

MATTERING IS THE AGENDA

A TOOLKIT FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

DATE 06/01/2017

VOLUME 01



MATTERING IS THE AGENDA



INTRODUCTION

Early in her teaching career, Angela Maiers had an epiphany: people need to matter. Everyone wants to be essential to someone else. Significance is more important than success. People want to be noticed, valued and honored.

For 25 years, Angela has been developing and sharing the message of “You Matter” with students, parents and fellow educators, in keynote presentations at education conferences and in schools around the world.

This e-book curates the best of Angela’s “You Matter” content. The content is ideally suited for use on a professional development day, while many of the activities can also be used throughout the school year, both with teachers and with students.

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We've also curated some of the best examples of teachers using the "You Matter" message in their classroom, and outstanding writing by other educators.

Teachers purchasing this Toolkit may use it within their classrooms and may reproduce it digitally or physically for use by their students.

Schools purchasing a school-license may use it throughout the school and may reproduce it digitally or physically for use by anyone in the school.

On the following pages are several possible agendas for a professional development day, depending on the amount of time allotted.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY

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EDITOR'S LETTER

I am thrilled that you have chosen to join this critical conversation about learning and leadership.

In today's world, there are no limits for learners with passion, foresight, and a desire to grow.

I am honored you have taken this step to pursue Mattering as your agenda.

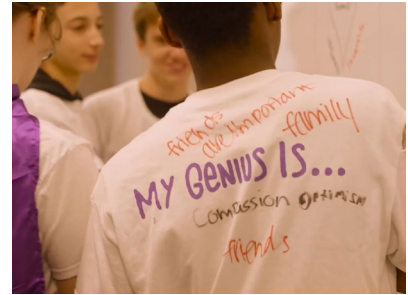
Together We Are Smarter!

Angela Mair

FOUNDER OF CHOOSE2MATTER



SAMPLE AGENDA FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY



1 HOUR

2 HOUR

3 HOUR

20 MIN	Watch "You Matter"	20 MIN	Watch "Whispering To The World"	50 MIN	Watch "Mattering Is The Agenda"
15 MIN	Facilitate Discussions	15 MIN	Facilitate Discussions	15 MIN	Facilitate Discussions
15 MIN	"Language of Mattering" Activity	10 MIN	BREAK	10 MIN	BREAK
10 MIN	Discuss 9 Ways To Show People They Matter	20 MIN	Watch "You Matter"	15 MIN	"Language of Mattering" Activity
		15 MIN	"Language of Mattering" Activity	40 MIN	Read "Two Letters," and Discuss
		15 MIN	Discuss 9 Ways to Show People They Matter	10 MIN	BREAK
		15 MIN	What's My Genius	20 MIN	Discuss You Matter Manifesto
				10 MIN	Discuss 9 Ways to Show People They Matter
				10 MIN	What's My Genius
					Teachers write "Lunchbox Notes"



PART 1

VIDEOS

WHISPERING TO THE WORLD

19 minutes



YOU MATTER

20 minutes



MATTERING IS THE AGENDA

53 minutes



PART 2

SECURE YOUR STUDENTS' HEARTS, or you don't have a shot at their brains.

I wrote this article for Huffington Post, in response to the **unforgettable TED Talk by the beloved educator Rita Pierson**. Tragically, Rita passed away not long after I wrote this. I will always humbly treasure the opportunity to reflect on her brilliant career.

 [Watch Rita Pierson's TED Talk](#)

-
- All teachers, at every grade level, should greet every student by name as they enter the class, and then remark on something about several students in the first two minutes.
 - Next, commend at least five students in each class period for their contributions.
 - Lastly, at the end take two minutes to reflect on what everyone learned that day.

In every school, I encounter teachers who “don't have time” for such frivolity, or proclaim, “They don't get paid to be friends with students.”

I respond, “If you don't first secure students' hearts, you don't have a shot at their brains.” Or, as Rita Pierson said in her TED Talk, “You know, kids don't learn from people they don't like.”

More than 20 years ago, Claude Steele, the current Dean of the Education School at Stanford, **wrote in the Atlantic Monthly**, “A valuing teacher-student relationship goes nowhere without challenge, and challenge will always be resisted outside a valuing relationship.”



SECURE STUDENTS' HEARTS CONT'D



Every kid
needs a
champion.

Rita F. Pierson
TED Talk

It was in the context of a valuing professor-student relationship that I was issued a challenge that changed the course of my life forever. I was a few weeks away from completing my college degree and preparing to attend medical school.

During my college summers, I did extensive clinical work with children, and ended up babysitting and tutoring the children of my professors. One day, I was leaving a class when one of these professors challenged me on why I wanted to go to medical school.

When my first, second and third answers failed to include the words, "because I want to be a doctor," my professor said he had never met a student who was so clearly meant to teach children.

