



Star Power

Our students are stars. The problem is that too many teenagers just don't believe it yet. After reading this article, you'll be equipped to create a school culture where more students live kindly, learn daily, and lead meaningfully in school and beyond.

By Ryan Keliher, BA, B.Ed, MBA

The Potential Opportunity

Schools are bursting with potential – we know that already. A major problem, however, is that students too often view school as an obligation instead of an opportunity, which then limits their motivation to acquire knowledge or skills and demonstrate their highest levels of learning. In four steps, you can transform your school culture to one where students are more self-motivated, self-aware, and self-confident learners.

The 4-Step Process

1. **Develop more leaders in every class**
2. **Foster a 'Superstar Mindset' within students**
3. **Emphasize 'CHOPS' when setting direction**
4. **Implement more student-directed opportunities**

1. Develop More Leaders in Every Class

Take leadership off its pedestal

Most people do not consider themselves leaders, which is problematic when trying to create leaders. Because of the way society glorifies leadership, the notion of becoming a leader often becomes something that is destined for a select group of *other people*, not us. We often look outward in search of leadership instead of looking inward to ourselves. In order to create more leaders, we need to simplify what leadership really means and make it accessible and attainable to all.

Simplify Leadership

Historically, defining leadership has been a difficult task. When I was completing my MBA in 2013, I had a professor who quipped that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it. His comment always stuck with me as I dove deeper into the complex topic of effective leadership.

If you *google* “Characteristics of an effective leader”, 24 qualities immediately pop up:

communication	accountability	creativity	self-awareness
delegation	learning	intelligence	empathy
emotional intelligence	decision-making	problem-solving	strategy
resilience	innovation	courage	decisiveness
integrity	confidence	humility	goals
active listening	transparency	positivity	honesty

Within the search result links that follow the above table, you'll find that even more characteristics appear on more lists. For instance, when you visit the *Harvard Business*

School Online, “ability to influence others” is added to the list. When you visit *Forbes*, you’ll find “managing complexity” and “promoting teamwork” as top considerations. The *Center for Creative Leadership* has “gratitude” on its list. Visit more websites and find even more exceptional qualities.

All the traits listed above are tremendous; however, when looking at the list in its entirety, it’s daunting. Few people would read the list and say “yes, that pretty much sums me up!” What happens instead is that we make leadership out to be something bigger than ourselves. As mentioned, the notion of becoming a leader becomes something that is designated primarily for a select group of *other people with special abilities*, not the everyday person. Then we need to account for the varying leadership frameworks and styles. If you google “leadership styles”, there are 12 different leadership styles that immediately appear in the results:

Democratic	Transformational	Coaching	Transactional
Autocratic	Servant	Affiliative	Charismatic Authority
Strategic	Charismatic	Authoritarian	Bureaucratic

Within the subsequent google links, even more leadership styles like “laissez-faire”, “delegative”, and “visionary” emerge. Each style has its own unique elements, pros, and cons. There are so many different leadership styles, frameworks and characteristics that the concept of leadership can become more complex than it is accessible. But what if there was a way to simplify leadership? Good news, keep reading.

Simplify Leadership

When we consider the aforementioned tables, obviously, we cannot demonstrate all of those leadership qualities at once, but we can demonstrate any one of them at any time. Each of these traits when acted upon with good intention creates an act of leadership.

Using this logic, the following definitions simplify the notion that we are all leaders, and contemplate how effective leadership is action-based and not title-based:

Leadership: *Acting on the genuine belief that you can generate positive outcomes for others and/or yourself.*

Effective Leadership: *The degree to which your actions generate positive outcomes for others and/or yourself.*

Effective leadership tactics or styles are never set in stone. Leadership is fluid, and effective leadership is both an inward and outward looking exercise. In order to best serve others, you should strive to be the best leader of your own life, too.

