

FISH PHILOSOPHY

@ G.S. LAKIE

A culture that has united staff and students since 2003.



Who knew 4 simple concepts could have such a BIG impact?

- *Be There*
- *Make Their Day*
- *Choose Your Attitude*
- *Play*



I remember feeling like I got punched in the mouth on the first day I started at Lakie. The enthusiasm and engagement levels from not only the students, but also the staff were literally through the roof! It felt like a place that valued the diversity, creativity and talent in children and everybody pulled together to find a way that they could nurture and grow those qualities. There were so many opportunities for students and everybody pulled together to honour those opportunities and to make them rich.

There are two significantly important aspects that contributed to that, in my mind. First, you needed the right people in the building, and Lakie was stacked with a gifted staff. Once people got to Lakie, they stayed and they worked hard together and had fun doing it.

Secondly, the foundation that united the people was "The Fish Philosophy" (Play, Be There, Make Their Day and Choose Your Attitude).

The energy in the building was palpable and grounded in a simple way of doing things that made sense to staff and students. Fish Fridays were the opportunity to showcase and be goofy and perform and have fun. Personally, I have never worked as hard nor had as much fun as I did when I was at Lakie! Go Fish!!!

Dave LeGrandeur

I can definitely provide some of my thoughts and the impact that the fish philosophy had on me during my time at Lakie! The two that stood out for me were "**choose your attitude**" and "**make their day**." I believe these were vital to making connections with students and staff each and every day I walked through the doors of Lakie. Having a positive and upbeat attitude is contagious and puts a smile everyone's face. "Making their day" makes me think of Fish Fridays in the main atrium at Lakie. These Fridays were really memorable and special! Students and staff could showcase their unique skills and abilities for the enjoyment of others and these really made my day as I'm sure it did for others!

Jared DeGroot

I loved the fish philosophy! It was wonderful that our staff embraced it and Doug with his love of fun made people buy in. I can imagine how hard it would be to implement this during these Covid days. **Being there** was one of the principles that meant the most in my job. In my opinion it was the most important as we all want to do the best for our students. I have to say that working at Lakie was the most fun I had in my career and I think the fish philosophy made for positive, caring staff.

Deb Lysak

Oh, how I miss Fish Friday. Man, did they ever create and cultivate such a culture of belonging and citizenship. I have wished every school I've been to since would adopt something similar.



Scan for video message from John Malcolm

LAKIE AND THE FISH PHILOSOPHY

I've worked in many schools and few have compared to Lakie! One of the things that make Lakie so special is the FISH Philosophy. It is so impactful for an entire school to have a unified focus that is lived in everyday experiences. In my opinion, its impact starts at the staff level by creating a sense of belonging, enabling relationships to develop and creating a positive work environment. We are better educators when we are happy to come to work and feel supported by our colleagues—the impact is then filtered down to the students.

Be There – Hump Days

At Lakie, I felt like I was part of a team. A big reason for this was that the staff got together as a group frequently. “Hump Days” brought the staff together weekly in a social and fun manner which provides the opportunity to get to “Be There”, get to know each other personally and build relationships. Developing relationships lends to collaboration and seeking help when you need it, which ultimately makes us better teachers.

Make Their Day – Supporting Each Other During the Good and Bad Times

It is difficult for educators to support their students if they don't feel supported themselves. I can think of many times that other staff “Made My Day” with kind words or gestures. But, the one that stands out was when many staff members took the time to stop by my classroom when my Grandfather passed away. This showed me that my colleagues supported me and cared about me on a personal level.

Play – Fish Fridays

Students learn best when we connect and develop a relationship with them. I cannot think of a better way to connect outside the classroom than by having fun together on Fish Fridays. It gives the students a chance to see their educators in a different light – having fun, being silly, stepping out of their comfort zone. This makes us more relatable and approachable which makes us better educators in the classroom.