A year later, I was teaching kindergarten, my destiny permanently altered by one professor who challenged me in the context of a valuing relationship. There are many more examples of educators who leveraged a valuing relationship to challenge a student, some with historic implications:

Annie Sullivan was hired to tutor a young Helen Keller, who was then an unruly deaf and blind child. Their initial encounters were challenging, but Sullivan persisted, and developed a valuing relationship with her charge. With that in place, Sullivan and Keller reached a breakthrough moment as the teacher spelled a word into the child's palm.

As Helen wrote in her autobiography years later,

"I knew then that 'w-a-t-e-r' meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away."

Maya Angelou faced her own childhood barriers. In the wake of traumatic incidents, Angelou refused to speak from ages seven to 12.

She found solace in poetry, and memorized the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Langston Hughes, Shakespeare and others. Angelou **describes** how a cherished teacher, Mrs. Flowers, convinced her to begin speaking again:

"She said, 'You don't love poetry.' And it was the cruelest thing I think she could have done. Because she seemed to be taking my only friend. She said, 'you can't love poetry. In order to love poetry, you must speak it. You must feel it come across your tongue, through your teeth, over your lips.' ... She was trying to shock me.

And one day I went under the house... and I tried poetry. And I had a voice. I had a voice."

Decades later, Angelou used that voice to read a poem at President Clinton's inauguration.

Each of these examples is a vivid affirmation of Rita Pierson's assertion that what students need most are teachers who are willing to be a champion for them, to love them and to insist that they be the best they can be.



MATTERING IS THE AGENDA

VALUE YOUR STUDENTS

LOVE THEM

BE A CHAMPION FOR THEM

**DEMAND THAT YOUR
STUDENTS BE THE BEST
THEY CAN BE**

TEACHERS MATTER



MATTERING IS THE AGENDA

**“WE CANNOT ALL DO
GREAT THINGS, BUT WE
CAN DO SMALL THINGS
WITH GREAT LOVE.”**

- MOTHER THERESA OF CALCUTTA



MATTERING IS THE AGENDA



Dear 5th Graders,

Hi! My name is Arin Kress and I will be your math and science teacher this year.

We haven't met yet, but every day this summer I've thought about you.

I know that sounds odd—but please keep reading.

I haven't thought about you individually, because I don't know who you are yet, but I've thought about you collectively.

I've thought about the amazing group of 5th graders that will cross the threshold of my classroom in just a few weeks.

- I've thought about challenging you.
- I've thought about embracing your differences.
- I've thought about your strengths.
- I've thought about your weaknesses.

And I have a secret that I can't keep in for another few weeks.

You
Are
All
Geniuses

Shhh! Don't tell anyone, but really you are. I know deep within you, your inner genius is ready to come out! I've worked with geniuses for seven years now, and let me tell you something: it's amazing. And this year won't be different.

So, before you walk through my door on the first day of school, think about YOUR genius.

What are you an expert at? What do you enjoy? What can I learn from YOU? How are YOU going to change the world? I can't wait to share my genius with you and for you to share your genius with all the other geniuses in the room: your classmates!

Ms. Kress

PART 2

TWO LETTERS ALL STUDENTS SHOULD RECEIVE

What would back-to-school time look like if all students, of all ages, everywhere received the following “Dear Student” from their teachers?



Arin Kress, a “5th grade teacher in Ohio who is constantly learning,” wrote and shared with me the letters on the following pages.

When I published them on my blog in August 2013, they were shared furiously in social media, and the post quickly became one of my most popular posts, ever. More teachers than I could count wrote to say, “Because of this post, I just sent my students letters just like these.”

Why were these two simple letters shared so widely and quickly? The first letter encourages students to think about what their genius is. The second tells students they matter, and encourages them to let others know they matter. They are succinctly written, and full of hope and encouragement. Shouldn’t every student start the school year by reading letters such as these?



MATTERING IS THE AGENDA

Dear 5th graders,

Today I learned what it means to matter. I know it sounds silly, but it's a powerful message. Two simple words—You Matter.

So many times we go about our daily lives and no one stops to thank us. No one seems to care if we go the extra mile. It's odd really that we would find it odd for someone to tell us that we matter—because it's such a simple thing to do.

So, I'm doing it right now—I want you to know that you matter to me before I even know your name. YOU are why I became a teacher. YOU will make a difference in my life. I hope to learn as much from YOU as you do from ME!

I want you to understand this: YOU MATTER to your family, YOU MATTER to your friends, YOU MATTER to so many people—You already matter to ME! Stop right now and think about who matters to YOU. (Most likely you matter to them too!)

So here's your first assignment. Tell as many people in your life that THEY matter to YOU and, of course, tell them why. (Don't just run up to strangers yelling, "You matter!" You might get a lot of confused looks!) Please take this seriously. It may be just one of the most important assignments you complete all year.

