

KEYNOTE #2POSITIVE PERSONAL CLIMATE &
CULTURE**TRANSCRIPT****PRESENTER:**
GERRY BROOKS

How are you? My name is Gerry Brooks. I'm an educator in Lexington, Kentucky. I've been an administrator for 14 years on the elementary level, and I've also had seven years experience in the classroom, teaching everything from first to fifth grade and also math intervention. I'm also a social media influencer, which is probably how you know me, if you know me. I put a video up three years ago on Facebook, and it went viral. From there, I developed a following of about one and a half million people on social media, which has given me a platform for education and allowed me to be able to present all over the world on things that I'm passionate about.

So, I'm here today because EducationCloset asked me to present, mainly because of my social media influence and my ability to be able to get information out to teachers because of that platform, and I'm very excited to be here. When they first contacted me and approached me about speaking, I said, "No," because of the conference topic. Our integration is not something that I was an expert on. I went to my art teacher. I went to a couple people on Instagram social media that I know and said, "Hey, can you help me with this?" Then I thought, well, I'm really just regurgitating somebody else's information. I wasn't comfortable with that. So, I went back and proposed to them and said, "I would be more than happy to present, if you allow me to present on something that I'm passionate about, that will hit everybody that's at your conference and everybody that comes in to watch your sessions," and they agreed. I love that.

I'm in my car because that's how I present on social media, and so I just said, "I'm going to be very basic. I'm going to talk about what I'm passionate about, and I'm going to do it in a way that's super simple," and that's what my goal is here today, is to be able to present something super simple to you that's going to change you, as a professional, no matter what position you're in, whether you're a teacher in art, or science, or the science lab, or technology, or computer, or library, or whether you're an administrator. No matter what position you're in, in a school, my goal is for you to be able to improve base on what it is I want to talk about.

What I'm going to talk about today is personal climate and culture. See, we know what climate and culture is in education because we throw those words around all the time. What's the climate and culture of your school like, when we're talking to friends that are different schools. We know that means, what's it like to work at your school? Are the parents happy? Are the teachers happy? Are the kids happy? Are you supported? It's just that overall atmosphere of what your school is like, but what I want to talk about



today is personal climate and culture because personal climate and culture, to me, is the most important thing in being a happy educator, in being good at your job and enjoying your job. It has to do with personal climate and culture.

Personal climate and culture is how you interact with the people around you, how you deal with situations that you're confronted with, just overall, your attitude and actions about your job, and so that's what I'm going to focus in on today. It's going to be very, very simple. I'm using note cards that I've written on. I don't have handouts. I'm not having anything special. I'm in my car with some note cards, and I'm here to present something I'm very passionate about, and I really hope that it will help you.

We're going to talk today about developing PCC, which is personal climate and culture. Again, that's your actions and your attitudes about the people that you work with, the things that happen all around you, just everything that pertains to your job, and so that's what I want to be able to do, is I want to focus in on personal climate and culture, and I want to develop a plan for dealing with two sets of people.

We're going to develop a positive plan of action for dealing with parents and dealing with colleagues, because those are the two major groups, beyond students, that we have to deal with, and so I want to talk about personal climate and culture, and developing a positive plan for dealing with parents and dealing with colleagues.

And so, one of the things that we do at our school is, we give our parents and our colleagues acronym T-shirts. We call them scarlet letter T-shirts. They have letters on them, and those letters are acronyms that stand for sayings that will help us to understand something about that person, and so we give out these T-shirts and ask them to wear them at open house so that our teachers will know what type of parent is walking into the classroom and so our teachers will know who they're dealing with on the staff with their colleagues.

The very first one we give to a parent is an NKN. This is one of the acronyms that we probably have most on with our parents. When they walk into your classroom, you know exactly what you're getting, and that's a parent that never knows nothing. Have you ever dealt with that parent? No matter how many times you put it out there, no matter how many times you email it to them, put it in your newsletter, write it in your planners, they never know nothing. Their kid comes to PE every single day in flip flops,



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because they don't know when PE is. They never send in lunch money for a field trip or a field trip permission form, because they never know nothing. If you had an acronym T-shirt, you would know that parent and you would be able to deal with them a little bit differently on the first day of school.

The next one is the WBF. This is a parent that you also need to know, because this is just a little bit of a sneaky parent, and that's the parent that... they want to be your best friend. That's right, the WBF. They want to be your best friend. They want to friend you on Facebook, and they show up at your church when it's bring a friend to church week, and they're sitting on your pew, and you don't even know how they're there. You see, they're trying to develop this relationship with you, acting like they want to be your best friend, but let me tell you something. They really don't want to be your best friend. They want to be your manipulator because they want to manipulate you into this relationship so that when their child's paper is turned in late, you don't take 10 points off of that child's paper. So, be very careful with the parents that want to be your best friend. They really don't want to be your best friend. They just want you to give them benefits when their child needs something.

