

SEASON 5: EPISODE 1

OBAMA AND THE 10 LETTERS A DAY

The aim of this supporting resource is that you make a 25 minute window to give yourself time to think. Take 10 mins to listen to the podcast and 15 mins to read through these ideas and see what they spark in you and what new ideas you can then generate. These ideas exist to get your thinking started. You don't have to decide anything today, just let these ideas marinade in your head until they are ready to emerge. Get away from all the distractions, turn off the beeping and the buzzing devices and give yourself 25 mins of uninterrupted time to think.

Want to share any ideas you have? Tweet me on [@rachelPiXL](#) and share with the hashtag [PiXLPearls](#).

In this episode, I posed some questions for you to think about:

- 1) In your leadership, what do you stand for and what do you need to know to make that a reality?
- 2) How do you really know what people think and feel about you and what you are doing?
- 3) If you are serious about what you are trying to do, what infrastructure do you need to make it happen?

Here are some ideas that may help you think of better ones!

1. Do you know what you stand for and what you stand against? Are you clear, are others clear and do you live that out? For example, if you say that you want to listen to others, how much of your diary would show me that you do this each week?
2. Some research into parental engagement in APs, shows that a number of settings that have good relationships with parents do so by listening to them, meeting them on neutral territory (a library or coffee shop) and giving them the time to be heard. This includes things like asking them what type of communication they would prefer (texts, calls, whats app, emails) rather than making assumptions.
3. Regularly ensure that your school/work is represented in the press with the stories that you want to tell – write the press release, shout about your values.
4. Use social media to reinforce what you stand for and to celebrate when people are living in those values, this may be celebrating a letter from a member of the public, or supporting a charity or through acts of kindness in school.
5. Check your correspondence with parents – does every interaction make it clear what you believe and what you stand for? Is the tone of your correspondence speaking to the parents like adults and creating buy in with them?
6. Create word clouds of your own: it could be through using AI and looking at a year group's reports or using words that young people have written if you ask them a question about what they believe or

what they think about something. These can be used powerfully to create a sense of identity and also to capture what the issues may be and where the 'wins' are.

7. What's your equivalent of 10 Letters A day? Speaking to 10 students from across the school each day? Pop in to 10 lessons? How do you take the temperature of what your community think and feel. It may not always be comfortable. Have you tried asking the parents who are critical to come in and have a meeting about their opinions and how it could be better?
8. Assemble a student shadow cabinet – assemble a diverse group of young people and set them an agenda which may look like an SLT or Year meeting agenda e.g.:
 - a. Year 11 progress: what do they need now?
 - b. Mock results day – ideas
 - c. Countdown/count up to exams – support and revision plans
 - d. Assembly content – what is needed?
9. How do you know how staff and students are feeling? During the pandemic (and still continuing in some schools), each day students were asked to log online and say how they were feeling between 0-6, anyone with less than a 3 had a 'check in call' just to give them the chance to be seen and heard and talk things through. You may not do this, but how do you know how your community is feeling?
10. If you are the Head, or the leader of a team, how do you know what your team/staff really think about the job you are doing? We need to get feedback but often we don't know how to get it or the way we get it feels very formal and a risk to those giving it. Some things that can help:
 - a. 360 reviews – perhaps the bravest choice and one of the most 'official' because you are giving a very broad scope for feedback.
 - b. Peer Pirates – ask your SLT to discuss a specific thing you want specific feedback on e.g. '*In meetings, do I allow everyone to express their opinion and be heard?*'. They discuss this without you and then they nominate one person to come and give you the feedback. Always close this loop by mentioning the findings and the learning points next time you see them as a group. This always works best when YOU decide what it is you want feedback on. Everyone feels more comfortable if there are clear boundaries and clear permissions given to be honest.
 - c. What are you putting 'out there' about what your community thinks and feels about your school? What is the banner on your gate? Many put the words of inspection reports on there but that is once every four years in most cases and the words can appear dated, find other ways of talking about your school yourselves, rather than only the opinions of a visiting group of strangers.
11. If you are going to get feedback (however you do that) how can you track this over time? Create a school log of results of feedback each term? Track this over time so you start telling the story of your school? Do a round-up at the end of the year to parents/staff? Use the data for induction evenings? Nothing is more powerful than saying, '*here is what our community say about the community*'.

12. School Surveys (see Teacher Tapp for more info) offer a package where you can ask your staff questions and compare their answers to those in similar schools. This provides a helpful snapshot of what people think. <https://teachertapp.co.uk/school-surveys/>. If you do not have a mechanism or infrastructure to support getting reliable and measurable feedback, have a look at this resource.
13. Who can help you with the collation and presentation of this feedback? Is there someone who is great at AI and could easily whip up some graphs and charts when you give them the data? Is there someone who is creatively gifted who could create something from what you have? Could you take the best feedback/or words and turn them into postcards for students or thank you cards for staff? *(An aside: I did this in my first year as CEO, I asked the team for feedback, took their words, put it into a word cloud and then got them printed and sent them all out. I did the same this year but with pictures of staff selfies all with a blue sky background when the weather was better. I have plans again for something different next year!)*
14. If you are going to get feedback, do surveys, visit 10 students or 5 classrooms, you need to put this in your diary or it will not happen!
15. Since we don't get 10,000 letters to choose from, we perhaps need to use other ways of gathering the 'mood of the nation'. We can ask great questions that will unlock what might be happening. Our equivalent of 10 letters a day could be:
 - a. Asking all staff in a survey, 'what should we stop doing, start doing, continue doing if we want to have a culture that is X, Y and Z'.
 - b. Make the results into a word cloud or a chart – AI makes this simple these days!
 - c. When we ask staff or students their opinion or for information, always go back and say what has changed as a result. At a briefing, take a 'you said, we did' approach and explain how that information has made a difference. Even if you just say, 'the information provided demonstrated three main things that you feel strongly about and so I have called a meeting next week to...'. People need to know you are listening!
 - d. Ask interesting questions if you want to find out the truth:
 - i. If you were the Head of this school, what would you sort first?
 - ii. If we could not fail what would we try that we are not trying?
 - iii. Ask a few selected people representing a diverse range of ages, roles and experience, 'When it comes to behaviour, where do you feel we are now in Year X, on a scale of 0 to 10?'. They may say '4' – then ask them, 'what does '5' look like?'. What would we need to do to get to 5? We have to make small incremental shifts to make change happen.

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