I hope you are enjoying your summer, because the ride you're about to embark on will be full of ups and downs and winding curves. One thing you will learn about me is that I hate roller coasters—but I can't wait for the ride that we will experience together!

I look forward to telling you in person how much you MATTER to me. I hope to see you at Open House on August 19th!

Ms. Kress

P.S. If you have a mobile device (phone, tablet, etc.), bring it to Open House! We have some fun, interactive activities planned!

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES

by Angela Maiers

In [“Teachers Matter, Now More Than Ever”](#), Angela wrote, “I’ve encountered many promising young teachers who are wondering if they chose the wrong profession. How do I counsel teachers who share these thoughts with me? I remind them of two simple words: you matter. Indeed, teachers matter more now than ever.”

In [“12 Things Students Want From Their Teachers”](#), Angela wrote, “Year after year, in every grade level, content area and classroom I was in, regardless of demographics or background, students were saying the same things and had the same message: It’s the small things you do that mean the most. That is what they remembered. That is what mattered.”

In [Connect Learning Today](#), in April 2014, Angela says, “I’m reminding everyone, not just kids, who they actually are. Part of my role is liberating the genius of others. It’s giving people a front row seat to their own brilliance, and actually naming it in a way they haven’t named it. Part of helping students grow is being able to recognize and honor who they are right now. I don’t see kids as leaders in training.”

In a video interview titled [“Sharing the Message of You Matter with the Bedley Brothers”](#), Angela says, “kids can be vessels of change.”

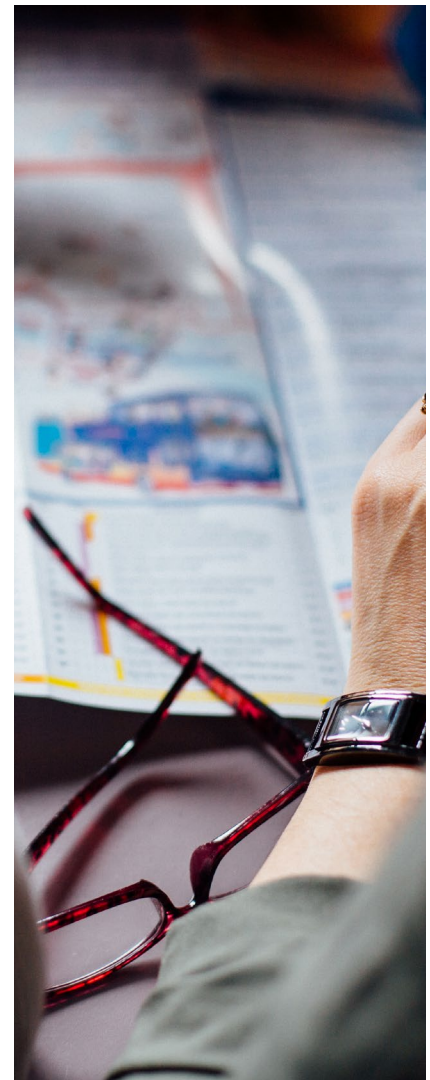
“Never doubt that a few words from you, at the right time, can change a person’s life, for good.”

In [“Passion-Driven or Project-Driven, There is a Difference”](#), Angela furnishes to Lauren Short of Collaboration Solutions a clear definition and distinction of how passion-driven learning is different from project-based learning.

In [“Rediscovering the Genius in Each of Us”](#), Angela and Brigadier General John E. Michel illuminate the different beliefs between your five-year-old self and your current self, saying, “Commit to fighting your way back to your five-year-old self. Fight for your dreams with the ferocity that you had back then.”

In [“Recognition Worth Noticing”](#), Angela explains the importance of noticing, a very simple but overlooked act: “Use your eyes. Use your ears. Use all your senses. Notice people.”

In [“A Few Words From You Can Save a Life”](#), Angela begins by telling her readers, “Never doubt that a few words from you, at the right time, can change a person’s life, for good.”



WORDS THAT INSPIRE US

Additional Articles |

In **“What Do You Wish I Would Notice,”** Pernille Ripp, a fifth grade teacher from Wisconsin, writes about how a student reflection sheet “turned into a reflection of how I am doing as a teacher. Even how I am doing as a person in their lives. And I know I can do more, I know I can do better, I only have to notice and then do something about it.”

In **“I Need You,”** Sarah Edson, a teacher at a private girls’ school, draws from a lesson learned from taking care of her terminally ill mother when she writes, “I will continue to attempt to connect with each of my students, even in the face of unresponsiveness. I will maintain hope. I will celebrate each success. And I will pay careful attention just in case I discover that a student, in her own way, has shown that she needs me.”

In **“5 Pieces of Advice to New Teachers,”** Steve Figurelli wrote, “Teaching is a complex profession. There are many variables that factor into every lesson design and instructional decision, but stripped down to its core, I believe there are five overarching ideals that students need from you, their teacher.”