Choose your attitude – Working

Towards a Common Goal

We often have to ask our students to “Choose Their Attitude” during learning and we will get a better response if we, as educators, lead by example every day in choosing ours. It is so much easier to choose a positive attitude when you work in a positive environment, feel connected and are having fun! We can be at our best more often when those around us are also focusing on choosing their attitude as well.

Jen Martin

It is so impactful for an entire school to have a unified focus that is lived in everyday experiences.

The FISH philosophy is something I still remember even 8 years after leaving GS Lakie. The environment at Lakie was a very positive one for me; in fact of the several schools I attended (I moved around quite a bit as a kid), Lakie has always held my favourite memories. I think a lot of that has to do with the positive atmosphere that was upheld by the words **Be There, Play, Make Their Day, and Choose Your Attitude**. I'm not sure if they still happen now, but one of my favourite things about the school was FISH Fridays. I think that weekly activity really gave the school a sense of unity; regardless of what grade you were in or what friend group you belonged to, everyone was welcome, and everyone had a great time.

While I don't necessarily repeat the words of the FISH philosophy to myself nowadays, I think the spirit of the philosophy is something that has stuck with me. I always try to be kind to those around me and to approach life with a positive attitude, and I wouldn't be surprised if some of that stems from the FISH philosophy being such a large part of my middle school years.

Angela Wood

The philosophy is simple but very powerful.



Fish was my first introduction to culture/character education in a school so it's A LOT nostalgic for me. Since those beginning teaching days, I've been a part of school's that have adopted other 'programs' such as: tribes, circle of courage, values and character words, leader in me/7 habits and manners matter.

To be quite frank, it doesn't really matter what the school you belong to adopts, so long as there is something! It's the pits working in a building where nothing is emphasised or where a few people do all the work to create something that never truly gains momentum. It's important everyone contributes something! Anyway, I've thought a lot about my preference and if I had my pick - it would be Fish!

My favourite memory is actually my first introduction to Fish my first year teaching. We had a staff meeting/pd day or something. We were given an overview/presentation of the Fish Philosophy. Then we had to write down what each tenet meant to us. We were put into 4 mixed groups and had to come up with a skit/song/presentation that reflected one of the tenets we were given and include all of our ideas about it. I don't know if there were props or what but I never laughed so hard in my life and instantly grew to love my new staff so quickly. It probably wasn't exactly like that, but it's how I recall that day!

Here's why I like Fish best:

It's easy to remember. This is important in creating a common language amongst staff and students. It's simple to get buy in and simple for students to learn and reference. You have to do the work with them though, so they know what it means to the school, to you as a staff member and then hopefully for themselves as learners too!

It's easy to live and make your own. It can be as deep or as shallow as you want it to be. Below are some of my personal associations. (There are a lot more and they changed over time. This is just what comes to my mind tonight.)

Be there.

Be present when you're with others. Have their back, listen. Show up on time, prepared and ready to work each day. (Also, pick a reasonable time to leave each day and then go home at that time.)

Make their day.

Say hello/goodbye. Smile, genuinely. Be authentic and thoughtful of others. Stay positive and participate in activities.

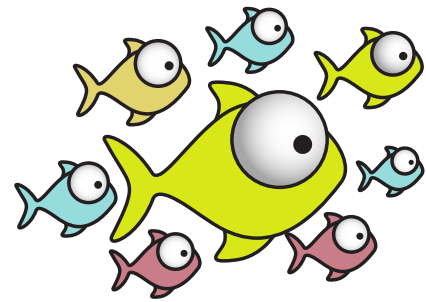
Play.

Know when it is time to work and when it is time to play. Work hard and play hard. Keep it light, appropriate/fair, and have fun!

Choose Your Attitude.

Leave your distractions, challenges, fears outside the door and make it the best hours of your day in the building, as well as the best hours of others while they are in the building with you. Be Respectful. Pick people over paper. You can use it to set up your classroom rules with student input. I like that the 4 tenets are not specifically described. You can make your own interpretations based on your context. It's not a prescribed program you have to follow. It's cheap. You don't need to be trained. You just need to apply it so it fits your already existing values and beliefs. It's action based.