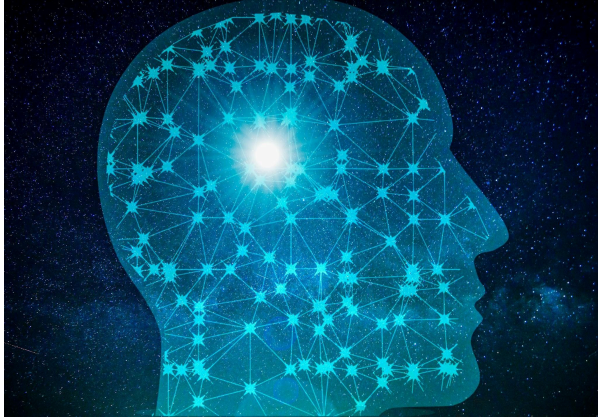
Identify Leadership

Telling someone they are a leader is not enough. We must show others the incredible abilities and opportunities they have to lead. We must make them understand that they are leaders. For example, in this exchange right now, one might suppose that I am taking on a leadership role in writing this article, which is true based on the above definition. I do genuinely believe that this information could help others and, as such, I felt compelled to share it. You, as the reader, however, are also a leader in this exchange of information. You are choosing to read this information in the belief that it might prove helpful to yourself and others. Now, whether this information exchange becomes an effective act of leadership will depend on how well I've done as a leader to share it, and then how you as a leader choose to assess, digest, and use it. With a shared understanding that we are both leaders, our chances of success rise. Leader-to-leader interaction is the ultimate form of effective leadership as both parties understand the immense collective power of their individual actions.

Discuss Leadership

Explicitly discussing acts of leadership and leadership opportunities with students can help them realize that their specific actions have the immense power to create positive reactions for themselves and others. Our students are leaders, both in their own lives and in the lives of others. The more that students recognize and believe in their ability to create positive reactions, the more opportunities they will seize, and the more they will lead. To quote legendary coach Mike Krycewski, "I don't view myself as a basketball coach. I view myself as a leader who happens to coach basketball." We are all leaders first. A focus on leading will lead to more-focused learning.

2. Foster a 'Superstar Mindset' within Students



What is a Superstar Mindset?

A Superstar Mindset is a genuine desire to develop and contribute.

The concept of growth mindset is wildly popular in education. Developed by psychologist Dr. Carol Dweck, growth mindset is a belief that one's abilities and

intelligence can be developed and improved over time through effort, perseverance, and learning. This concept contrasts with a fixed mindset, which is the belief that abilities are innate and cannot be changed. Individuals with a growth mindset are more likely to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, see effort as a path to mastery, and learn from criticism. By promoting a growth mindset, schools aim to help students see challenges as opportunities for growth, rather than obstacles to be avoided. This can lead to improved academic performance, as well as increased motivation and self-confidence.

A *Superstar mindset* takes Dweck's growth mindset theory further by considering the *contribution effect* of a person's beliefs and actions. With a superstar mindset, there is not only a belief that purposeful actions can improve skills and knowledge over time, but also an extended belief that those actions can generate a positive impact on individuals, groups, situations, and environments.

Students who demonstrate a superstar mindset become increasingly purposeful in how they approach school and increasingly prepared for life beyond school. Students embracing a superstar mindset will cultivate qualities that hold them in high demand and even higher regard. They will sharpen their skill sets and brighten each room they enter. They will create more moments in their lives where they live kindly, learn daily, and lead meaningfully. The more of these moments they create, the more fulfilled their lives become, both now and in the future.

Take a look at the difference between the two mindsets on the following page:

Growth Mindset vs. Superstar Mindset: Elevating Student Potential

Core	Growth Mindset	Superstar Mindset
Belief:	Abilities can be developed	Development with a purpose beyond the self
Focus:	Effort, learning, and resilience	Character, habits, and impact
Goal:	Encourages continuous personal improvement	Encourages personal growth and uplifting others
Quote:	"Success is not an accident, success is a choice." - Steph Curry	"Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value." - Albert Einstein

The Superstar Mindset builds on Dweck's valuable growth mindset work by adding depth and a broader perspective on student development and engagement. A superstar mindset encourages others to think beyond personal achievement and consider the impact on themselves, their peers, and community.

*Superstar Mindset: A genuine desire to **develop** and **contribute***

What we **develop**: Skills, abilities, relationships, habits, high-standards, integrity, self-awareness, self-confidence, perspective, understanding, opportunities, moments, strategies, reputations, knowledge, well-roundedness, and the list goes on...

How we **contribute**: To our own lives, to those around us, and to our collective environments.

