

The MIDDLE LEADER MANIFESTO

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT.

Have a goal to start with. Even better, have a cause. A strong cause helps guide your project towards a meaningful and valuable outcome.

SIMPLE IDEAS ARE AMBITIOUS IDEAS.

There's no such thing as a small change. Change meets with resistance whatever it is. A simple, clear vision with concrete ideas is a starting point to making any change happen. Make your ideas clear, not clever: draw them so a seven year old can understand and a 57 year old Principal gets excited. "Everything should be as simple as possible but no simpler," said Einstein. Simple sells. Simple can be easily understood. Simple happens.

IT'S ABOUT THEM, NOT ABOUT YOU.

No Middle Leader is an island. Listening, really listening, is how we build anything worth building. Listening to others is vital, but also listen to yourself. The power of reflection is key to seeing the learning opportunities.

Be vulnerable and lead from behind. Your team makes you a leader, not you. A leader without a team is dancing alone. Find your first follower, and get them to bring a friend. And then you can start being a leader.

Great leaders don't just run on their gut. They don't just have hunches. They run on data, too. Data can be on a spreadsheet or on the face of the person in front of you right now.

FIND YOUR BRAINS TRUST.

The collective is more powerful than the parts that make it up.

Share, think, wrestle with ideas, constantly shift your perspective and seek out the folk who challenge your ideas with heart. If you work in a school, that should include some students. And it should include people who don't work in your neighbourhood, who can show you there's always another way.

And your Brains Trust can also be your ally when you need a reality check.

MAKE YOUR IDEAS PORTABLE.

The way you communicate your ideas matters, but what matters most is that the idea is memorable on first sight. Make the idea inspirational and

memorable. Big ideas are hard for people to deal with. They don't know what to do. They can't see the next step. Inspirational ideas are ideas that happen. Memorable ideas are ideas that have happened. Inspirational, memorable ideas are stealable, ones that others can build on.

LEADERS CREATE LEADERS.

Middle Leaders don't hide out of sight, or keep their ideas hidden. They rock the boat and throw ideas over the side to test the water. Where there are ripples there's enough interest to keep going, to refine, rebuild and create an alternative way of doing things. Great leaders create ideas that others can borrow, and use to become even better leaders themselves.

PLAN SERENDIPITY.

Accidental conversations tend not to happen when they're programmed in as a Zoom meeting. Unless you plan for serendipity. How can you make meetings last 8 minutes, not 60, and start at a weird time that makes people show up early, not on time or late?

Side projects can be the work. The unexpected outcome is often the outcome worth going for.

20% DONE IS AN INVITATION TO FEEDBACK. 90% DONE IS AN INVITATION TO SHIP.

Feedback is the place where good ideas become great. Iteration isn't a formula. It's a mindset.

Build ideas bit by bit with others. Coach the idea, not the person. The ability to reflect and be flexible, change the plan when it needs to be changed. We used to say "fail fast". Really we need to "learn fast". Trial and error allows us to do that.

Ask questions that drive an idea forward. Don't be critical with your question. Don't question like you don't believe - question like you need to know more to make an idea happen.

'No' is the start. Be bold with your changes so that others will argue with you! Suddenly you're in a conversation about your cause.

ITERATE. ITERATE. ITERATE. THEN ITERATE AGAIN.

When you tell the story again and again, when you run projects again and again,

when you keep pushing the flywheel around just one more turn, eventually you get the perpetual motion that makes the whole thing fly. Speed trumps perfection. Get stuff done, find out what needs to be done better, and keep going.

REVISIT YOUR SCRAPHEAP.

We always throw out ideas that didn't work out first time around. Keep them somewhere. When you're lacking inspiration, head back to your old projects and those that fell over at the first hurdle. Revisit them with fresh perspectives. Then coal can maybe become diamonds. Journal it. Anyone who ever came up with anything kept a journal. Write and draw everything that you notice.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY, DIFFERENTLY, OFTEN.

When you're trying to communicate your idea clearly, one way might be visually, but other ways help more people understand. Collaborate with a "cabinet of talents," people whose skills add to yours.

There's power in small conversations - every conversation is a step closer to finding the nugget that paves the way for the idea to come to life.

Don't hold your cards close to your chest - make sure you share your ideas far and wide. The better your idea the more likely others will want to borrow it. Then they can make it their own and improve upon the original idea.

TIME IS YOUR MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE - START USING IT THAT WAY.

Use time wisely. It's one of the only non-renewable resources that we have. Be effective with your meetings, make sure your team is working on useful tasks. Don't waste people's time with meaningless tasks or laborious meetings.

ACTUALLY DO IT.

Leadership isn't a book. It isn't a PhD. It isn't just reading about it. Leadership is what you achieved by trying something out.

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