

Finding Opportunity in Challenges (Leadership)

SUBMITTED BY: Leya Matthew

SUBJECT(S): Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

In this lesson, students and their teacher learn from each other how they can find opportunities in challenging situations.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, IV. Personal Management Skills

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“Mountain Guides Teach Us About Leadership”](#)
- [“Leadership Lessons from the Thailand Cave Rescue”](#)
- [“Embracing Leadership in an Era of Activism”](#)
- [“CEO David Pottruck on How to Be a Great Leader”](#)

Common Core Standard(s):

1. CCR Standard for Reading: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it.
2. CCR Standards for Listening: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on each other’s ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

3. CCR Standards for Speaking: Present information, findings and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, and the organization, development and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Objectives/Purposes: In this lesson, students will analyze challenging situations and identify opportunities in them.

Knowledge@Wharton Article: [“Seth Berger’s Full Court Press: Building a Company from the Ground Up”](#)

Activity:

1. Introduction and Orientation (5-8 mins)

Teacher introduces the concept of finding opportunity in challenges through personal anecdotal examples. You could use any personal example where you were able to find opportunity in a challenge, or where you feel you missed an opportunity because you did not approach the challenge with the right perspective. *For example, my graduate classes miss so many opportunities because we think we have a problem, instead of an opportunity; we think there is something to be fixed (or to be ignored). We recently did this a class activity where one group was pushing back against the activity very heavily. The group didn’t want to do the activity. The professor tried to fix it; he talked about how much weight the activity held in terms of grades. If only he had thought about this differently. It was such a golden opportunity to check what was not working with his course, and if that opportunity had been taken, it would have changed the course substantively for the better. It was an opportunity to improve the course at so many levels, and I would have felt so much more respect for the professor if he had seized that opportunity, rather than pushed it on us. But, the professor was trying to fix the problem, rather than to solve it. Such an opportunity missed! However it is not easy to find opportunities in challenges, because you have to give credit to the emotional burden involved in being caught in a difficult situation. Personally, it is a struggle for me to find opportunity in challenges, because I get so caught up in feeling guilty or anxious that I can’t move beyond those emotions to find the opportunity that exists in the situation. So, this is as much a lesson for me as it is for you.*

2. Writing activity (8-10 mins)

Teacher now asks students to write about a situation that was particularly challenging in the recent past. Students may also write about challenges they are facing currently. You could give them 4-5 mins for this part of the writing exercise. I would join the exercise with the students to

become a participant in this lesson, to give greater credit to what I said about it being as much a lesson for myself as it was for them. Please give students a one-minute warning before the 5 minutes are up.

After students have written about their challenging situations, ask them to try and find opportunities that go beyond a simple fixing of the problem or worse still running away from the problem. For the example I shared in the orientation section, the professor could have transitioned from the group activity to a discussion of course structure, course objectives, and the objectives of the activity to find out where the disconnects were. This would have provided valuable feedback that would have been beneficial to the professor as well as the students. Of course, it is easier to do this for someone else, and in hindsight. In the professor's shoes, I would have felt anxious about the activity not working out, and probably wanted to end the class as soon as possible. The easiest method of control would be to talk about grades and try to coerce students to play their part without really considering why they were pushing back against the activity I had designed.

3. Small Group Discussion (10 mins)

Teacher divides class randomly into small groups and asks students to share from their notes. If some students are not comfortable sharing — in case what they have written about is too personal — teacher should not insist. Other group members are encouraged to help the friends find opportunities within challenging situations. Alongside, they are also asked to consider the emotional burdens that go with the situation, which might make it difficult to find the opportunity in the challenge.

4. Work with Knowledge@Wharton article (10 mins)

Teacher distributes copies of the Knowledge@Wharton article “Seth Berger’s Full Court Press: Building a Company from the Ground Up” to the students. Students read the article individually, but stay in their small groups. As they begin reading the article, they are asked to look for the main challenge Seth Berger talks about in the article and the way he turns that into an opportunity.

According to Seth, the main challenge he faced was being young and inexperienced, but as he describes it, the inexperience made him bold enough to pull off the impossible.

5. Wrap-up discussion (5-7 mins)

Teacher asks students for what they felt about the advice in the article, and about the lesson. Teacher wraps up by talking about personal expectations and limitations. *For example, I would talk about how I will try to use this principle in my life, but I would also caution myself and my students that it will not be an easy or consistent journey, and that we could try to do it together.*

Tying it All together: I feel it is important for a teacher to exhibit some degree of vulnerability, and indicate a willingness to participate in the learning process. In this lesson, the teacher and students discuss the importance of attitude—how a challenge can also be seen as an opportunity. Both teacher and student will hopefully help each other over the entire course to work this principle in practice.

Practice Outside of the Classroom: I certainly hope this principle will be used extensively outside the classroom. But, for that I feel that it will be important for the teacher to model this principle in class and develop this attitude as a habit that is valued throughout the year, not just in this one lesson.

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently: While it may be beneficial to exhibit vulnerability, do not let students take advantage of the situation. Try to keep a balance so that you are able to conduct the lesson honestly, but without disruptions.