



School Leaders Need to get Comfortable with being Uncomfortable

By Educator Barnes – August 3, 2019

I was the last hire of my school's administration team. Everyone else had the entire summer to acclimate. I had less than two weeks. During that two-week time span, I went to the Bahamas for a family reunion cruise that was planned two years prior. Whatever is worse than drinking

water from a fire hose is what I have been feeling. Every time I think the end of my task list is near, it doubles.

Thankfully, my principal has been understanding and has let me fall back to get caught up. On Wednesday, my principal asked if I would lead an icebreaker get-to-know-you type activity on Friday. If you know me well, you know two things immediately: I said yes, and I hate icebreakers. I'm always willing to pitch in, and since I had not led any professional development or sessions, I thought this would be a good opportunity to show I am a team player.

My former colleagues who are reading this know I am a rule follower and will participate in what is asked of me with the exception of these types of activities. I typically outright did not participate or made little effort to engage meaningfully in these activities. I didn't want to fall back and hope you caught me during a trust exercise. No, I didn't want to make another damn marshmallow and toothpick tower to show teamwork. I didn't want to write down two truths and a lie and have people guess the lie. And no, I didn't want to find someone who is born in the same month as me among other items that tend to be part of that activity. I strongly feel that connections should be organic and develop over time...but I just agreed to lead an activity I don't like participating in and have made little effort to participate in during previous school years. However, I have been participating in these activities this school year, and I've been uncomfortable. Being part of the admin team, I knew I should not employ previous tactics of avoidance.

It was Wednesday, and I had a long task list to complete. I decided to plan my activity on Thursday. Then, Thursday came, and I still didn't want to work on it. I decided to work on it Thursday night, but then I fell asleep around 9 PM. I woke up around midnight and gave myself a pep talk. I went right to my computer and worked on everything else but the activity. Around 3 AM, I went to bed and woke up at 5:30 AM. I'm typically not a procrastinator unless my nerves are getting to me. My fear was my activity was going to suck and people would see I was uncomfortable. I was supposed to be at work by 7:30 AM, but luckily my principal moved our start time to 9:30 AM. At 8:30, I opened up my school's slide template on my computer and typed up my activity. I used to do classroom connections every other Monday when I taught middle school English. I used a game called the art of conversation. I typed up the directions, put the game in my briefcase, and drove to work.

I arrived at 9:17 AM, and got into the media center at 9:20 AM to pace back and forth. I reminded myself to smile, and look excited. I told myself not to speak too fast which is what I do when I get nervous. As staff slowly entered the media center, I greeted as many as I could which

was a good opportunity to practice my smile. Then, all eyes were on me to begin....and it all went well. People enjoyed the game and some said they were going to buy it. I breathed a sigh of relief as I quickly made my way around to collect the cards of the game as another administrator set up her presentation.

Even though my situation was not high stakes, it was hard for me. I'm not shy, but I'm an introvert who does not like those type of activities. As a leader, you have to remember you are serving others. This means stepping out of your comfort zone and participating in and leading activities that make you uncomfortable. I may never rise to the level of social butterfly icebreaker guru, but this struggle was an opportunity for me to learn a leadership lesson.