

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to “Just Do This...” a call to action for educators who are ready to roll up their sleeves and make a meaningful impact on their school culture and climate. This book is not about abstract theories or pie-in-the-sky ideas; it is about authentic, actionable strategies you can implement in your classroom, school, or district right away. Think about it: have you ever felt overwhelmed by the challenges of fostering a positive educational environment? You’re not alone. But here’s the good news: you have the power to create change, and this book is your roadmap. Just Do This...

I have been in K-12 education for well over 25 years. Throughout my extensive career, I’ve had the privilege of attending numerous professional development sessions, conferences, talks, and events. While many of these gatherings offer a wealth of innovative ideas and theories that have the potential to transform education, I often find that the proposed solutions are either too complicated, multi-stepped, or rooted in expert jargon, making them challenging to implement in real classrooms, schools, and districts. That’s exactly what this book aims to avoid. Today, my speaking career involves driving change in schools by developing and delivering valuable professional development strategies, workshops, and keynotes.

In our journey together, we’ll explore how simple yet effective understandings, planning, and actions can transform compliance into genuine commitment within your school community. When I say, “Just Do This...” I mean it! We’ll tackle everything from building relationships and recognizing achievements to establishing a culture rooted in integrity and commitment. Each chapter will provide you with straightforward explanations and techniques that can easily be woven into your daily routine.

**JUST DO
THIS...**

You might wonder why a book like this is necessary. Let’s be honest: many classrooms, schools, and districts are grappling with cultures that fall short of fostering positive learning environments. Educators are increasingly recognizing that the atmosphere within a school directly impacts the success of students, staff, and the broader community. The truth is, we’ve all sat through meetings that leave us feeling more bewildered than empowered, or we’ve witnessed initiatives that sound great on paper but fail to gain traction in reality. My goal is to cut through that noise and provide you with tangible ideas and steps that can lead to meaningful, systemic change. By focusing on enhancing the culture and climate of your educational environment, we can create a foundation that supports and uplifts everyone involved. This is not wishing or hoping. This can actually happen!

JUST DO THIS...

Take a moment to think about what you've experienced in your own educational environment. When you walk into a classroom or a school, do you feel energy and engagement, or do you sense apathy and compliance? The difference lies in the culture, the shared beliefs and practices that shape how everyone interacts. Research shows that when educators foster a commitment mindset, it leads to better student outcomes, higher morale, and a more vibrant school community (Hattie, 2009; Fullan, 2016).

In this book, you'll discover that improvement is not only possible but achievable with consistent effort and the right strategies. We'll dive into practical scenarios, real-life examples, and insights from schools that have successfully transformed their cultures. You'll learn that small, deliberate changes can lead to profound results.

So, are you ready to embark on this journey? Let's commit to shifting the climate of our classrooms, schools, and districts from mere compliance to a thriving culture of commitment. It is time to roll up your sleeves and say, "Just Do This!" because every educator has the potential to make a difference.

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CHAPTER ONE

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Reduce Not Eliminate

Before jumping into the world of culture and climate of schools, you need to understand a very important concept – most of this book is common sense. But even though it is common sense, we tend to forget it and, therefore, not apply this thinking to our actions. This concept draws from personal experience and practical leadership insight. In my 25+ years in K-12 education, I have personally experienced and witnessed the power of this understanding on multiple occasions. In other words, this works.

The concept is **Reduce, Not Eliminate**. Within education, we have multiple problems, issues, and concerns. Everything from the achievement gap to poor behavior to attendance issues. What do we do when we are aware of these issues, problems, and concerns? We put together a committee! Administrators love a good committee, right? We say things like, “Let’s get all interested parties together to discuss,” or “We need to tackle this head-on with everyone at the table.” Now, don’t get me wrong. I like a quality committee as well. But sometimes we put a committee together just to prevent us as leaders from bearing the weight of making the decision.

REDUCE
NOT
ELIMINATE

During those committee meetings, we sit and try to figure out what we can do to eliminate the issue, problem, or concern from the school. We talk about what the ideal situation may be. How is the achievement gap, misbehavior, or absence hindering the learning of the student or other students? Then, we discuss the steps necessary to eliminate the issue. The problem comes into play a few days, weeks, or months later when the problem, issue, and concern are still taking place. As a result, we are frustrated that we keep going around in a ridiculous circle with no resolution to the problem, issue, or concern. Your seasoned educators say things like, “...this is the way it always is.” Your new teachers question whether they are cut out for teaching.

Here’s the thing gang... You will not eliminate the issue, problem, or concern initially. The achievement gap may still be there. The “problem student” has been in schools for hundreds of years. To be honest, some of you were that problem student! Sitting in a committee is not going to eliminate concerns. Stop going in with the mindset that it will be eliminated. Instead of a mentality of elimination – address the issue, problem, and concern with the mindset of reducing. What can we do to reduce the issue, problem, or concern? Now, you are working within the realm of reality.

