

BECAUSE OF 4

A true story and step-by-step guide to uncovering
potential in youth and you.

CHERYL PETERSON, PH.D.



Copyright © 2022 by Cheryl Peterson, Ph.D. All rights reserved.

Published by: Dr. Cheryl Peterson, Explore-IDEAS Publishing

Image Copyright © 2019 by Mackenzie Murray. mackenzie-murray.com

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-7377630-2-4

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-7377630-3-1

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review. Printable sheets of the step-by-step guides are available at drcherylpeterson.com.

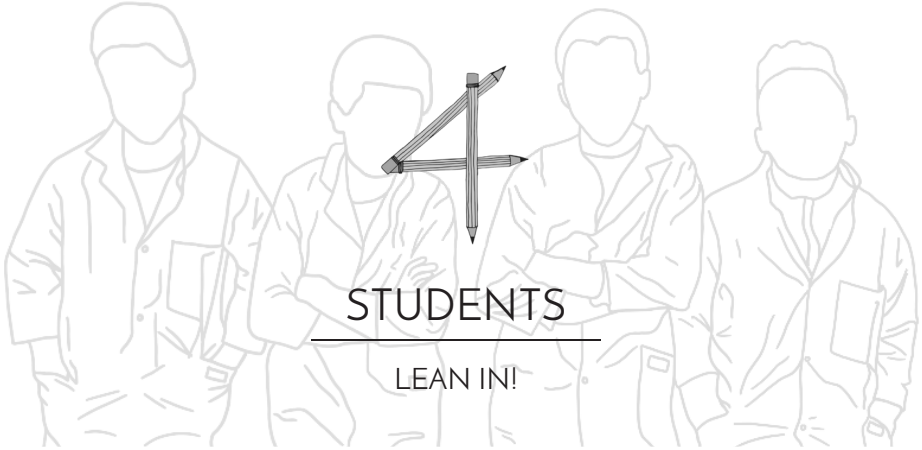
All website URL's are accurate and active at the time of publication. The author and publisher makes no guarantee concerning the information and materials given out by organizations or content found at websites and is not responsible for their content or changes therein.

Names and details have been altered.



✿ Created with Vellum

ONE



STUDENTS

LEAN IN!

The world is desperate for braver leaders. It's time for all of us to step up. -Brené Brown¹

“YOU’VE GOT some tough kiddos in your class,” I remarked to Mrs. G, passing by her third grade classroom before school. “I think I better take Michael for a small group to do some puzzles or something. I told him I would, if he worked hard while I was in there doing my lesson. I honestly wasn’t sure I’d get through the lesson with this group. They took a ton of energy.”

I DIDN’T KNOW Mrs. G very well yet. She was a new teacher in our building. My role as gifted specialist included working in classrooms, with small groups of students, and coaching teachers. I was using this opportunity to get to know her better. When I was in her classroom the previous day, it was chaos. There was a substitute teacher in her place, so I wasn’t sure if that was the cause of the

behavior I witnessed in her classroom. I was curious about Mrs. G and her teaching style. I hoped to learn a little more about her and the class.

The reaction from third graders in her classroom was unusual. It was only the second week of school, typically a honeymoon period where students are fairly engaged and compliant. Students in other classes had enjoyed the lessons. This class was different. The students were not interested in me or what I had to offer. A few confronted me saying I wasn't their teacher, and they didn't have to listen to me. Not knowing the students only compounded the challenge.

One student, Michael, was particularly confrontational. He refused to even try the activities. He used his need to move and talk to argue he was stupid, and I would not take him anyway. I tried my best to connect with him by engaging in conversation about puzzles. He seemed interested and I suggested we could find a time for him come to my classroom to try some. I promised he could work with me if he completed the activity. Time had moved slowly in this classroom. As I wrapped up my lesson and exited the classroom, a long, slow exhale of relief passed my lips.



