

# FISH! For Schools: The foundation of a positive school culture



Sometimes the best lessons come from the most unlikely teachers.

Years ago, filmmaker John Christensen was shopping at Seattle's Pike Place Market when he noticed a large crowd surrounding a small fish market. The fishmongers tossed salmon to each other, the crowd cheering each spectacular catch.

The fishmongers greeted strangers like old friends. When a fishmonger focused on a customer, it was as if they were the only two people in the world. Everyone smiled—and bought lots of fish.

Christensen was fascinated. How did the fishmongers transform a cold, exhausting job into a joyful experience? To find out, he made a film about them.

## SUCCESS SKILLS FOR LIFE

The film, FISH!, explored four simple practices anyone can use to be more successful by building better relationships. Together they are the FISH! Philosophy:

**Choose Your Attitude:** No matter what the day throws at you, you can choose how you respond.

**Be There:** When people need you, they need all of you. Be fully present.

**Make Their Day:** Find simple ways to show people you value them.

**Play:** Bring a spirit of enthusiasm, creativity and fun to work. You'll accomplish more.

## A MODEL FOR EDUCATION

FISH! connected with people in every industry. It showed how to throw yourself into everything you do with passion and purpose. FISH! became the most-watched training video in the world.



FISH! spoke strongly to educators. Their work was difficult, their efforts often unappreciated. Much lay outside their control, from government mandates to unhelpful parents. Cynicism was a constant temptation. FISH! reminded educators they could still choose to care, support, encourage, laugh and love. "It helped me get back to who I was and why I got into teaching," said Chris Streiff, a teacher from Minnesota.

FISH! helped educators connect with students like never before. As one boy told his teacher, "FISH! helps you hear me."

Christensen, who once planned to become a teacher, saw how well FISH! worked in schools. He wanted to do even more. So his company, ChartHouse Learning, developed FISH! For Schools—a family of K-12 resources that blended the FISH! practices with research on effective classroom management and positive behavior.



### WHO ARE YOU “BEING?”

FISH! For Schools builds positive cultures and strengthens relationships. It provides tools and workshops to introduce The FISH! Philosophy. It has programs for staff development and age-appropriate resources to help students apply the four practices.

The FISH! practices aren’t something extra to do. They’re about who you are “being” while you’re already doing what you’re doing. FISH! For Schools reduces time spent dealing with unproductive behaviors, so staff and students can focus on what they need to accomplish.

FISH! For Schools works best when practiced school wide, from lunchroom to gym to hallways. The St. Tammany Parish School

District in Louisiana teaches and reinforces the practices in all aspects of school life, supporting its behavior program, Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports.

### BUILDING NEW AWARENESS

When staff and students live the four practices, it changes how they think. Staff become more mindful of their impact on others, especially as they guide behavior. Students become more aware of their feelings, and how to use them productively.

“They get to step back from a situation, and say, ‘I get to choose who I’m going to be today, how effective I’m going to be today and how positive I get to be today,’” said DeWayne Noble, a high school teacher in Arkansas.

### SKILLS TO STOP BULLYING

FISH! For Schools builds empathy. “It’s hard to be a bully when you’re focused on making someone else’s day,” according to Candace Call, a principal in North Carolina. When students are “being there,” they are more likely to step in when they see someone being bullied.

It helps them to be sensitive to people of all backgrounds. They build social skills they take from grade to grade, into their first jobs and their families.

“The greatest thing about The FISH! Philosophy is you learn it at school, but you can take it with you everywhere,” said Tamarah Myers, a behavior specialist in Louisiana.

### CO-CREATING THE CULTURE

In a healthy culture, every member connects with the group’s values. When Barb Stoflet, a sixth-grade teacher in suburban Minneapolis, found herself spending too much time on discipline, she enlisted her students’ help.

Together, they used FISH! For Schools to create their vision of a classroom that worked for teacher and students. Discipline problems plummeted. Stoflet had time to teach again. Her students went from passive followers to proud co-owners of the culture they created.

“I actually have more control because the students help manage the room,” said Stoflet, winner of the 2010 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

*“FISH! captures what a great school culture looks like.”*

- Tamarah Myers, behavior specialist

## A DRAMATIC TURNAROUND

The FISH! Philosophy works in struggling schools as well. When Candace Call became principal of Southmont Elementary in Asheboro, NC, the school had not met its Adequate Yearly Progress goals for three years.

Call removed the rules plastered on the walls. She and her staff modeled The FISH! Philosophy and reinforced it constantly.

“My wise granny told me, ‘Spend your time doing what you’re supposed to and you won’t do what you’re not supposed to.’ That’s what FISH! does.”

Test scores rose 31% in writing and almost 20% in reading and math. The school met its AYP goals.

“The FISH! Philosophy is a tool I can use in any school,” Call said. “It works.”

## IT STARTS WITH RELATIONSHIPS

FISH! For Schools builds caring relationships. When students know you care about them, they find the power within to learn and become successful adults. When parents understand you truly care about their children, they become your partners. When colleagues care for each other, they gain the strength to face their challenges together.

“You could call The FISH! Philosophy a strategy to create the culture that needs to exist to provide optimal student learning,” said principal Ann Clark. “Or you could just say it helps us take care of each other.”

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