Superstar Mindset Learner Profile:

1. Demonstrates core belief that their actions can create positive reactions for themselves and others.
2. Recognizes school as an opportunity to develop and display their personal character, positive habits, knowledge, and skills.
3. Has a genuine desire to develop and contribute positively.
4. Feels a sense of control over their educational journey and future.
5. Lives kindly, learns daily, and leads meaningfully in school and beyond.

3. Emphasize 'CHOPS' when Setting Direction with Students

Having the Chops to Embrace the Journey of School

I once read about a college basketball scout who, whenever he heard of an incredible talent, would naturally go watch the kid play. The interesting part was that the scout would go to the game hoping that the kid would play poorly.

Seems counter-productive, right? The scout, however, was most interested in assessing elements of the athlete's game that had little to do with technical skill acquisition, but so much to do with achieving consistent levels of high performance.

The scout wanted to know about the athlete's habits when things were going south. He wanted to see the body language of an individual who was struggling to find success. He wanted to witness the true character of the person.

The scout already knew that if the player's name made it across his desk, skill was no longer the most important part of the assessment. He actually wanted to know if the player had the chops to contribute on a daily basis, knowing that every day on the path to success is not a good day.

This story stuck with me as a reminder of what matters most when trying to sustain and explain consistent performance over the long term. It led me to develop a framework that emphasizes focusing on the journey of who kids can become, not just what they can do.

What is the CHOPS Framework?

CHOPS is a holistic performance planning and evaluative framework. Its name is an acronym that stands for Character, Habits, Opportunities, Priorities, and Skills. The framework is useful for daily or long-term planning and evaluation. It is useful for self-assessment or external assessment.

Here is an example of how it works in a classroom setting:

Outcome:	Create and Deliver a Class Presentation	Date: April 5, 2024
Identity:	Become an effective presenter.	
<i>Core elements of high performance</i>	<i>Select from guide or create your own</i>	<i>Notes/Eval:</i>
Character	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Calmness 2. Courage 3. Responsibility 	
Habits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thinking and communicating with Clarity and precision 2. Persisting 3. Striving for accuracy 	
Opportunities (for growth, contribution, and support)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Step out of my comfort zone 2. Help others learn course content 3. Seek advice from teacher/peers 	
Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparation (over procrastination) 2. Visuals (over text when possible) 3. Confidence (over memorization) 	
Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication skills 2. Visual-design skills 3. Time-management skills 	

The CHOPS framework acknowledges the importance of skill development while emphasizing other crucial identity-based elements of high performance and goal execution that are major predictors of longstanding success but sometimes overlooked. Plus, by taking a holistic approach to performance, there's a much better chance that the skills (outcomes) will improve as a result. The framework incorporates elements of growth mindset, superstar mindset, and identity-based goal setting. It focuses on the type of person you want to become, which inherently drives the behaviors needed to achieve outcomes. In the above example, I've used this template to help many shy and anxious students realize that they can also be courageous, clear, and confident communicators.

Using the CHOPS Template:

Step 1: Identify the goal or plan

Step 2: Identify character qualities required (from the list or add your own)

Step 3: Identify habits required (I use the *16 Habits of Mind* by Art Costa and Bena Kallick)

Step 4: Identify opportunities for growth, support, and contribution

Step 5: Identify top priority considerations

Step 6: Identify top skills required

Step 7: Review, assess, and adjust as required

Character qualities

Calmness	Courage	Compassion	Integrity	Kindness
Justice	Humility	Honesty	Respect	Loyalty
Forgiveness	Tolerance	Acceptance	Gratitude	Responsibility
Fairness	Patience	Self-Control	Self-Awareness	Love

16 Habits of Mind

<i>Persisting</i>	<i>Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision</i>	<i>Managing impulsivity</i>	<i>Gathering data through all senses</i>
<i>Listening with understanding and empathy</i>	<i>Creating, imagining, innovating</i>	<i>Thinking Flexibly</i>	<i>Responding with wonderment and awe</i>
<i>Thinking about thinking (metacognition)</i>	<i>Taking responsible risks</i>	<i>Striving for Accuracy</i>	<i>Finding Humor</i>
<i>Questioning and posing problems</i>	<i>Thinking interdependently</i>	<i>Applying past knowledge to new situations</i>	<i>Remaining open to continuous learning</i>

4. Implement More Student-directed Learning Opportunities

Make it More About Them

In order to have more students feel connected to the curriculum, we need to continuously place students at the center of learning and the outcomes at the end.

