



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

grade clips from [A Christmas Carol](#) after we read each scene. I can see that You Tube is going to be an amazing tool!”

Situation #9: When adults have meetings, it is so common to see people using laptops to do non-related Web surfing and e-mail during the meeting. What do we do?

ITC to bring this up and ITC to address it. Some colleges have banned the use of laptops by students -- or turned wireless off in the lecture rooms -- because students sit in classes doing e-mail and surfing the Web during class. But this issue is common at the adult level as well -- at faculty meetings at some schools and at technology workshops that involve tech coordinators and tech directors. Multitasking and rudeness are not the same thing. When someone is talking to an audience, it is rude to be reading a magazine and it is rude to be using a computer for non-related items. The fact that many of us choose to watch TV, talk on the phone and surf the Web at the same time does not suggest that rudeness during presentations and classes is acceptable.

Situation #10: How important is it for the technology director at a school to have teaching or educational experience?

ITC to express an opinion that makes people uncomfortable and yet this is exactly what is necessary at times. Jim Collins from *Good to Great* fame has popularized the story of Alfred Sloane telling his board of directors that if we are all in agreement, then let us postpone the decision until we have some genuine disagreement so that we might know what the decision is all about.

At the NAIS Task Force discussion, this exact point of contention came up regarding the technology leadership in a school. So many schools recently have been hiring the technology director to be to someone from the world of business who has never taught. The point made by one member of the task force was that running the IT side of things at a school was relatively straightforward. The challenging part of technology implementation always involves the faculty and the educational mission of the school. He proposed to the Task Force that we implement the principle that “the technology director should have an educational, classroom background and be part of the Admin Team at the school.” While this did not get adopted by the NAIS Task Force, ITC to at least put it on the table!

Situation #11: What is the preferred height of an interactive whiteboard to be mounted on the wall?

ITC to tell professionals that you disagree with their assessment and want something different from what they recommend. Nevertheless, this is exactly what is needed with companies that mount IWBs on your walls. An adult who is 5’ tall cannot reach much higher than 72” and yet these companies insist on mounting these boards at 78” or 80” above the ground. Students in lower grades tend to be shorter and it is even more problematic for them. At one school, we had to insist to the installing team (none of

whom were teachers) and put a formal disclaimer in writing in order to get them to mount the interactive whiteboards to be 72” from the ground. This note posted on a tech listserv says it all!

To: nycist@googlegroups.com

Sent: Wed, 29 Apr 2009

Subject: Height of SMART Boards in Lower School classrooms

Our most coveted SMART Board in our lower school is 20” off the floor. Earlier boards we installed at the recommended height had to be lowered because teachers were having their students climb onto chairs to reach them. We put the 20” inch one in that low because of space restrictions in that room and a tall-ish teacher would have to watch their head, but the teachers agree that it’s at the optimal height for kids in 2-3rd grade.

Situation #12: How to deal with a company that is supplying training but not doing it very well?

ITC to find a way to tell any professional that he or she is not doing a good enough job. We had a situation at my school where the SMART Board company was supplying training as part of their services but each session was basically a “show and tell” instead of helping to empower the teachers with hands on practice. I said to the supervisor who was doing the training that I was going to start coughing each time he wrote on the SMART Board and that I wanted him to ask volunteers to come to the SMART Board and learn the skills he wanted to demonstrate so that they were in control. He took the comment in good cheer (I thought) and smiled each time I started coughing. I never knew until many years later that he took this request so much to heart that he went back to his team of trainers and had them formally change their approach.

Situation #13: We are spending a huge amount of money per year on some administrative software that is “one of a kind” and requires a custom programmer?

ITC to cut your losses and buy into the financial model of “ignoring past expenses” and making a financial decision based on “looking forward only.” If we have spent significant annual money on a custom-designed software program, there is a tendency to allow the sum of that money to influence the decision as to what to do next. But it is absolutely the best practice to ignore past spending and to contemplate the options for next year based simply on the upcoming financial costs. Most of the time, a software program that was custom designed from years ago and requires significant money to maintain is the wrong choice.

Situation #14: What to do when your head of school wants to add more and more computers but not more people to manage them?

ITC to tell your head of school that we do not have the humanware to deal with more computers added to the mix. This is exactly what happened to me back in 1996 when I was a one person computer department and the number of computers was growing by 10-20 each year.

Situation #15: What to do when you have a full time job but it is clear that there is/was an important need to help teachers and schools make progress with technology?

Ironically, this is how The Teaching Company and Summercore began in 1982. After conducting a first teacher training workshop with computers and reading the book *Mindstorms*, I decided to “quit my day job.” I never realized until this chapter that it was an important example of ITC.

Situation #16: Parents are concerned about the school’s use of social networking tools, including blogs, wikis, Nings, and Twitter. How can the school address those concerns?

Parent Education is central, but the focus of the discussions must move from the issues of internet safety and the fear of predators to the more realistic concerns about cyberbullying, sexting, media literacy, social media literacy, and digital citizenship. For example, according to the New York Times (*Teaching Teens about Harassment*, 1/27/09), “About 39 percent of teenagers have sent sexual e-mail messages or instant messages, according to a 2008 study from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.” Discussions should also include the importance of social networking sites for the 21st century learner: Facebook and YouTube have become critical components of our participatory Democracy, and, as such, these sites need to be integrated into the our schools to remain relevant to social media's most avid practitioners. To engage Digital Natives, schools cannot discourage or block social media's use; indeed, they should encourage it. Twitter might scare parents, but it has become a source of news and information.

Chutzpah at TEDxNYED Talk March 2011: The name of the talk (see tinyurl.com/ted34) was *Ruffling Feathers*, delivered backwards in Jimmy Fallon *Put it In Reverse* style:

- Skills and projects are not mutually exclusive. Why are so many people negative about skills learning, believing that technology has to be only about glitzy and sexy Web 2.0 projects?
- It is important to move our students out of their comfort zone through technology and international connections.
- Myth? Every teacher should be teaching by using technology.
- The Golden Ticket? Educational innovation is not a quick fix. The relationship between the key technology person and a key administrator becomes the best way to create an evolution of substance in our schools.
- Too many males are in positions of leadership in our schools. We need more females.