



Action Packed Teacher's Guide: 8 Secrets to Teaching High School Students Leadership Skills

We all want high school students to become strong young leaders, but it's easier said than done.

Teachers give their students so much, so why do some students still fall short of becoming an effective student leader? If you're looking to build critical leadership skills in your students while still teaching a meaningful core curriculum, below are 8 tips to help you manage the process.

1. BE A LEADER

High school students learn by seeing and then doing. When they see teachers, coaches, and parents leading well, they subconsciously are receiving the tools they need to become leaders themselves. Specific advice for teachers: speak with confidence, listen well, and guide students with care. They see more of this than you may realize.



2. EMPOWER

I have never been a fan of the “sit and get” presentation style. When students are forced to sit through a 30-minute lecture, they miss out on potential opportunities to speak and share ideas, communicate with classmates, or engage in their learning. When teachers trust and empower students, they open the door to building both content knowledge and leadership capacity. Specific ways to do this would be to have a student or group teach a lesson, allow time for group discussions amongst peers (encourage students to ask each other questions about the topics being covered in class), or develop an interactive activity to showcase a lesson through motion and action.



3. ENGAGE

If students are falling asleep, not only are they not becoming stronger leaders, they aren't even learning the content!! Being an engaging teacher is not just about telling a joke or two during your lecture, it is about asking open-ended questions and creating a comfortable environment where students feel as though they can give their thoughts without ridicule. It is about taking students aside for one-on-one conversations at times. It is about encouraging and building up the difficult students (as hard as it may be) so even they feel like they can participate in class. I'll never forget when my 5th grade teacher made our entire class memorize a poem and individually sit next to her and recite it out loud one-by-one. I've never rehearsed something more in my life – this type of personal attention helps students stay engaged, and better engagement leads to better participation, which leads to stronger young leaders.

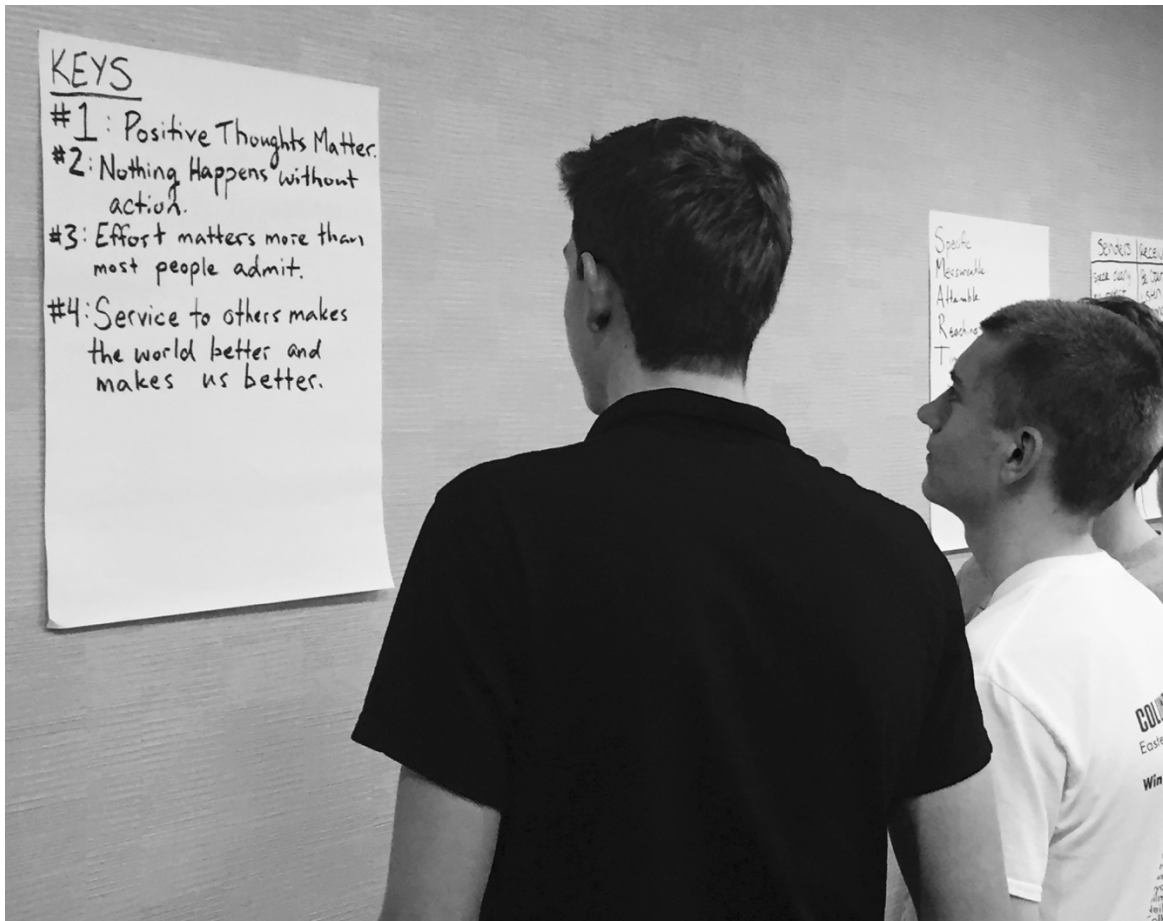
4. ENCOURAGE

What high school students tend to find out time and again is life is hard. They are thrown into all kinds of scenarios they've never yet experienced, and they don't always get it right the first time (or the second). However, standout students know a failure is only a failure if they don't learn from it – and standout teachers know the right times to point this out to their students. Any teacher will tell you they have acted more as a parent to certain students than the student's real parents. It's important to remember discipline only goes so far. Students are more likely to stay after class, participate in discussions, or lead group projects when they haven't been disciplined or berated for every little thing, but rather have been built up and encouraged/rewarded when doing the right things.