There's honestly too many memories to pick out only a few (retreat, hump day, fish Fridays, etc..). I mostly remember staff being there for me when I needed them, people were genuine and cared, we got to know each other outside of work and could appreciate our similarities and differences, healthy staff relationships were modeled for students, students were excited and happy in the halls and classrooms, staff were present, there was mutual respect.



The impact was common language. I could reference it when addressing students in my class, the hallway or office. It felt less cheesy/canned than some of the other ones. I loved hearing others talk about what it meant to them - sometimes both in and out of school. It started with the staff and trickled through to the students because everyone came to the table wanting to do what was best for kids.

Although Fish would look a lot differently these days (changes in budget, timetable, personnel, pandemic, etc.), fish fins are flexible! I love the idea of creating something new for your students, with your new staff members! It will mean something different to them, so how it looks and is lived in the building may be different and that is super cool! It will all be authentic and done in the best interest of students!

Jessica Ames

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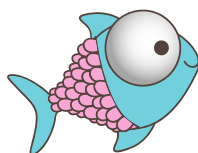


Scan for video message from Deana Dypolt

Why I love the Fish Philosophy: Be There. Make Their Day. Choose Your Attitude. **PLAY.** In my thirty some years as a school librarian, I can honestly say that I grew the most and learned valuable lessons during my time at G.S. Lakie. If you want to believe in a philosophy, your leader/principal/CEO/president have to believe it and live it. They set the standard and the "vibe" for how things are dealt with and how we treat each other. Doug James is the epitome of the Fish Philosophy. He was or should have been the Poster boy. We started with **CHOOSING YOUR ATTITUDE.** Sometimes you are the only ray of sunshine and hope in a child's life. You should understand that responsibility and own a positive attitude when you walk through the doors every day. Your attitude will play a huge role in how everyday issues are dealt with. Ever notice how the simple act of smiling will lift your spirits? If not yours.....surely someone else's. Before you choose your outfit for the day.....choose to smile.....choose your attitude. When you arrive at school.....**BE THERE.** Be there in your mindset.....be there in your focus. Leave your personal life at the door and be there for your kids, your co-workers. During the first few years at Lakie we experienced some heartache as a staff. We lost a child to a tragic accident out at Victory Church. We were there for each other and for her family to grieve as a community. **MAKE THEIR DAY:** One of my favs. Do something for someone just because you can. When you spread a little joy it spreads like spilled milk, seeping into places you never imagined.....reaching out. Every year on Valentine's Day at G.S. Lakie, all the gents on staff would dress up in their best and greet the ladies on staff with a flower, a hug (pre Covid days) and a wonderful breakfast. The gesture made me feel appreciated, valued and yes.....loved. We looked forward to it, and we loved every precious minute of it. I see some of those gentlemen are still on Lakie staff.....Rod, Frank, Tavis and Gord –

Thank you!! You always made my day. Play! The most important of the four mottos. Working with kids is hard. Patience is needed. Planning is required. All this and still have time for a private life. Play brings balance. What happened at Lakie.....didn't always stay at Lakie. Sometimes it moved to the Blairmore old psych hospital. There.....we all lost our marbles.....let loose.....and played hard. Practical jokes, dance moves, barricaded dorm rooms and laughter.....lots of laughter. All the things that bonded us. You spend the better part of your waking hours at work with people that are not related to you.....but they are family. Work family.....and they will pick you up or put you in your place.....depending on which attitude they bring that day....but it's all good. We are all on this journey together.....to bring a sense of wonderment, joy, courage for independence, and strength to face adversity to our future generations. Why not do it in style.....Fish style.

