

Pursuing excellence as the leader – showing students that leaders also have setbacks.

Daniel Kempf, Middle School Principal

Today's environment and culture is one where moments are captured permanently through social media posts or screenshot messages. At times, these moments could be held against you for the remainder of your career. We observe in athletics, politics, and pop culture that decisions made from one's past can be brought back years later. This reality, in addition to the reality that Gen Z is more evaluative and skeptical of leadership, creates a paradigm for leaders today.

Tim Elmore recently wrote an article presenting three perceptions Gen Z has toward their leaders. These perceptions were that Gen Z believes that leaders cannot be trusted, that leaders are hiding something, and that leaders mismanage people and finances. This research, in addition to my observations and conversations among leaders and students, brings me to the conclusion that this generation views leadership differently than previous ones. Because of this reality and a desire to present a biblical and authentic example to those I am leading, I have evaluated and adjusted my leadership philosophy to effectively lead in this generation.

How do we lead people, adults, and students in a way that models both a pursuit of excellence and humility and authenticity in setbacks? This question started a journey for me of studying and interviewing many leaders over the past two years. This journey culminated in a belief that the following truths will guide my philosophy as both a school leader and as a parent of two children that I desire to know, love, and follow Jesus.

Jesus INVITES all his followers into a life that is different from the world.

2 Timothy 1:9 tells us that, *"he has saved us and called us with a Holy calling –not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace"*. God knows what is best for us, and as a loving protective father, he tells us through his Word the method of living that is best for us and his family. Christians should hold themselves to a high standard for the purpose of willingly pleasing a loving father, and as a picture to an unbelieving world what a life lived for Jesus looks like. This reality is the expectation for positional leaders and all followers of Christ.

Leaders have failed, repented, and been restored by Jesus.

Remember the life of Peter. He denied Jesus three times when he promised he would be faithful to the end. Jesus responds in John 21:15-17 and says, *"feed my sheep"*. Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, which Peter responded, *"you know I love you"*, and Jesus affirmed him and commissioned him to continue in his work. Jesus restored Peter AFTER his failure. What would have happened if Peter failed and quit? What would have happened if Jesus told Peter he was unqualified to lead? Thankfully, neither of those things happened and Peter was used to build the church and write letters in the New Testament. Are there mistakes that we as leaders need to repent of and pursue restoration with those we are leading?

Leaders must live in honesty, humility, and repentance if they want to model the gospel to those they are leading.

Paul talks honestly about himself in Romans 7 where he says, *"I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing...oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"*. Paul admitted his struggles and acknowledged that only through the power of Jesus



Pursuing excellence as the leader – showing students that leaders also have setbacks.

Daniel Kempf, Middle School Principal

can we live out this Christian walk. Influential leaders understand their humanity and display humility and repentance to those around them. This creates a culture of growth and honesty where everyone on your team understands failure and growth are a part of learning.

Because authenticity is important to Gen Z, leaders may be more influential when those they are leading see that those in positions of leadership can have setbacks, are willing to admit them, and pursue growth.

Whether you are a parent, a coach, a mentor, or a leader in an organization; I challenge you to consider leading in this way. I want those I am leading to desire excellence in all that they do and understand that failure is a fantastic teacher. If we desire individual responsibility and growth for those we are leading, we should model this philosophy as leaders ourselves.