**“NEVER DOUBT THAT
A SMALL GROUP OF
THOUGHTFUL, COMITTED
CITIZENS CAN CHANGE
THE WORLD. INDEED, IT
IS THE ONLY THING THAT
EVER HAS.”**

-MARGARET MEAD

MATTERING IS THE AGENDA



PART 3

9 WAYS TO SHOW PEOPLE THEY MATTER

Choose2Matter is a global movement that challenges people to solve problems that break their hearts. It is a call action that invites you:

To ACCEPT that you matter, by recognizing that you were created for significance, and that you have a contribution to make to the world.

To ACT, by asking yourself, “What breaks my heart about the world? And “What am I going to do about it?”

1. SEE THEM

In the movie “Avatar,” the Na’vi greeted one another with the phrase, “I see you.” It is an acknowledgment that there is something worth noticing and appreciating in everyone we meet. One way to let people know you see them is to begin or end sentences with the word “you.”

- I hear you
- I understand you
- It was great to spend time with you
- I couldn’t have done it without you
- You made my day!

You may already say words such as these to your loved ones or good friends. But how often do you say them to people with whom you aren’t as close? Do you say these words to students at school, colleagues at work, a crossing guard, a receptionist or a stranger you pass on the street? Why not? What’s holding you back?



9 WAYS TO SHOW PEOPLE THEY MATTER

2. LISTEN EARNESTLY

“More and more I’ve come to understand that listening is one of the most important things we can do for one another... It can often be our greatest gift. Whether that person is speaking or playing or dancing, building or singing or painting, if we care, we can listen.” - Fred Rogers

Listening means more than quietly nodding your head while waiting your turn to speak again. It means opening your ears and heart and making the other person the sole focus of your attention. Often, this is all someone needs from you.

3. ASK MEANINGFUL QUESTIONS

Questions are a window into our minds and intentions. We show people how much they matter by the questions we ask them. Do you ask meaningful questions that show a sincere interest in the other person?

What’s on your mind these days?

What was the best moment of your day?

How did you make a difference today?

What are your ambitions for this year?

How can I help you achieve your goals?



4. BELIEVE THEY CAN

“All you really need is one person to show you the epiphany of your own power and you’re off. If you can hand people the key to their own power, the human spirit is so receptive... if you open doors for people at a crucial moment, you are educating them in the best sense. You are teaching them to open doors for themselves.” - Aimee Mullins, “The Opportunity of Adversity,” TEDMED 2009

When we believe in others and **encourage them to believe in themselves**, we hand them the key to their own power. We help them stretch their thinking, envision success, and open the door to their true potential. Words are contagious.

Hopeful words infect people with energy and enthusiasm. Cynical words unleash energy-sucking negativity, doubt and fear.

Words we speak may be the catalyst that sends someone into an emotional tailspin or the spark that spurs him to great achievements—by sparking the belief that he can.

5. DWELL IN POSSIBILITY

I dwell in Possibility -
A fairer House than Prose -
More numerous of Windows -
Superior - for Doors -
- Emily Dickinson

When we dwell in possibility, we help others to do the same. If people cannot envision the possibility, they cannot achieve the outcome.

Imagination is our mind’s eye. It enables us to make the mental leap from present facts to future possibilities. Our capacity to dream, hope and plan for a brighter future depends on the extent to which we use our imagination to dwell in possibility.

6. CELEBRATE THEM

Do you know anyone who talks relentlessly about his own accomplishments? Of course you do; these people are difficult to avoid.

Humble people are far more interesting.

When you celebrate the exciting things other people are doing, the strides they’re taking, the goals they’ve met, it reinforces their will to keep moving in a positive direction.



7. DO LITTLE THINGS WITH GREAT LOVE

Give me your hand when I've lost the way
Give me a shoulder to cry on
Whether the day is bright or gray
Give me your heart to rely on
Send me the warmth of a secret smile
To show me you haven't forgot
For always and ever, now and forever
Little things mean a lot.

- **"Little Things Mean A Lot"**

by Edith Lindeman and Carl Stutz, 1953

A smile. A "hello" that lingers.
A note of praise, a pat on the back that says, "Job well done."
A phone call that says, "I'm thinking of you."
Little things mean a lot.
Can you imagine how small actions you take today might make a difference in someone's life tomorrow? Can you imagine the ripples those actions might make?



8. SHOW UP

In a post on NPR titled "Always Go to the Funeral," Deirdre Sullivan explains that the title expresses a broader philosophy:

"I have to do the right thing when I really, really don't feel like it... I'm talking about those things that represent only inconvenience to me, but the world to the other guy... In my humdrum life, the daily battle hasn't been good versus evil. It's hardly so epic. Most days, my real battle is doing good versus doing nothing."

