



# **MOBILE LEARNING MINDSET**

**THE DISTRICT LEADER'S GUIDE  
TO IMPLEMENTATION**

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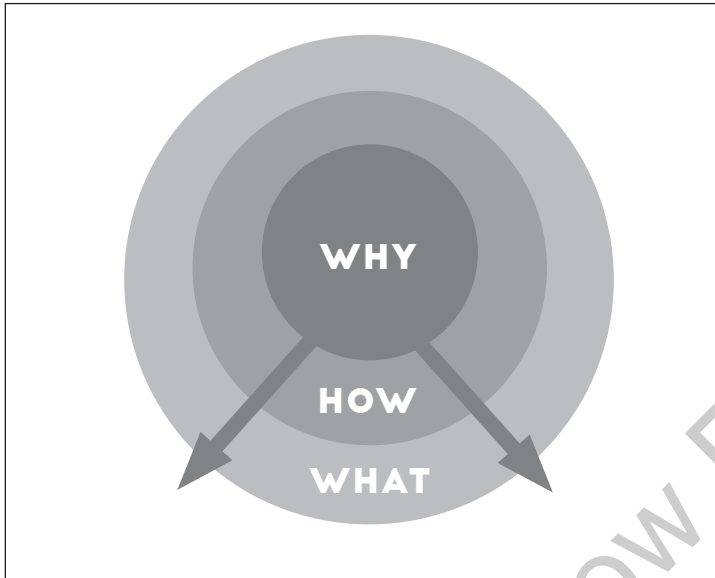


Figure 1.1 Simon Sinek's Golden Circle.

I found this talk extremely compelling, especially when I first watched it. At the time, we were in the throes of a debate about what device we should choose for our 1:1 mobile device initiative. Lots of time and energy were dedicated to this “What” of the initiative, while equal amounts of time and energy neglected the “Why.” Ultimately, we discovered the error in our ways and refocused our energy on why we were doing this in the first place.

As a leader, you will need to communicate this message clearly and well to all stakeholders. Everyone from a teacher to a parent to a student should know what the purpose of learning with mobile devices is in your district. Creating a vision or goal out of the “Why” will help guide all other parts of the initiative. In this book, we’ll look at why having a strong and well-communicated vision is so important and discuss the role a leader plays in a district that is embracing mobile learning.

Many districts have a mission or vision statement. If I had to hazard a guess, it’s a buzz-filled sentence or paragraph about pushing kids toward excellence and making learning personalized for each student. Most, if not all, usually

Remember that student learning is the most important objective and that learning can encompass a lot more than a short-term gain in a few test scores. We should be measuring the growth of the “whole student,” and that means more than academic measurements. Although students are the primary focus, don't forget all the ancillary purposes and goals of a mobile device initiative. Some of these may vary in scale, but all should be considered when thinking of end goals for your initiatives. Also, be prepared for the inevitable “dip,” when it feels as if you are standing in the middle of chaos. Keeping these end goals at the forefront of your mind will help guide you through those stages as well.

## Preparing Students for the 21st-century Workplace

The title of this section is a phrase full of buzzwords, but this phrase actually has a lot of merit when plunging into a mobile device initiative. What does the world look like outside of the classroom walls? Do society and the changes in society mirror what is happening in schools?

In 2007, Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone, and the world has never been the same since. We now carry these amazing mobile computers and multimedia studios in our pockets. Yet, no matter how great that innovation was, in the coming decades our own children will look back on smartphones and think of them in much the same way we think of the Commodore 64 or Tandy 1000. What we as adults consider innovative can quickly transition to operational in the blink of an eye.

My youngest daughter, Caroline, will graduate from high school in the year 2031. Let's consider for a moment what she will find when she walks out the doors of that high school. What will be the same? What will be different?

When I ask these questions to a group of parents or teachers, I get the usual responses.

“We'll have flying skateboards” or “3D printers will be everywhere.” They all agree that the world will be not only slightly different but *very* different than

## Have a Strategy

If you've done all the legwork and marketing research around establishing a powerful brand, don't waste it by failing to execute on the message. While we may not have million-dollar marketing firms, we do have access to some very creative students and staff.

Have a logo design contest and leverage the talent around you to create a memorable image. That alone also tells a good story and message about integrating student talent into your initiative.