Laura Richardson Former G.S. Lakie Librarian



Be There - I never once felt alone at that school. Everyone was so kind and I made lifelong friends there. The staff and students made a point to have your back. Whether it was a trying week or a triumphant one. You always had a cheerleader or shoulder. Whatever was needed. I remember getting so sick right before the show I co-directed opened... SO SICK, the worst I've ever been. I passed out in my chair during a prep in my class, I was so exhausted. A couple coworkers came in and sent me home and reassured me that they had the show covered. The team rallied behind me and the show went on without a hitch. **Choose Your Attitude**— I think this one is the most over looked, especially in this pandemic life. Choose sunshine, choose happiness, choose to see the good and let it over shadow the bad. Choose success. The students (and staff) can achieve anything with the right mindset. **Play-** oh how I miss Fish Fridays. Man, did they ever create and cultivate such a culture of belonging and citizenship. I have wished every school I've been to since would adopt something similar. **Make Their Day** - I think the students really felt this one. The school/teachers were good at making it known to the students that they were valued and when that was apparent the students success soared and not only their success but their willingness to try and fail because they knew that attempt was a learning opportunity and did not define them.

Whitney Exlbey

Oh, how I miss Fish Friday. Man, did they ever create and cultivate such a culture of belonging and citizenship. I have wished every school I've been to since would adopt something similar.



**“Make their day, be there, play,
choose your attitude”**

People tend to write-off middle school as that “awkward phase”, or as a difficult transitional period where you can do little to help preteen angst besides letting them experience those cornerstones of hardship and growth. But those years are also some of the best years— they’re the time before you learn that excitement is uncool and acting on impulse is embarrassing.

Eight years after finishing middle school I still remember the FISH Philosophy by heart, and I still recollect on those three years as some of my favourites. Looking back now, so much of what made my experience great was that the philosophy was internalized by educators and staff as more than a catchphrase – it was a mantra.

The FISH philosophy was events and competitions on Fridays, a professional-grade Rock Show, and teachers taking the time to put on educational trips. It was going beyond the everyday to incite excitement and passion in school and extracurriculars, not just teaching them.

The FISH philosophy was hands-on math lessons with jeeps, and science experiments with a teacher suspended from the roof —None of which strictly necessary to a middle school education, but all of which were most remembered from it.

The FISH philosophy was the Vice principal who seemed to know everyone’s name, despite having 700 students.

The FISH Philosophy was class competitions, grade level events, and clubs, put on to make the school feel more like a collective community rather than a sea of terrifying eighth-graders.

The FISH philosophy was my seventh grade English teacher sending me one of the school Valentines because the boys in my class kept throwing my belongings into the garbage and she wanted me to feel appreciated.

The FISH philosophy was the haunted house and little shows that the teachers put on for no other reason than our own enjoyment.

What I loved so much about Lakie was that school for the sake thereof never seemed to be enough. It was always a question of how to turn learning into fascination, excitement, or feelings of community. And when you’re 12 years old, those are the things that make the biggest difference.

To educate is one thing. To impassion is a whole other.

Lisa Basil

For me the FISH philosophy became a way of life because it was everything that was good in how we learn to treat ourselves and the people around us.

In my classroom those pillars were something we tried to address every day as there was always a situation, whether in our own class or out in the rest of the school, where learning could take place with a conversation about how **PLAY - CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDE - MAKE THEIR DAY - BE THERE** - manifested itself or not and how could we do better as individuals or as a whole school.

We all control ourselves in what we do or say, how we think and act, how we interact with self and others - no one but ourselves is responsible for who we are and who we become as people. It takes no effort do do the right thing - a smile, a wave, a hello, a lending hand, a kind word, a pay it forward, lend an ear....the list goes on.

As teachers we have the opportunity to teach our students to be intentional - and we need to model what that looks/sounds like.

How much easier could it be than to use the FISH pillars on a regular basis for all the right reasons.

I still have a plaque with those words on my bookshelf that I see every day and remind myself....

Pam Garner



Scan for video message from Lara Hall