What are examples?

- Culturally-responsive teaching
- Project-based Learning
- Self-reflection
- Group work
- Co-constructed success criteria
- Student choice

What about assessment?

- Provide more advice than feedback during the learning process
- More formative assessment than summative
- Assess product, observations, and conversations
- Include self-assessment
- Focus more on distance covered than peak performance

What else works?

- Connect the present to future
- Embrace discomfort
- Balance your communication
- Frame challenges as opportunities
- Anchor charts, word walls, quotes
- Universal Design for Learning

Key Takeaways

Out with the Old

In our current education system, all of our students have incredible potential, but:

1. Student grades are often the main identifier of student growth
2. Too many students view school as an obligation rather than an opportunity
3. It's becoming increasingly difficult to connect with disconnected students

All of the above are bad for increasing the joy and motivation that bring out a person's incredible potential.

In with the New

By implementing the 4-step process outlined in this article, you can uncover a learning system where:

1. A focus on leading leads to more-focused learning
2. More students view school as an opportunity than an obligation
3. It becomes easier to connect with more students
4. More students discover their incredible potential

From the timeless words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education." To the timely words of Lionel Messi, who said, "the day you think there are no improvements to be made is a sad day for anyone." To the profound influence you will have on your students this year – superstars are truly everywhere, around you and within you.

Thanks for reading, and thanks for leading.

Best wishes,

Ryan

Appendix A

CHOPS High-Performance Framework

Plan/Goal/Outcome:	_____	Date:
<i>CHOPS Framework</i>	<i>Core Elements of High Performance</i>	<i>Notes/Eval:</i>
Character	1. 2. 3.	
Habits	1. 2. 3.	
Opportunities (for growth, contribution, and support)	1. 2. 3.	
Priorities	1. 2. 3.	
Skills	1. 2. 3.	

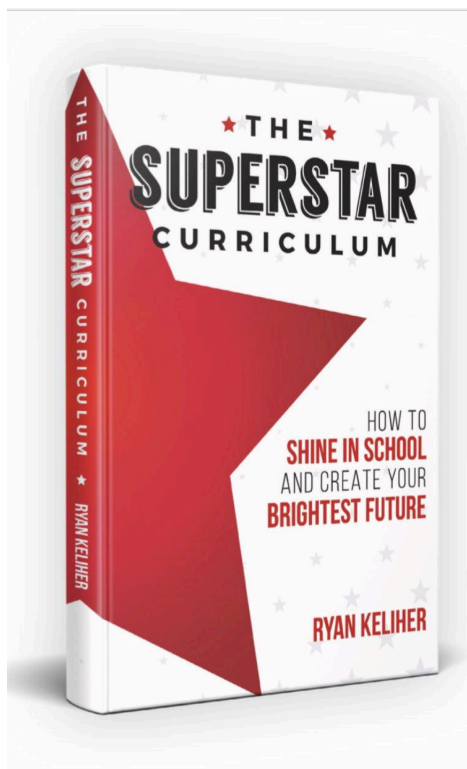
About Ryan Keliher



Ryan Keliher is a high school educator who spent the past 17 years teaching, coaching, and motivating teenagers. He is the creator of The Superstar Mindset and the author of *The Superstar Curriculum: How to Shine in School and Create Your Brightest Future*. His self-published book has helped thousands of teenagers across North America unlock their potential and transform the way they approach school and life.

Ryan is a former valedictorian, team captain of a nationally-ranked university basketball program, and an Academic All-Canadian who is passionate about leadership and personal growth. In his spare time, he is a sub 3-hour marathon runner. Ryan lives in Prince Edward Island, Canada with his wife Siobhan and two growing boys, Rafa and Reese. For more information about Ryan and *The Superstar Curriculum*, please visit www.ryankeliher.com.

Superstar Testimonials



"It's unlike any book I've ever read. It changed the way I view school."

"It has done nothing but encourage me to become a better person each day."

"Superstar Curriculum, although targeted at the teenage reader, is a beneficial read for educators."