Before you go further, you should also try and grab a few "things." Check for the domain name around your brand and see what social media accounts are out there. While you'll want this tied to the school district, you'll want it also to be its own go-to source for information. The domain for "LEAP" was taken, but we did make sure that all important information was funneled through our district website page dedicated to the initiative at <http://eanesisd.net/leap>.

When we eventually launched our learning festival, called iPadpalooza, and our iLeap Academy, we didn't make that same mistake and quickly grabbed both [iPadpalooza.com](http://iPadpalooza.com) and [iLeapAcademy.com](http://iLeapAcademy.com), as well as Facebook pages, twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Google+ accounts. Even if you have no current plan for using these, it makes sense to grab them early—the potential use down the road makes it worth the 5 minutes it takes to set up an account.

Whenever you send out any messages around the initiative, be sure to always include the brand/logo and a link back to the main site. You always want to covertly push people back to your brand in order to have both consistent messaging and, as we'll talk about in the next section, a common language.

## Common Language and Procedures

In a school district you have administrators, teachers, secretaries, bus drivers, students, parents, and a bevy of other people tied to your learning community. Having all of them speak the same language is a huge step in having success

around your initiative. For example, if you have a new student enter the district and they are given this device on day one, what are the expectations for that student? How are they trained, and who will relay these expectations? Having everyone on the same page means that students, teachers, counselors, and administrators who come into contact with the new student all speak the same language and can put the student on the right path.

One area where we failed early on was having these students fall through the cracks, which in turn meant that their parents were kept in the dark. Teachers didn't have any established procedures or common language for handling new students when it came to getting them established and set up on their device. The whole system was falling apart, except for the fact that we had an educational technology point person at every campus. Without that main contact person, many of these students would be running around aimlessly.

Admittedly, having that single point person saves us in many ways when it comes to just-in-time learning, deployment strategies, app purchasing, provisioning, and so forth. Because most districts don't have those people on staff, it becomes even more important to have a common language, expectation, and procedure around your initiative.

## Evolve and Share the Brand

Once the brand around your initiative has been established, it's easy to sit back and rest on your laurels as things progress. The truth is your brand should be ever evolving and expanding. Our initiative went through one major brand overhaul from "WiFi Project" to "LEAP Initiative," but we've since used the branding and success around LEAP to expand it to include more than just the initiative.

One of the best examples of this is our recent success with our iLeap Academy. (<http://tinyurl.com/olg4l4f>). The basis for the academy is having others learn from our mistakes and also see 1:1 in action. While we have had many districts come for site visits since the early going, it was hard to really teach





## CHAPTER 7

# CULTIVATING SHARED OWNERSHIP

Leaders are interested in finding the best way rather than having their own way.

—JOHN WOODEN

**Y**ou have a lot of good ideas. You have a lot of bad ones, too. Just because you are given the title of chief or director or superintendent doesn't mean that you have the best ideas. Another quote I like is one from David Weinberger, who says, "The smartest person in the room is the room itself." If you include more minds in the process, you will actually get more ideas and, as a result of having their buy-in, more success.

## Hire People with Skills and Vision

Of course, one of the things that makes flat leadership and shared ownership most successful is when you hire people who are best suited for that environment. When it comes time to hire a new employee, I try to follow the lead of the innovative companies I mentioned before, such as Google and Apple. Trying to find a person who shares the vision of the district but also one who fits the strengths of the others is important.

However, our typical interview process in public schools is full of holes. It is antiquated and proprietary, and it lends itself to the traditional hierarchical model, not to one of shared ownership. In the fall of 2012, I changed that process into something that not only got us the best candidate, but also supported the notion of shared ownership.

Going through the interview process can be time-consuming and cumbersome, so I wanted to make sure that we had the following:

- Ample time to accept qualified candidates
- A group of core staff who filtered the applications with a rating system
- A component that allowed us to have a “sneak preview” of potential candidates and a component that gave candidates an opportunity to highlight their creativity
- A smaller group of core staff to interview those who made it through the application process
- A larger group of core staff actually being trained by the finalists in a professional development setting

It's those last three components that I'd really like to focus on. Individuals don't always show what they truly are like on paper or in an interview setting. I've often said that when it comes to the presidential election, we should put all the candidates on an island, a Survivor-style TV show, and see who makes it. Those of us at home will see the true colors of the candidates.