

Throughout the videoconferences, numerous questions and inquiries radiated around the appropriate use of a push pin, so we thought this the perfect opportunity to provide clarification.

Once upon a time, long, long ago in a distant land called ListenHeare, a group of 12 wizened sages—a.k.a. educators—came together and sat around a table. An experiment was conducted by one of the savants whispering a message to the individual on her right. One by one, each educator listened to the message imparted from the person to his/her left and repeated the message to the person on his/her right. Well, as is true with circles, the message returned to the original messenger, and... “Hark!” exclaimed the originator of this table fable. “That is NOT what I spok’ith (remember, this is long ago). Push pins are NOT messages of good news!”

Fast forward to three years ago. The Tulsa Model was on the drawing board with pieces and parts being negotiated/ collaborated between teachers and administrators. Senate Bill 2033 mandated a comprehensive, systematic feedback and support platform for all teachers exhibiting less than performance effectiveness. Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) had historically used a tattered tool called Job Targets. Either through use or misuse, the term Job Target was tainted and fell in disfavor by the staff. With the creative juices flowing, the Tulsa Model authors forwarded a slew of alternatives to Job Targets, finally settling on a more positive concept referred to as a Personal Development Plan or PDP. Remember, PDPs were Tulsa’s interpretation of SB 2033 feedback and support for teachers exhibiting less than performance effectiveness.

The writers thought and thought. Would the PDP have the same “sledge hammer” reputation as the old Job Targets? Could a gentler approach nudge a teacher to effectiveness in lieu of the immediate use of a PDP? In fact, that gentler push pin approach was incorporated as a “potential” (not to be used in every situation, e.g., health, well-being, safety issues warranting an immediate, significant wake-up call) less aggressive, less forceful tool to improve effectiveness. Thus, the push pin was born!

Fast forward to summer 2012. The Tulsa Model was rolled out to some 500 districts via 44 trainers. As part of the training, a series of PowerPoints were used as the delivery system for Tulsa Model messaging and informing evaluators about the components of the model. A specific PowerPoint on conferences and PDPs included a “Customized Feedback and Supports for Teacher Improvement” slide with information about push pins (less formal, yet documented) approaches to remedy area(s) of ineffectiveness or that need improvement.

Push pin approaches could include:

- In passing, a brief conversation in hallway, classroom, etc.
- Requested brief conversation in office.
- Written note in mailbox.
- E-mail to staff member.

Push pins are a precursor to a PDP. They were never designed as messages of “good news.” We have a plethora of other ways to say thank you, bravo, well done, amazing, etc.

Returning to the Days of Yore. The initiating sage sitting at the table delivered the following whispered message to the first person on her right: “A push pin is a precursor to a PDP. If a push pin’s effectiveness preempts a PDP, then in fact that is good news!” When the message went full circle, it ended as: “A push pin is good news!”

The moral of this story? Remember, push pins are a gentler approach to nudge a teacher to effectiveness in lieu of immediate PDP use. So, in fact, a push pin is good news if it improves effectiveness, but it is not designed to deliver good news.