AS I TALKED with Mrs. G about creating an extra group for Michael, I secretly hoped she would confirm it probably wasn't the best idea. I soon discovered she was not that kind of a teacher. She's not the kind to sit back and wait for good things to happen for kids, hoping someone will take care of them. She is the type of teacher who pushes everyone to do what is right for kids and makes things happen. She was about to push me.

"Yep, they're my lovelies. Michael keeps talking about you taking him. I think I have four boys you could pull for a group."

Four? I thought groaning silently. Smiling politely, I responded, "I'll see what I can find in my schedule. I really don't have a lot of time,

STUDENTS

and my groups are full, but I want to follow through on my promise to Michael to meet with me to do some puzzles.” It wasn’t much of a promise, but it worked, and I felt resolved to keep it.

MRS. G HANDED me a sheet of paper with four names on it. I immediately recognized two of the names belonging to boys I had seen in the cafeteria that morning. I witnessed their unique leadership ability firsthand. Our school serviced students in kindergarten to third grade. Many of our students qualified for a free breakfast, filling the cafeteria with young, hungry bodies each morning.

As I was working breakfast in the cafeteria, two of the boys on the list, Larry and Rick came strutting in with Michael like peacocks. Even though they were only third graders, every adult in the room watched them with high alert. The kids watched them too, some in awe and others in fear. The boys took it all in and worked the crowd.

“Oh yeah, I’ve seen Larry and Rick in action. They are talented leaders. They’ve got the whole school running around trying to figure out what to do with them. Imagine if we could channel that energy.”

“I know, right,” agreed Mrs. G with a lighthearted chuckle. “I’m also trying to start a mentor program to help them build some positive relationships. I think they would really like coming with you and it would be a positive thing.”

“I’m not sure I know James,” I said referring to the fourth boy on the list.

“James has something special; you need to meet with him too.”

WHY DO I offer these things? I can’t do this. I was so excited about my promotion from gifted specialist to coordinator, but the new role

was adding responsibilities and tasks which dictated much of my time and calendar. I was supposed to be focusing more on the overall district goals and administration of the program, but I also felt drawn to working directly with students. As if that wasn't stressful enough, my husband accepted a job out of state. I hadn't even told anyone yet. I wanted this job so badly. I just wanted a chance to do it well and not have it focused on my end date.

My thoughts and fears continued to spin out of control. I don't have time for this! I screamed silently in my head. Yet, somewhere deep down, I knew the right thing to do was to support these boys. Within a few days, I found a thirty-minute opening in my schedule. *I can take the boys on Monday from 11:30-12:00. Will that work?* I e-mailed, leaning into the growth opportunity for the four boys...And me.

PLAY - Lean In!

When I was young my family and I stayed at a small resort for a week every summer. My memories of that time are filled with moments of play. During the day we created games, played catch or fished. At night we would play card or board games or make up shows for the family. There was also a beach where I would spend hours playing in the sand. Next to the beach was a large oak tree where I would swing. My cousins and I would try to see if we could touch the leaves and then see who could jump the farthest into the sand. The beach provided a sandbox full of opportunity to create castles, sculptures or sand drawings.

Throughout my childhood, one of my favorite playgrounds was the sandbox. In a sandbox I could sift sand, fill things, and dump things out. I could create things or just move sand and toys around. I could play by myself or with others. Sometimes I played in the sand just for the fun of it, but other times I had a definite purpose such as building a castle or sand sculpture. As an adult, I find myself playing in different ways. Writing is now my sandbox. When I write I sift through ideas filling the page with words or dumping them out. I create things with words or just move my thoughts around. Some-

STUDENTS

times I write alone, but I also write with others. Sometimes I write for fun, other times I write for a purpose. Writing for me is play.

HOW DID you play as a child? Did you do activities where time seemed to stand still or you did them just for the sheer pleasure? How do you play now?