Most of us fight the same battle. Let doing good triumph over doing nothing.

Show up.

9. CHOOSE TO MATTER

Mattering is a choice. It's something you decide to do.

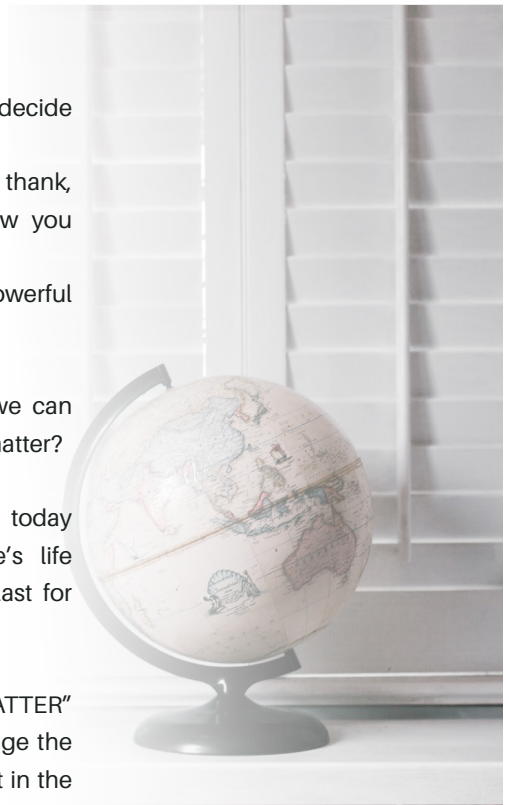
Make the choice every day to offer, thank, encourage, inspire, and let others know you notice and believe in them.

It could be and often will be the most powerful thing you do all day.

Can you imagine what kind of world we can create by helping everyone realize they matter?

Can you imagine how actions you take today could make a difference in someone's life tomorrow? And how that ripple could last for generations?

This simple, clear message of "YOU MATTER" has the power to change lives and change the world, if we understand it and leverage it in the right way.

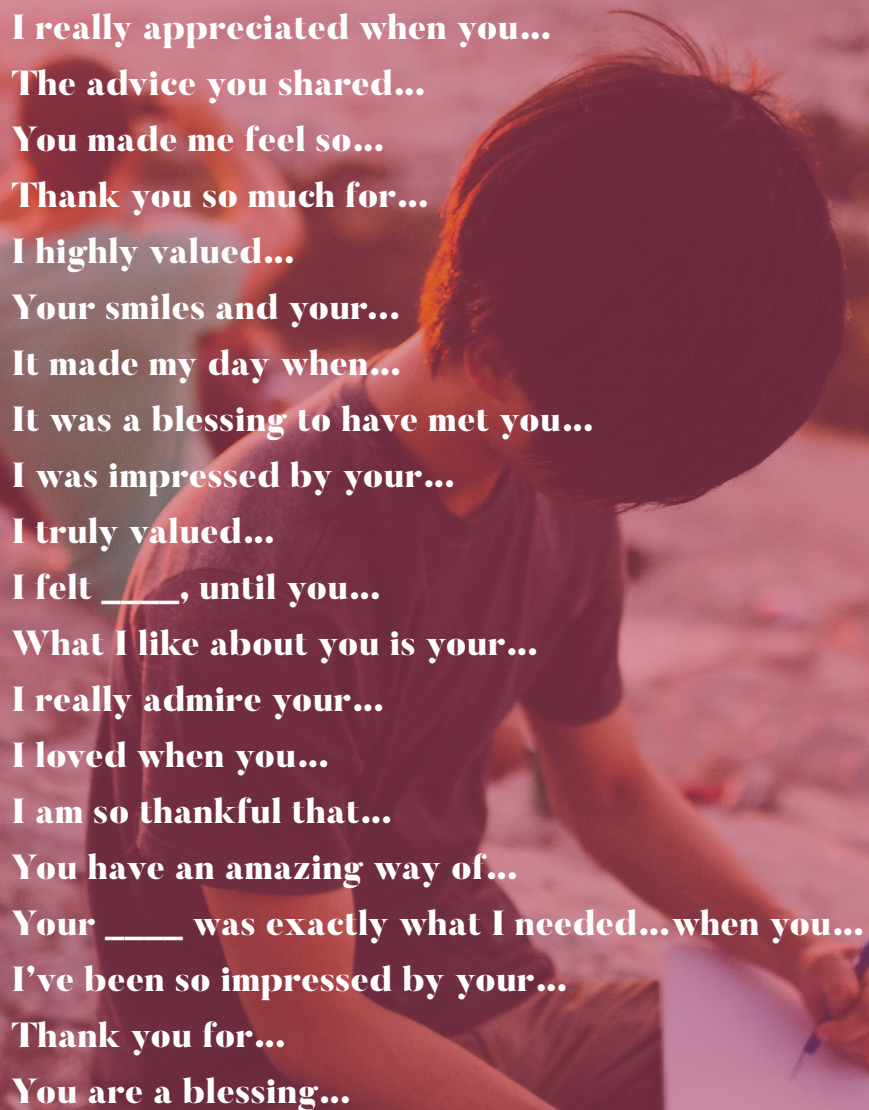


LANGUAGE OF MATTERING

How can you create a culture in which administrators, faculty, staff and students make it part of their daily routine to let others know they matter to them?

