



Chapter 17

It Takes Chutzpah

Note: this chapter was written to celebrate our beloved Boston Celtics. For the previous 24 years, we had 16 chapters because the Celtics had won 16 championships. After they won their 17th championship in 2008, we chose to add this chapter.

What is chutzpah and why is it the title of this chapter?

One definition of chutzpah from Wikipedia is the quality of audacity, for good or for bad. The word derives from the Hebrew word חֲצִפָּה (meaning "insolence", "audacity", and "impertinence." The modern English usage of the word has taken on a wider spectrum of meaning, however, having been popularized through vernacular use, film, literature, and television. In Hebrew, chutzpah is used indignantly, to describe someone who has over-stepped the boundaries of accepted behavior with no shame. But in Yiddish and English, chutzpah has developed ambivalent and even positive connotations. Chutzpah can be used to express admiration for non-conformist but gutsy audacity. Leo Rosten in The Joys of Yiddish defines chutzpah as "gall, brazen nerve, effrontery, incredible 'guts,' presumption plus arrogance such as no other word and no other language can do justice to." In this sense, chutzpah expresses both strong disapproval and a grudging admiration.

There is indeed a connection between chutzpah and moving your school -- and yourself -- forward with technology.

Technology in most contexts is a barometer of change. It constantly challenges us to consider the status quo and contemplate the future. It takes chutzpah -- and thinking outside of the box -- to move forward to create programs that meet the needs of digital natives and 21st century learning.

Situation #1: I am a teacher with poor typing skills. Everything I do takes more time. What do I do?

ITC for an adult professional to recognize that it is necessary to start a daily practice routine. There are numerous typing programs to practice with the home row and other keys. But there is no magic bullet with typing. You have to put in your practice time just as if you wanted to play a musical instrument. ITC for an adult to practice his or her typing 15-20 minutes per day.

Situation #2: All decisions regarding technology are made by the computer department for whom security and bandwidth are the dominant themes. When I try to bring up the importance of training for faculty and support, they dismiss my concerns.

ITC to suggest to your head of school that he/she should create a committee which includes division heads, department heads, several enthusiastic computer using teachers as well as members of the computer department to guide technology policies and programs at your school. It is a mistake in a school to trust all decisions about technology growth to a limited number of people, many of whom are not aware of current thought on classroom pedagogy.

Situation #3: My children in middle school are frequent users of Facebook and do not respond to my concerns as parent. What do I do?

ITC to say to your children that you are the parent and that you do not want them to use the Internet in their bedrooms. ITC to say to them that you want their passwords to any email or social network group that they are part of. ITC to say to you that you need to learn about these social networking sites. ITC to say that you should open an account on Facebook or myspace and inform your children that you have an account and you want to be included on their friend list. One NYC Independent School parent who happens to work in the office of the District Attorney makes it clear to her children that this is her computer and her house; her children can have usage privileges only if they follow certain rules including providing her logins and passwords to any accounts they use.

Situation #4: Faculty members continue to store gigabytes of illegal music on their computers. We have a strong policy about illegal software and illegal music that is not enforced. I am part of the technology committee here. What do we do?

ITC to bring in an outsider to help educate your faculty and administrators to the issues of honesty regarding software and music. You must try to solve the problem by creating and allowing dialogue to happen within the school. There are numerous stories out there of people who have realized they have made mistakes and helped to become change models for others. Additionally, teachers need to model proper copyright use to their students; student and teacher creations must follow Fair Use guidelines. ITC to stop relying on Google image searches for all projects.

Situation #5: The head of my Science Department frequently downloads some of our school owned software and brings it home. I am the technology coordinator here. When I have confronted him, he is arrogant and challenges me to turn him into the head of school whom he says does the same thing. What do I do?

ITC to tell another adult that he or she is acting improperly and dishonestly. And yet if we do not find an appropriate way to do so, we are refusing the opportunity to change the world, one person at a time. We talk to students frequently about these topics and even help our students role-play about what they would/should do when another student does so-and-so. Although ITC and inner strength to do so at the adult level, it is generally the best practice.

Situation #6: The administrative tech person here prioritizes the needs of his division here and minimizes most of the educational priorities? What do I do?

ITC to challenge someone in such a key role at a school. More to the point, it takes collaboration and a number of people to do so. Division Heads and teachers using computers must be part of a technology group so that they can help prioritize the direction for the school. It is common for schools to spend a lot of money on the administrative side of computing since many people buy into the the notion that “kids are like fish in water and will just learn computer skills on their own” so why spend money of them. Convincing the leadership of the school that money needs to be spent on faculty training and acquisition of related software/hardware takes chutzpah and the support of a number of people in your school.

Situation #7: My school will not allow students to do anything on the Web because one parent complained about Internet safety. What do I do?

ITC to talk to your parents and try to put the worries of Internet safety in perspective. Although Internet safety is indeed important, one must have a balanced view and give students real world experiences using Web 2.0 tools.

Situation #8: My school does not want any use of YouTube, so we have an Internet filter to block YouTube. What do I do?

ITC to convince people that their anxieties and fears about inappropriate website is overblown and preventing the use of valuable educational resources. The YouTube of 2004 is now a lifetime behind us. Teachers are now incredibly empowered by the use of YouTube videos to enhance their classes. To quote one faculty pioneer:

“So, for the holidays this year, I have unwrapped the gift of YouTube! Before our Pioneer training on how to access You Tube, I had never used the site. I thought it was only good for viewing videos of silly people doing silly things. Imagine my surprise and excitement to find that You Tube has so much more to offer. I have used YouTube to show the eighth grade clips from the PBS program Frontier House; I showed the seventh