The next is the BET. This is a parent we all have to deal with in every single classroom, every single school all the time, and that's the parent that blames everything on the teacher. You got a BET. No matter what happens, they blame everything on the teacher. Guess what? We're going to have to deal with those parents on a regular basis. How do we deal with parents? How do we deal with parents in developing a positive climate and culture for ourselves, individually? Well, I've got some tips.

First and foremost, listen first and respond second. Listen first. Respond second. If you're taking notes, write that down. Listen first. Respond second. You see, when a parent comes to us, we already know what they're going to say. We've been dealing with this situation at school. We've been dealing with the child at school, and so when a parent calls angry or says, "Email me," we know, 90% of the time, what they want to say. And so, a lot of times, we want to jump in there and we want to respond and say, "Okay, I know what you're going to say. Let me tell you what happened." Well, that's not what they want. What they want you to do is to listen. So when we're dealing with parents, the first thing we have to do is listen first and respond second. It will develop a positive relationship with them.

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Next is to listen to what they're saying and not how they're saying it. I used to think that this was a talent that I had, and I do believe I'm good at this. I used to believe I had a talent at listening to what they were saying and not how they were saying it, but I realized it's not a talent. It's a skill, because I think a talent is something that you're kind of born with. A skill is something that you work on, and so you got to be able to develop this. You got to be able to listen to what the parent is saying and not how they're saying it, because when you listen to how they're saying it, you get wrapped up into inappropriate language, and screaming and yelling, and emotions.

And so, you got to be able to take a step back when you're dealing with a parent, and they're angry, and they're screaming and yelling, and you got to say to yourself, "Okay, I can't get wrapped up into how they're saying this, and they're screaming and yelling, or reading this email. They're being so rude." I've got to say to myself, "What is it that they're saying?" You got to develop the ability to be able to listen to what they're saying and not how they're saying it.

Next is to think about their perspective for happiness. You see, we have to think about every parent's perspective for happiness. Perspective is what they believe, and we're not going to change what they believe, and we have to differentiate the way we deal with parents because if you deal with a parent... If you deal with two parents the same way that have different perspectives, you're going to have a struggle. If you deal with a parent who believes that happiness for their child is a full scholarship to Yale, based on their academics, the same way you deal with a parent who believes happiness for their child is a full scholarship to a division one school on a football scholarship, then you're going to have a struggle. We have to differentiate the way that we deal with parents.

One of the things that we have to be able to do is to think about their perspective for happiness. If the parent's perspective for happiness is academics, you deal with them one way. If it's athletics, you deal another. You're trying to get to the same place, but you still have to differentiate the way you deal with the parent based on their perspective for happiness.

Next is, arguing doesn't do you any good. Arguing does you absolutely no good. In fact, it's very detrimental in your relationship with parents. Let me tell you what happens when a teacher argues with a parent. Do you know what they do? They go to the principal. Let me tell you what happens when a principal argues with a parent. They

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go to Central Office because, see, a parent doesn't come to you for an argument. They come to you for an answer, and so arguing doesn't do you any good, whatsoever. You may have an answer, but when you get wrapped up into what they're saying and start arguing with them or telling it like it is, they're just going to call the next person on you.

I've had Central Office called on me five times, and all five times were my fault, because instead of... because I said things like, "Well, your child is not failing because of your child's teacher, like you're saying. Your child is failing because they're on the softball field until 10:00 every night. Maybe if you allowed your child to do some homework and got a better schedule for your family, your child wouldn't be failing." Well, guess what? That was right, and now I'm arguing with a parent, but it wasn't the right thing to say. Just because it's the right thing to say doesn't mean it's the right thing to say, and you need to understand that arguing with a parent does you and no good, whatsoever.

Next is, ask parents for specific details. It's disrespectful, as an educator, for you to allow a parent to get away with criticizing you without asking for details. You can't let a parent say, "You're not fair to my child," or, "You don't like my child." How do you fix that? You can't fix it. You have to ask a parent for specific details. Can you give me an example of why you feel like I'm not fair to your child? Because you can fix that. Ask parents for specific details.

Respond professionally. Always respond professionally. When we respond unprofessionally, the parents like that because then they go to Facebook and tell everybody what a horrible person you were. We always have to respond professionally. Here's what I tell my teachers. This is always what I want them to ask themselves when they leave a conversation with a parent. Did this conversation strengthen my relationship? Did the conversation you just had with that parent strengthen your relationship? Because if it didn't, you got to go back to them.

So, those are some tips on how to be able to deal with our parents. Well, what about our teachers? We have some acronym T-shirts for our teachers, too.