In this section, we suggest several ways to do this, both at a specific staff meeting and as part of the daily routine of the school.

The first step to letting others know they matter is to use the “language of mattering.” If you add specific details to these prompts, the listener can’t help but know they matter to you.



I really appreciated when you...
The advice you shared...
You made me feel so...
Thank you so much for...
I highly valued...
Your smiles and your...
It made my day when...
It was a blessing to have met you...
I was impressed by your...
I truly valued...
I felt _____, until you...
What I like about you is your...
I really admire your...
I loved when you...
I am so thankful that...
You have an amazing way of...
Your _____ was exactly what I needed...when you...
I've been so impressed by your...
Thank you for...
You are a blessing...



LUNCH BOX NOTES



FOR A STAFF MEETING:

1. Uniformly decorate brown paper bags for every person in attendance, and place in each bag enough small pieces of paper for each person to receive at least five notes.
2. Each person writes their name on a bag and places it on a common table.
3. Over the course of the day, people write notes to let others know that their actions have made a difference in the school and in people's lives.

Lunchbox Notes is inspired by a group of students at Downingtown STEM Academy that was formed during a Choose2Matter LIVE event. In the launch video, Sophomore Carrie Filion poignantly explained the value of telling someone they matter and that you believe in them. Carrie described her first day back at school after a hospitalization, one of several she had endured that year.

At lunch, Carrie opened up her lunch box to find a note from her mother that read, "Good luck Care Bear, you got this, xoxo Mom."

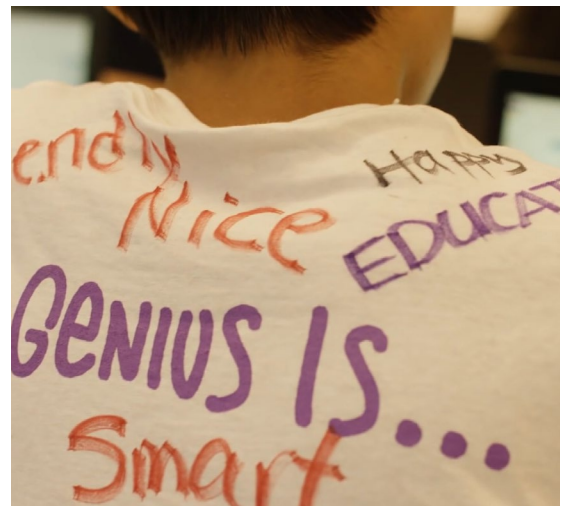
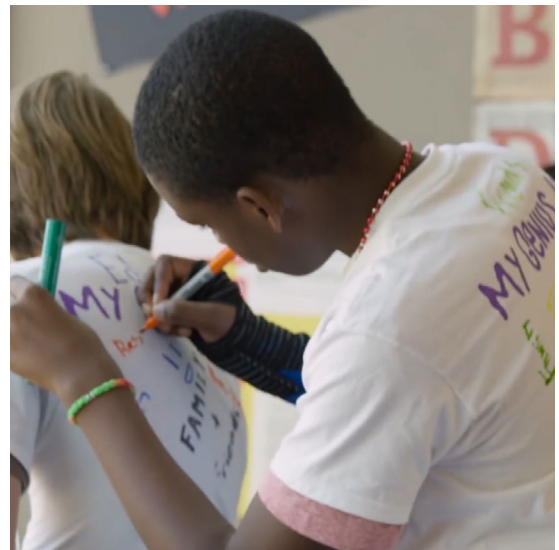
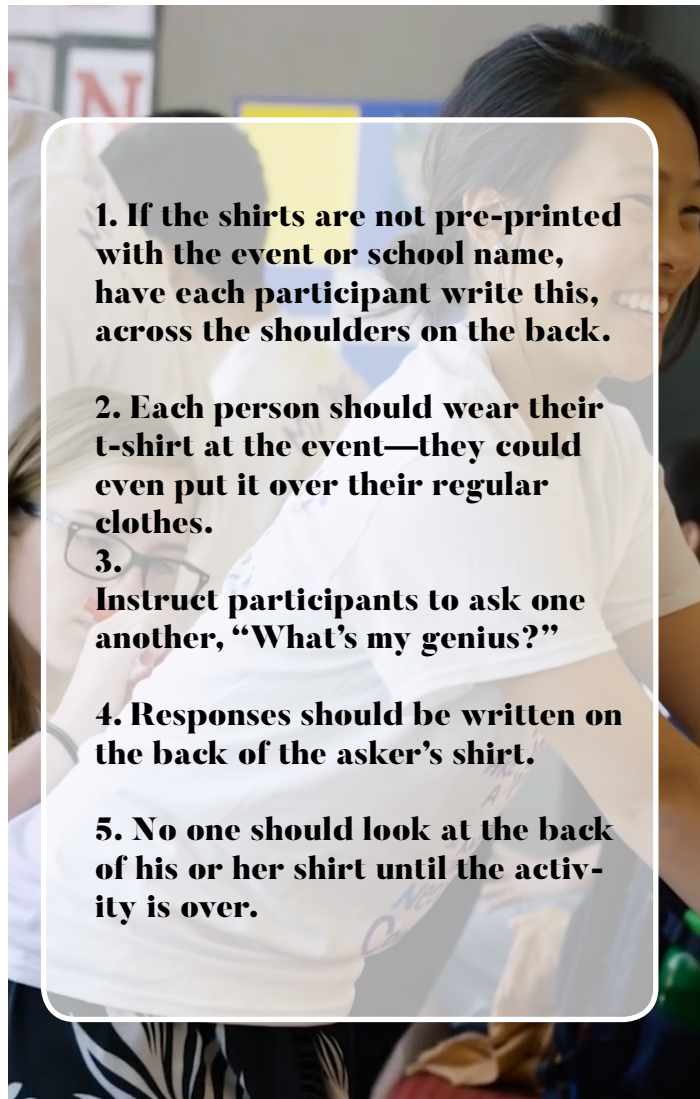
Carrie tells us, "I really did have it ... and that note helped me understand that I matter, and I can persevere."