5. EMBRACE THE STRUGGLE

This title is a little misleading, but I just wrote three titles starting with the letter “E” and figured I shouldn’t end the streak. The idea here is to let your students embrace the struggle, not you as the teacher (teachers have it hard enough as is). High school is not just about learning the content in a class curriculum – it is about learning the critical thinking skills necessary to make it at the next level of education and in the work force. Teachers are so passionate about what they do, and they, for good reason, want to teach students every chance they get. However, if their version of teaching is simply providing answers, they may be doing more harm than good. The best teachers know when to provide direction and expertise, and when to encourage students to think, test, and experiment. This type of discipline can be hard for teachers who love nothing more than imparting knowledge onto their students, but it is critical to practice some caring restraint to encourage students to think on their own and be confident with making decisions (two characteristics of a good leader).



6. AVOID THE BAILOUT KID

There's always going to be one know-it-all who answers every question you ask. Deep down, you're going to love this kid. They are smart, engaged, and well-behaved. They even keep their phone in their locker during your class. They make your job less awkward because they remove that dreaded silence after you ask a question. But, if you consistently let this student answer on behalf of the class, the rest of the class learns it is okay to disengage. They learn that know-it-all Nancy is going to respond to every question and they won't have to offer anything if they simply avoid all eye contact. It can be hard to hear crickets when you ask a question and wait for hands to raise, but it is just as awkward (if not more) for your students. If you find a student is answering all your questions, politely note that your star student isn't allowed to answer the next couple questions and work to get other students involved. One important thing to remember, you still want to maintain a safe and comfortable space for your students. Calling on students at random is okay, but if they don't know an answer, it's not in your or their best interest to make them feel any worse than they already do. Simply move on and ask someone else.



7. PROVIDE A TITLE

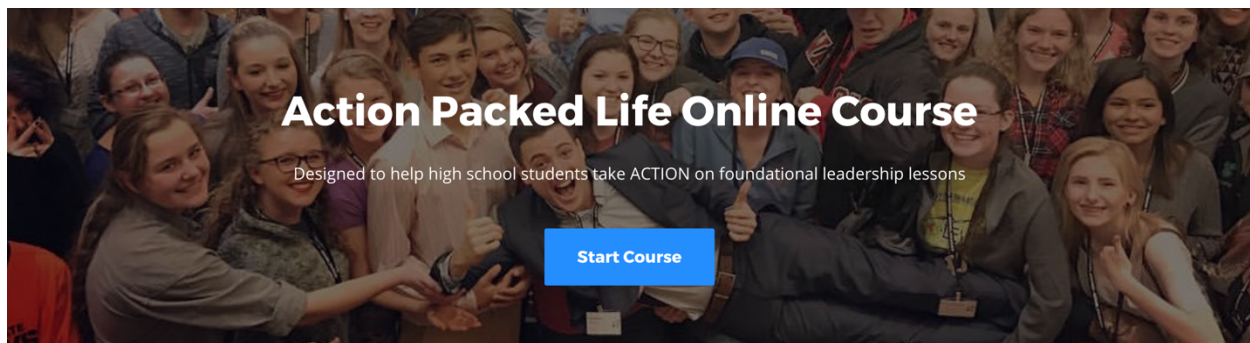
Plenty of students would love to be a leader in a group activity if they had the chance. They want the responsibility and to feel like they've accomplished something, they want to tell their friends what their team accomplished, and they desperately want to stop being bored in high school. This is not the description of all students by any means, but these students are out there. Peer-to-peer learning can be extremely valuable, but it will take some creativity on your part. Find ways you can designate students as the "Leader." In the entrepreneurial world, people have told me, "If you can't pay someone what they deserve, give them a fancy title." People love titles, and they may even take less pay to be able to have a fancier title on their business card. High school students are no different – they secretly want to be the "Team Lead" or the "Group Expert." In sports, they want to be "Team Captain." In band, they want to be "First Chair." If you find creative ways to give them an opportunity paired with a nice title, you will help them step up to the plate as a leader. (Warning – if you give out lame titles, this advice may backfire. You might want to ask the class what titles they'd want to receive).





8. PROVIDE THE RIGHT RESOURCES

Leadership books and curriculums are often overlooked because it is not a teacher's core focus. However, bringing the right resources into the classroom can make all the difference – and it doesn't have to be a burden to find the right materials! My company provides the Action Packed Life online course to help high school students become stronger leaders. It is made up of 16 video lessons and gives specific actions students can take to build their leadership skills. We operate under the assumption that a lot of little actions can add up to make a large impact. To learn more about the Action Packed Life online course, visit www.actionpackedlife.com today.



If you're seeing an absence of leadership in the students you teach, try one (or all) of the techniques above to foster leadership as a skill in your students. You may see some drastic changes in the students who just needed a little push.

What have you done to build strong young leaders within your classroom and school? I love to hear your feedback. Send me an e-mail anytime at kyle@actionpackedleadership.com.

For more information about Kyle Willkom as a speaker, visit www.kylewillkom.com. To learn more about Kyle's books, visit www.actionpackedleadership.com.