The first one is the MGT. This is the one that we give to certain teachers. You got to be really careful with that one, though, because it's the mean girl teacher. This is the bully girl teacher that's bossing everybody around, can be a bully boy, too, that always wants



their way. You got to know who they are. Get out of their way when they're coming through the hallway.

The FCD, this is a teacher that I always walk on eggshells about because I feel like they're going to quit on me at any point, and that's the fancy car driver, because if they got a fancy car, they either have a really rich spouse or they're a drug dealer and they can just leave me at any minute, so I got to be very careful with them.

Next is the CTT. That's the colleague that's always taking their time, the constant time-taker. They're always blah, blah, blah, blahing on team planning time. You don't ever got any time to talk.

This is one that we all have, the SAHM. This is one that every single school has, and that's the self-appointed hallway monitor, the person that always wants to be able to be in control of the hallways, telling everybody what to do. You got to know them teachers.

So, here's the question. How do you deal with those? If you want to have a positive climate and culture, personal climate and culture, then you got to learn how to deal with your colleagues. So, I've got some tips on how you can learn to deal with colleagues.

First and foremost, always be professional and respectful. Always be professional and respectful. None of your students should know that you have a disagreement with another teacher, and really and truly know their teacher should because you should always be professional and respectful about all teachers and all colleagues. It helps develop personal climate and culture.

Always support them publicly. Did you know that one noise can ruin a parent's reputation because you're the expert? So, when one of your friends at church says, "What do you think about Ms. Smith? My child has her next year." You go, "Hmm..." You've ruined that teacher's reputation. So, always support them publicly. You don't have to lie, but find something great about every single teacher and be willing to share that. Always support them publicly because you're the expert, and when you don't support them publicly, then you can ruin a teacher's reputation. Really and truly, a lot of



times, without having ever even walked into that teacher's classroom, we're making comments on that because you're the expert.

Go directly to the person. This is the biggest struggle that I have. Why are you not going to your colleagues when they're doing something that's affecting your classroom? If you have a colleague that's doing something that's affecting your classroom, affecting your instructor, affecting your teachers, your students, you've got to go to them. Isn't that what you want? Would you ever want someone to go to the principal about something that you were doing, without having them come to you first?

If you have a problem with somebody, if the specials area teacher is never ready for your classroom when they pick you up... If you're a specials area teacher and you've got a teacher that's late every single day, go to that teacher and explain, "When you're 5 minutes late to my 50 minute class, your students are missing 10% of my classroom." Go to the teacher. Go directly to them, and then if it doesn't work and then you need help, then go to your administrator, but always go directly to the person.

Keep it to yourself. You don't need to be sharing with everybody around you the stresses you're having about your colleagues. Keep it to yourself. Here's what I tell my teachers. "Everybody needs a confidant at school, one person to go to when you have a concern about another teacher. You can complain about that teacher, complain about the principal, complain about anything. But when you take that complaint to a second person, you're gossiping. When you take that complaint to a third person, you're just being a bully because you're trying to get a group of people on your side." So, keep it to yourself if you have a problem with someone and go find your confidant.

Get to know them. Get to know the people that you're working with. That's what helps personal climate and culture for you with your colleagues. Get to know who they are. Get to know the struggles. Get to know the things that they're going through, and let me give you a real key to this. Get to know their children. Do you know what I appreciate more than anything? When people ask me how my children are doing. My children are adults now, and I still love it when people are concerned about my children. So, get to know your colleagues, because when you get to know your colleagues, you'll have more sympathy and you will have more empathy for them.



Then lastly, if someone acts differently than they normally do, it's probably not that situation. If someone screams and yells at you because you're on the copier during their planning, and it's never been a problem before, and all of a sudden, they're screaming and yelling, it's probably not that situation. If someone acts differently than they normally do, it's probably a different situation than they're dealing with, and it's a good opportunity to open a door for you to say, "Hey, I noticed yesterday that you were really upset with me about something that didn't seem very big. Is everything going all right?" When someone acts differently than they normally do, it's probably not that situation, and it's an open door for you to have a conversation with that teacher and develop a positive relationship with them.

So, I hope that you've enjoyed this. I'm tremendously passionate about this. I truly believe that if you want to be a good educator, what you have to have is personal climate and culture, positive personal climate and culture. You have to be willing to deal with the people and the circumstances that you're dealing with on a regular basis in a positive way, and I hope these tips have helped you.

If you ever need me, if you message me directly on Facebook, it comes directly to my email. So, I would love for you to email me, message me if you have any kind of questions. I always answer those, myself, and I really and truly hope that you'll be able to look back on this, think about some of the things that I've said, and that you'll be able to have personal climate and culture in your own classroom and in your own schools.