The Lunchbox Notes crew at Downingtown, knowing that these are tough times for educators, focused their initial efforts on having students write notes to every member of the faculty.



WHAT'S MY GENIUS

This activity is simple, but extremely powerful. We've conducted it with young kids, teens and adults, and most of the participants in each group were surprised and gratified by what they learned about how others perceive them. All you will need are white t-shirts and dark-colored Sharpies, which should be distributed to all of the participants the day before the event..



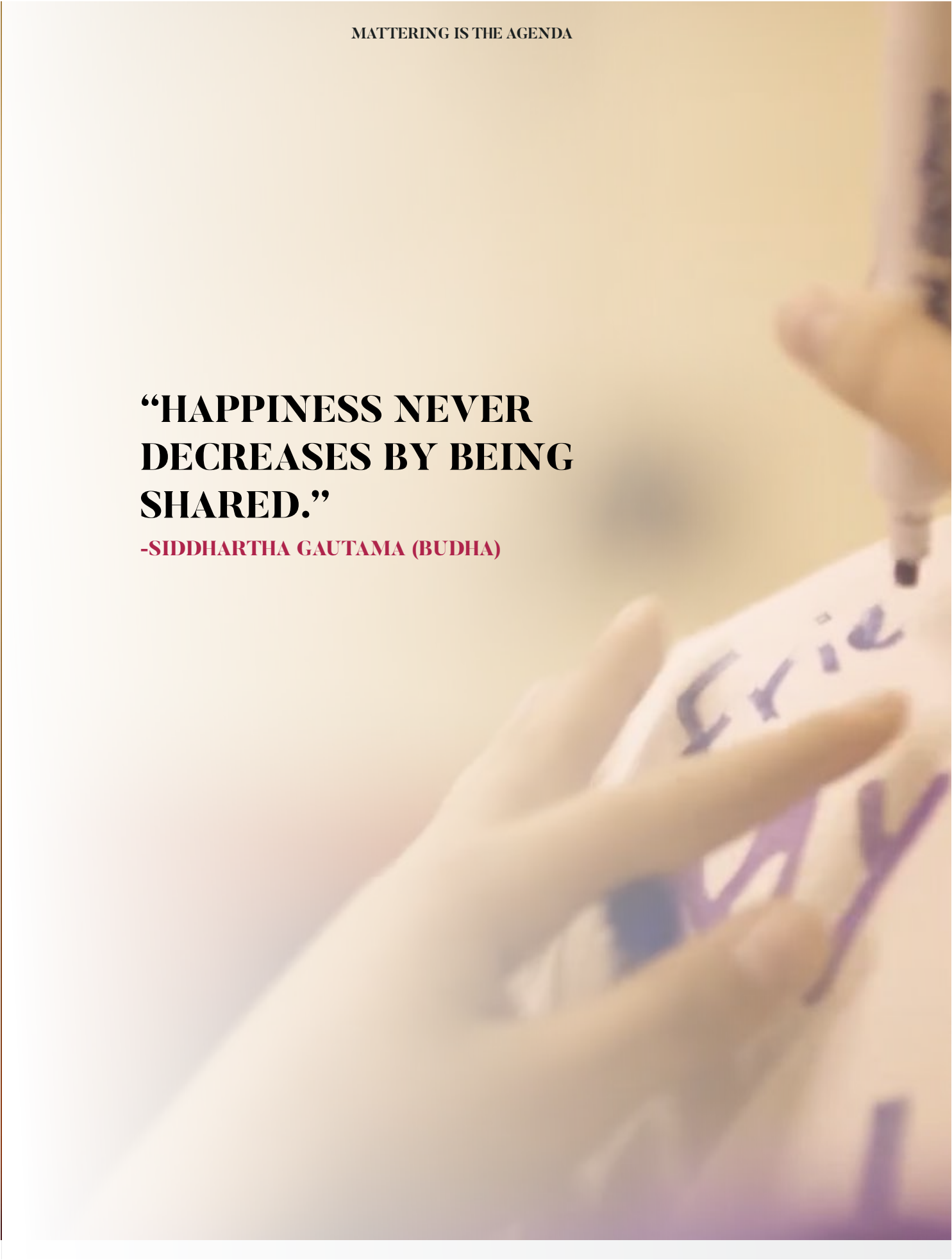
ALTERNATIVES

1. Firmly tape a piece of paper to each person’s back and have participants write their responses on the paper.
2. Provide a small notebook for each person. Each person writes their name on their notebook and places it on a common table. Participants write about their colleagues’ genius, and other feedback to let them know they matter, in their notebooks. No one should look at the notebook until the end of the activity.



**“HAPPINESS NEVER
DECREASES BY BEING
SHARED.”**

-SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA (BUDHA)



PART 4

YOU MATTER MANIFESTO

The YOU MATTER Manifesto is a call to action. Before we can convince anyone else that we matter, we must first convince ourselves. You are called upon to acknowledge and put to use the gifts that have been entrusted to you. Empower yourself and realize the importance of contributing to the world by living your genius. Mattering is a process, not an event. It has no expiration date; it's a new way of life. Knowing that we matter is essential to our existence. Consider this Manifesto an acknowledgement of your significance and that...

1. YOU ARE ENOUGH

Do you know what it takes to make a difference in this world?

You don't have to be rich or famous. No special knowledge or skills are needed. Whether you are young or old or in-between, you matter.



2. YOU HAVE INFLUENCE

To acknowledge that you can change the world is overwhelming. Yet all of us have the ability to begin changing the world by contributing our genius to solve the world's problems.



3. YOU ARE A GENIUS

Author Seth Godin defines genius as the act of solving a problem in a way that no one has solved it before.

You don't have to win a Nobel Prize or earn a Master's degree to be a genius. You just have to use your insight and initiative to find original solutions that matter.

4. YOU HAVE A CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE

