so patience and perseverance are vital.</p> <p>Students need to monitor their progress and results, constantly mapping them against their plans, taking corrective action and even amending their objectives.</p>
----------	-----------------	--

R	Resilience	<p>Inevitably travellers will encounter the unexpected, setbacks, barriers, challenges, problems, clashes, failings and vulnerabilities, etc. Personal values can provide the strength needed in tricky situations or to remain true to oneself and withstand pressures and tension, stay on track, accept failures along the way and yet remain resolute about making progress. Shared values can provide a leader and his or her followers with the glue to stick together through adversity and pull through.</p>
----------	-------------------	--

		<p>Students need to appreciate that to consolidate their learning, effort, deliberate practice and perseverance are critical. Success comes from deep and sustained commitment. They need unswerving commitment to their dreams, otherwise efforts will flag.</p>
--	--	---

<p>T</p>	<p>Teachers</p>	<p>Teachers are role models. Many a successful leader has paid glowing tributes to how a certain teacher believed in him or her, was both a mentor and a coach, clearly loved learning and nurtured life-changing building blocks for that person's learning and fulfilment - and, crucially, cared about the individual and wanted him or her to succeed. The teacher was a leader.</p> <p>Teachers who are supportive and use their professional judgement not just to determine how best to get through a curriculum but also in ways that look outwards into the wider world, are opening up their students to possibilities and dreams. They are also fostering strategies that will consolidate and deepen their students' learning and so laying foundations and enhancing skills, dispositions and motivations.</p> <p>The inner journey is vital, embracing self-questioning and reflection.</p> <p>Schools that create a culture of leadership promote character strengths and encourage their students to verbalise and seek help when necessary. The adults making up the school community are ambitious for their young citizens and encourage ever higher standards. They proactively enable their students to transfer their learning to other contexts. They know that working with others is a very powerful means of extending opportunities for personal growth and development. They encourage listening to others in discussion and seek ways of helping students to make connections between what is being learnt with what is happening beyond the school gates. They are constantly extending their own knowledge and practices and gently helping students realise what they don't yet know.</p>
-----------------	------------------------	---