Let’s think this through. If your committee can work towards reducing the pressing issue, problem, or concern within the classroom, school, or district, that automatically improves the probability that your teachers will be able to do what they really want, which is... TEACH. Am I right? This simple change in thinking can significantly reduce stress and increase productivity on a massive scale. All schools aim to educate and improve the knowledge and lives of the children they serve. If you can improve the probability of that happening, wouldn’t you want to do that? Yes, we do want the whole

thing! We want the problem, issue, or concern eliminated. We are greedy like that. But how about we work within the realm of reality instead of fiction? When sitting down with your team, committee, or group, state to everyone before you start, “Reduce, not eliminate.” Help them understand that you want to make gains to improve the situation enough so that progress can begin. The goal is not to wipe out every issue but to reduce its frequency or severity to create better conditions for teaching and learning.

Okay, here is the issue with reduce not eliminate. When we reduce the issues, problems, or concerns, we often don’t recognize the reduction. We always want to eliminate all the time. When we actually start moving towards reduction and improvement we hear things like, “... but he’s still disrupting the classroom...” or “...she is still running out of the room...” and “...they are still showing up to the classroom late...”

Here is the difference as it relates to reduce not eliminate. Yes, he is still disrupting the classroom, but last week, it was ten times a day. This week is only five times a day. Didn’t that just improve the probability that you can teach more? This week, she ran out of the room only twice compared to four times last week. Didn’t that just increase the amount of instructional and learning time for her? Last semester, they showed up late every day for class. Now they are late twice a week. Reduce not eliminate, ya’ll!

WHY DO PEOPLE RESIST THE “REDUCE” MINDSET?

Pressure for Quick Fixes: Schools often face high expectations from parents, administrators, and even the community to “fix” problems immediately. This pressure can make staff feel like anything short of the complete elimination of an issue isn’t good enough. Think back to when you were in a meeting trying to improve something. How often did you think about what it would look like if it was eliminated? Do you remember the pressure from either the parents, community, administrator, leader, or yourself to eliminate the problem? How real did that feel?

Perfectionism: Many educators hold themselves and their schools to high standards. Accepting “less” can feel like settling for mediocrity, which makes them resistant to gradual improvement.

MRS. COLLINS AND THE “DISRUPTIVE” STUDENT

Mrs. Collins was an experienced 5th-grade teacher who prided herself on running a well-structured and highly productive classroom. For years, she had built a reputation for getting the best out of every student, and her academic outcomes were always among the highest in the school. She held herself and her students to very high standards. When she encountered Marcus, a new student with frequent behavioral issues, her patience and sense of control were tested.

Marcus had trouble sitting still and often disrupted lessons by blurting out, tapping his desk, or walking around the room. (Does this sound familiar?) Determined to eliminate these behaviors, Mrs. Collins tried a variety of strategies

and reward systems, parent-teacher conferences, and even referred Marcus to the school counselor. But nothing seemed to work completely. His disruptions, though slightly less frequent, still persisted, and Mrs. Collins began to feel frustrated.

During one staff meeting, the principal introduced the “reduce not eliminate” approach, encouraging teachers to celebrate small improvements rather than expect overnight transformations. But Mrs. Collins found herself resisting the idea. “If Marcus is still disrupting the class at all, isn’t that a failure on my part as his teacher?” she thought. In her mind, anything less than perfect behavior felt like settling for mediocrity. She believed her classroom had to be disruption-free to be a truly successful learning environment.

However, over time, Mrs. Collins began to notice something. Marcus was no longer disrupting the class every 10 minutes. In fact, the disruptions had decreased significantly to only two or three incidents a day. More importantly, Marcus was gradually engaging more in lessons. He answered questions, participated in group work, and even seemed excited about learning math, his least favorite subject.

One day, Mrs. Collins paused to reflect on these changes. No, Marcus was not perfectly behaved, but the reduced disruptive behavior meant the rest of the class gained valuable instructional time. Most importantly, Marcus himself showed growth. Her initial perfectionism caused her to overlook the very real progress made.

At the next staff meeting, Mrs. Collins shared her experience with the team. “I was so focused on eliminating Marcus’s disruptions completely that I didn’t recognize his small but meaningful improvements. It is not about perfection, it is about progress.” By embracing the “reduce, not eliminate” mindset, she began to see each small reduction in disruptive behavior as a win, not just for herself, but for Marcus and her entire class.

Mrs. Collins’ perfectionism initially blinded her to Marcus’s progress. Her high standards made her feel like anything short of eliminating the problem meant failure. But once she shifted her perspective, she realized that gradual improvement was still a significant victory. This story illustrates how educators can resist the “reduce” mindset out of fear of accepting “less” and how embracing small wins can lead to meaningful progress without sacrificing standards.

STRATEGIES TO SHIFT THE MINDSET

Consider the Fear of Being Judged: Teachers and school leaders might fear being judged as ineffective if they only reduce a problem rather than eliminate it. They worry that acknowledging incremental progress will be seen as a failure to do their jobs fully.