

The logo for PIXL, featuring the word "PIXL" in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. The letter "i" is lowercase and has a white dot above it. The background is a vibrant orange with various circular patterns, including a large circle with a grid of small dots in the top right and concentric circles in the bottom left.

IGNITING LEADERS
CHANGING LIVES

SCROOGE

TRANSCRIPT

SCROOGE

A Christmas Carol has become a classic of Christmas time, it was popular when Dickens published it and has remained so ever since. Originally published on December 19th, 1843, it was sold out by Christmas Eve. This must have been a huge relief for Charles Dickens, considering he wrote it in 6 weeks under financial pressure. He needed this to be a money-spinner and it was. By 1844, the novella had gone through 13 printings and continues to be a best seller now – and, like the Bible, it has never been out of print. A remarkable achievement for an author, who wrote the story in his head whilst walking 15-20 miles around London every night.

Dickens needed the money and as he walked thinking of ideas he mixed his desperation for money, and his moral outrage with how the poor were being treated, into a winning idea. He wanted to write something that would **create action and make people re-evaluate**. A key part of the eventual best seller was the love of money, the abuse of money and the life changing power that money could have in the right hands. He made money from it himself of course, and it became a staple of Christmas past, present and future but not everyone was a fan. Mark Twain said of the novella, “There is no heart. No feeling – it is nothing but glittering frost work”.

Yet, there was heart in A Christmas Carol. Dickens tells the story of the power of connected choices and the **transforming power of changing our outlook and our habits**. The central character, **Scrooge**, is obsessed with money: making it, counting it, spending it, withholding it. His days are driven by the love of money and although he feels productive, others can see he is miserable. **Money with no real purpose is empty**.

As you may well know, Scrooge is confronted with a range of scenarios – past, present and future– that are a catalyst for change. He reflects on the past and he sees what his future could be and eventually, the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change. **Scrooge is transformed**.

The novella ends with a changed Scrooge: a man who starts embracing other options, a new way to live and the possibility of love. As Keller and Papasan say in their leadership book which references Scrooge, “**Scrooge once saved money and used people, he now uses money to save people**”. **Nobody is too old or too set in their ways to change**.

Dickens’ inspiration for the name of Scrooge was apparently taken from a tombstone in a Scottish cemetery. The tombstone read, “Ebenezer Scroggie. Mean man’. Ironically, it turns out that it didn’t say that at all, Dickens had misread it. It actually said, ‘meal man’. The Scroggie on the tombstone was a wealthy distiller and grain merchant.

Perhaps the misread tombstone is fitting considering how the story ends. Scrooge was a ‘mean man’ but by the end of the novella, he is wealthy in a different way and provides food for others in the final scene that has perhaps become the most famous of all. **A meal man after all**.

APPLICATION

Most of us are familiar with A Christmas Carol, even if it's through the Muppets' rendition. However, we might not have considered it a story of leadership and habit formation. Yet, *it is both*. Its lessons extend well beyond Christmas and are relevant all year round.

Our purpose determines our actions.

If your purpose is to make money by whatever means, *that* drives your actions. It drives your perspective on whether you are successful or not and it drives your habits. In Scrooge's case, his purpose was to make, and keep, his money. Yet, what we see in this story is that, *when our purpose changes, so do our actions*. Scrooge went from wanting to take money from people and keep people out, to giving money to others and reaching out to those who he could help. His purpose dramatically changed. His behaviour changed. The iconic Tiny Tim scene symbolises that. Purpose and productivity are also linked. If we know what we want to do and why we want to do it and have belief in whatever that is, we are more likely to strive for it. That, in turn, makes it more likely we will be productive as we pursue it. When the purpose changes, everything changes.

We need to reflect on how we view the world.

Scrooge viewed the world as irritating and miserable and so he led a life that irritated people and made them miserable. As **Erich Heller** said, "be careful how you interpret the world: it *is* like that". Call it confirmation bias, prejudice, a frame of reference, or a host of other labels but the truth is this; **the way you see the world is how you experience the world and how you then communicate to others**. If you believe that the world is a fair place where opportunity is open to all then you will say something rather different to your students than if you have had the opposite experience. If you are fortunate enough to have nice holidays, of course you will ask your young people what nice things they did over the summer or half term. If you are from a family where holidays were not possible and any time away from the routine and safety of school was unsettling, even dangerous, then you would be more careful of your question, knowing what it may be asking.

We do not decide our futures; we decide our habits.

We have ambition and aspiration – I hope we all do but futures don't magically happen. A future is created through taking the small steps, establishing the good habits. That decides the future. **Habit formation** is a topic of hundreds of books these days and so, considering the volume written on it, it must be that we are not getting this right yet. It takes 66 days to acquire a new habit, that's the big headline but there is some nuance. The full range is between 18 and 254 days, although 66 represents the sweet spot apparently. We can have big dreams and so we should but without a conversion into tangible action, a discipline to follow through and a persistence to the new habit you have identified, it is unlikely change will happen. And if it does, it will almost certainly take much longer. Scrooge may have decided to change his life and give more to the poor, but that was only an intention. That intention became real when he does 3 small actions: he gives money to the poor, spends Christmas with his nephew, and gives him a wage increase. Without those 3 actions, the novella isn't anywhere near as possible. **The story doesn't end with intention, it ends with action.**

Q U E S T I O N S

1. Keller and Papasan in their book 'The One Thing' say this, 'life is a question and how we live it is the answer'. What does your '*answer*' say about what your purpose and priorities are? In your personal life? In your professional life?

2. Sometimes our worldview is more optimistic than at other times, depending on what we face, what we experience and what we are exposed to in what we see, read and hear. How do you see the world and how does this positively impact your colleagues and your young people? How might it hold them back?
3. Intentions are great, but it is **action through habit forming that starts the real change**. Name an intention that you have right now. What habit is going to help make that a reality? If your intention is to have more time to think so you feel more in control of yourself at work then you need to book it in the diary like you would a meeting and DO it. Leave school on time, go for a walk or whatever else is a habit that can help you get the clarity you say you want.

A Christmas Carol may be on the syllabus for GCSE English Literature, but the lessons we can learn from it don't just belong there. **The observations about human nature are not just for Christmas, or for 16-year-olds studying GCSEs, they important are for all of us.**

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS AREA?

Try these episodes of the PiXL Leadership Bookclub:

[Think Again](#)

[The Joy of Work](#)

[Please Yourself](#)

We also have some Pearl episodes on these topics:

[Emotionally Overdrawn](#)

[A Spoonful of Sugar](#)

[The Wizard](#)

There are also relevant chapters work in these books:

[Time to Think: The things that stop us and how to deal with it](#)

How to know what you stand for and what you stand against

How to have healthy boundaries

How to ensure that you are at your best more of the time

[Time to Think 2: The things that stop our teams and what to do about them](#)

How to help people feel brave and safe

How to work with yes and no

How to get the best out of introverts and extroverts

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