Play is a spirit or energy, a way of being. Play is personal. When you play, you often lose all sense of time and you feel joyful. There isn't a right way to experience it. You can't force someone to play, you can only invite them. As we begin this journey, I invite you to play with me. Come jump in my sandbox and explore different ideas and ways of thinking. Sift through the ideas. Fill your mind with things you want to hold on to and dump out those you don't. Play by yourself or invite others to join you. Explore, experiment, and test out what works and what doesn't work for you. Play for fun or to create something. Let the stories inspire and motivate you. Imagine new possibilities for your students and you.

To play in the sandbox, you must lean in. You can't stand on the outside and play. You need to get in and get messy. Leaning in is messy and fun. Throughout this book I invite you to come alongside my story, to get in the sandbox and play along with me. In each chapter, I play with ideas, not because I have the answers, but because I don't. I play to explore, to experiment and to learn. I play to grow and to discover who I want to be for myself and others. I can play by myself, but I'd much rather play with you. Come play with me! **LEAN IN.**

PRACTICE - Lean In!

Have you ever leaned over a railing or stood on one of those glass platforms at the top of a skyscraper and leaned out? Leaning in can be exhilarating and fun, but it can also be terrifying. I remember the first time I visited Willis Tower in Chicago. There is an observatory

at the top where you can step onto a glass platform and lean into the city. I could not step onto the platform. Even though I knew it was safe and it looked fun, I could not get my body to do what my mind was asking it to do. I could not lean in. I teetered on the edge, barely putting a foot forward, offering instead to take pictures as my children delighted in the experience. Despite the fact that I knew it was safe, I could not convince my brain and body to lean in. Our brains have an amazing instinct to keep us safe; sometimes too safe. This is difficult to override. Just ask someone who has a fear of spiders or flying. No matter how much they rationalize the fear, it can be debilitating and affect their ability to enjoy certain experiences or opportunities for growth.



GO AHEAD, move your body and lean in. What does it feel like? Notice how it takes some intentionality and control to lean. You need to push forward and yet hold yourself, so you don't fall flat on your face. Leaning in emotionally or for a purpose has a similar feel. It's a push and a pull. You can play with the idea of leaning in, but really understanding it and implementing it takes practice. Practice is a way of doing something. Done repetitively, practice becomes permanent or a habit. So be careful. Some habits keep you from growing and becoming more of what you were meant to be. You want to practice behaviors and attitudes that push you to improve.

The tendency to pull back and stay safe occurs when we try to lean in and move forward emotionally or toward a purpose. Think about a time you decided to lean forward and try something new. What did your inner voice sound like? Did it encourage you? *That's a great idea, you can do it!* or did it try to sabotage you? *Who do you think you are? You can't do that? It will never work.*

I'll admit, I'm pretty risk adverse. I'd rather keep my feet on solid ground than lean into a glass box from the top of a skyscraper. I guard my emotions, too. I carefully think out my goals and ambitions, weighing them against my perceived abilities. These things

STUDENTS

keep me safe, but they don't allow me to grow. Fortunately, as this story played out part of me instinctually overrode this safety feature by leaning in. Maybe it was Mrs. G's cunning persuasion or perhaps my desire to serve others that pushed me past my secure boundaries. Whatever it was, the way forward depended on me leaning into this moment, this opportunity.

ONE WAY TO improve your ability to lean in is to practice it. Mel Robbins, a motivational speaker and author, shares an interesting technique you can practice in her book, *The 5 Second Rule*. The premise of the book is that if you try to lean into a new goal or change, your inner self will often try to sabotage your plans. Robbins has a five second solution to overriding this self-sabotaging instinct. Robbins explains, "if you have an impulse to act on a goal, you must physically move within 5 seconds, or your brain will kill the idea."²

One of the simplest ways to begin practicing this technique is with your morning alarm. I don't know about you, but I often hit the snooze hoping for a few extra minutes under the covers. But I would rather approach the day with enthusiasm. Wouldn't you? One thing that has worked for me is practicing the 5-second rule. When the alarm goes off, rather than hitting the alarm, I start the countdown 5...4...3...2...1! Before I finish counting, I jump out of bed and move. I brush my teeth and get a glass of water.

