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From *Think Tank* to *Do Tank*: Making Great Ideas Happen!

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We often have great education ideas. Where we tend to struggle is after our great education ideas are formed.

What happens on the path to implementation? Well, let's be honest. Some of our great ideas aren't that great—they just sounded that way in our heads. It just takes a few clarifying questions by a critical, trusted friend to inform us that our wannabe great ideas weren't all that awesome or original.

As educators who believe in risk taking and failing forward, we understand that the “graveyard of not-so-great ideas” is part of the thinking process for the great ideas. But, how often does a great idea fail—not because the idea itself is weak but because our vision to make it actionable isn't coherent and surgical in its approach? And, how often are the idea and the actionable steps well-thought out and well-defined, yet we become weak and backtrack when the idea receives pushback from a vocal sector during the implementation process?

How do we move ourselves from a think tank that creates potentially great ideas without follow up into a “do tank” that supports a creative culture of ideation, balanced with a hearty dose of fortitude, sustenance, and long-range planning? We don't profess to have all the right answers, as educational ecosystems are different depending on zip codes and zoning. However, we are actively trying to solve these questions and are openly sharing our approaches to balancing thinking and doing. Perhaps our potential solutions for moving from think to do will spark an idea that percolates into something actionable for you, too. We hope that you'll let us know so can we learn along with you.

Until then, here are some strategies for you to keep in mind as you work to move your culture from one that solely creates to one that moves ideation fluidly from process to product.

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Not Another Committee!

Our school district's leadership council isn't a state-mandated body of individuals. Our focus is on making an actionable Jim Collins' mechanism of getting the right people engaged in thinking to encourage debate, conversation, and realizations. The council will then channel these conversations into actionable steps, moving us through think and into do. Our council has four administrators and four teacher leaders. There's equality in the room, and norms are clear: open discussion is sometimes spirited, but it is always rooted in the belief that we are doing what is best for the students we all serve.

A Picture Says 1,000 Words . . .

. . . but seeing it live can leave us speechless. There are many innovative educators out there doing great things, some with little to no resources. This summer, we've visited, either in person or virtually, 14 public schools and colleges. We're proud of our district, but we're not pompous enough to believe we've figured it all out. Nor are we done learning. We want to continually learn from others and see their pride. Our goal is a spiderweb of open communication, so our "do tank" extends beyond the walls of our building to the schools and colleges with whom we've formed relationships.

Sharks with Laser Beams

In the original *Austin Powers* movie, antagonist Dr. Evil famously complains, "You know, I have one simple request. And that is to have sharks with laser beams attached to their heads! Now evidently my cycloptic colleague informs me that cannot be done. Ah, would you remind me what I pay you people for, honestly? Throw me a bone here! What do we have?"

Dr. Evil's main issue was the inability of his team to focus and complete one major task. Unlike Dr. Evil, we often set far too many goals or expected outcomes than our teaching staff can realistically accomplish. As education leaders, we can all learn something from Dr. Evil's laser-like focus on a laser: create one or two actionable goals from all the ideas you glean from your think tank. Instead of getting excited about 400 potential initiatives and wanting to do them all, choose one or two that your classroom, school, or district can do extremely well.

Just Keep Swimming

Having a fantastic vision can spur initial motivation and movement, but focusing on the big picture and how to get there can become discouraging if it doesn't happen "fast enough." We must always remind ourselves, and our colleagues, to focus on the here and now. Celebrate the small wins. Identifying and celebrating small wins achieved in short spurts keeps everyone's vision positive. Small wins over time become large wins.

As we move from **think** to **do**, we aim to learn alongside our staff, continue to grow our teacher leaders, and celebrate all our failures as equally as our successes. We know that on the path to greatness, each failure will take us one step closer from our think tank to our "do tank"!