Your mere presence can bring a smile to someone's face. Your poetry can lift someone out of a slump. Your passion can lead you to create something magnificent.

5. YOU HAVE A GIFT TO GIVE, THAT OTHERS NEED.

Happiness and love are the two greatest gifts you can give to the world. Too often, we indulge our own gratifications and forget there are people in this world that we can make feel.

6. YOU ARE THE CHANGE

It is in the small encounters with others that we recognize that we matter, that our presence is important. A shared smile, an unexpected kindness, leaving each encounter with something positive. It is in these small moments we find opportunities to make the choice to matter. In doing so, we make the world a better place.

7. YOUR ACTIONS DEFINE YOUR IMPACT

Action is the world's greatest currency. There is no better day than today to start to make a difference to the world. You don't need to wait until you have the time; you don't have to wait until you make more money; you don't have to wait one second to let someone know they matter.

8. YOU MATTER!

To matter means to be of consequence or importance to others. It means you are significant, relevant, worthy of note and of crucial value. The world may not always affirm this. Your friends and family may not adequately communicate the importance of your presence in their lives.

But that doesn't mean that what you do and who you are don't have a profound impact on the world. The world would be a much lesser place without you.

Let's make our time together matter!



MATTERING IS THE AGENDA



PART 5

DIGITAL FILES

The YOU MATTER Manifesto is a call to action. Before we can convince anyone else that we matter, we must first convince ourselves. You are called upon to acknowledge and put to use the gifts that have been entrusted to you. Empower yourself and realize the importance of contributing to the world by living your genius. Mattering is a process, not an event. It has no expiration date; it's a new way of life. Knowing that we matter is essential to our existence. Consider this Manifesto an acknowledgement of your significance and that...



YOU ARE A
GENIUS

www.choose2matter.org



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YOU HAVE A
CONTRIBUTION
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YOU ARE ENOUGH

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YOU ARE THE
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YOU HAVE A
GIFT
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YOU
MATTER

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YOUR ACTIONS
DEFINE YOUR
IMPACT

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