I will admit when I started this approach I had to set multiple alarms and place them in different rooms to force me to get out of bed and move. But it worked, and it can work for you too. Rather than snoozing into your day, lean in. In what ways might you practice this rule? How might you grow and change if you **LEAN IN**?

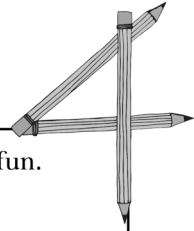
PURPOSE - Lean In!

BECAUSE OF 4 students, I leaned in. I didn't think I could do it. I didn't think I had the capacity. Having the courage to lean in allowed me to discover potential I never knew I had. Leaning in is more than just doing, it's being. It's daring to open your heart to possibility and opportunity.

Purpose is your reason for taking intentional action to fulfill an idea, a promise, and to turn potential into possibility. Each of us has a purpose. We have a calling to discover our purpose and use it to serve those around us, including our students, families, and communities. What is your purpose in this moment? Who needs what you can give? In what ways might you lean in? You can do it. All it takes is 5 seconds. **LEAN IN.**

LEAN IN

step-by-step



PLAY

Lean in to the sandbox. Get messy and have fun. Play with ideas about how you might lean in.

PRACTICE

5 seconds is all it takes to lean toward a goal. Choose one from above. Write an action step you are willing to take.

PURPOSE

How do you show up? Who needs what you have to give? Name four students and tell how you might lean in to be more for them. *AND YOU!*

Notes

1. STUDENTS

1. Brown, B. (2019). *Dare to lead: Brave work, tough conversations, whole hearts*. Random House Large Print Publishing.
2. Robbins, M. (2018, December 13). The 5 Second Rule. Retrieved from <https://melrobbins.com/blog/the-5-second-rule/>

2. MIRACLES

1. Al Michaels. (2020, December 12). Retrieved December 15, 2020, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Michaels
2. What is Chaos Theory? (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2020, from <https://fractal.foundation.org/resources/what-is-chaos-theory/>
3. Elrod, H. (2019). *The miracle equation*. New York: Random House Large Print.
4. Brown, B. (2019, August 21). What Toni Morrison Taught Me About Parenting. Retrieved from <https://brenebrown.com/blog/2019/08/07/what-toni-morrison-taught-me-about-parenting/>

3. HABITS

1. Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2000). *Habits of mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
2. KEVA Planks Official Website. (n.d.). Retrieved December 16, 2020, from <https://www.kevaplanks.com/>
3. Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2000). *Habits of mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
4. Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2000). *Habits of mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. P.16.
5. Wonder Grove Learn Habits of Mind Animations. (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2020, from <https://wondergrovelearn.net/products/2/1>
6. Anderson, J. (2017, October 19). Teacher Resource Library. Retrieved December 15, 2020, from <https://habitsofmind.org/resource-library/>
7. Anderson, J. (2020, September 21). Succeeding with Habits of Mind. Retrieved December 15, 2020, from <https://habitsofmind.org/>
8. <https://habitsofmind.org/category/free-resources/>



About the Author

Cheryl Peterson, Ph.D. is a mom, teacher, coach and writer. This is Dr. Peterson's first book. Because of four young students, she was inspired to be more. She studied elementary education at Millikin University and then spent nearly 20 years in public education teaching at various grade levels, and working as an instructional coach and gifted coordinator. She has also supervised student teachers at The University of Iowa where she received her Masters Degree in Educational Psychology. She supervised student teachers, conducted research and served as an instructor for preservice teachers at The University of Minnesota where she received her Doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. With her extensive background in gifted education she has taught as an adjunct professor at Hamline University for six years. She blogs regularly about her experience as a mother, writer, educator and hobby farmer. Since COVID-19 she has utilized her experience to support families and students through tutoring, coaching and teaching a variety of courses in homeschool co-ops. She lives with her husband, children, dog, cats, chickens and horses in Illinois.

www.drcherylpeterson.com



facebook.com/DrCherylPeterson



twitter.com/drcherylpeters1



instagram.com/drcherylpeterson