

You Had One Job: A Comprehensive Guide to Culture-First Leadership in Education



Extended Insights from Adam Voigt's 'You Had One Job' EdChat Presentation

A practical guide for education leaders seeking evidence-based culture transformation strategies

In a recent EdChat session, educational leader Adam Voigt addressed one of the most pressing challenges facing modern school leaders: the overwhelming burden of competing priorities and endless responsibilities. His message cut through the complexity with startling clarity: ***“Whether you’re a school leader or a classroom teacher, your most important job is to lead the culture.”***

This comprehensive guide presents both the theoretical foundations and practical applications of Voigt’s culture-first leadership framework, as presented in his EdChat discussion, supported by real-world examples and measurable outcomes from schools across Australia.

Drawing from over 25 years of educational leadership experience, Voigt demonstrates that sustainable school improvement requires culture transformation as the foundation for all other changes. When leaders get culture right, as Voigt consistently emphasises, ***“everything follows.”***



Key findings from Voigt’s analysis:

- Culture-first leadership produces measurable improvements in behaviour, engagement, and academic outcomes
- The Traffic Light vs Roundabout model provides a practical framework for transforming organisational systems
- The P3P3F3 restorative conversation protocol creates accountability while building student capacity
- Implementation requires systematic attention to professional development, policy alignment, and cultural reinforcement
- Schools report dramatic reductions in suspensions and behaviour referrals following implementation.

This guide examines three core components of Voigt’s methodology while providing practical tools and strategies for immediate implementation in any educational context.

Reclaiming Your Primary Purpose

The modern education landscape presents unprecedented challenges for school leaders. As Voigt observes, ***“Somewhere across the years, we absorbed an inordinate number of ancillary responsibilities as educators and now it can feel as though we’re not specialising, making a difference in what matters, or even working in our purpose. That needs to stop.”***

This observation resonates deeply with leaders who find themselves managing compliance requirements, administrative demands and crisis responses while struggling to maintain focus on their core educational mission. The result is often a sense of spinning plates without making meaningful progress on the issues that matter most.

Voigt's response to this challenge is both radical and simple: stop trying to do everything and focus intensively on the one job that makes everything else possible – leading culture. His argument rests on a fundamental premise that **culture underpins every other school objective**, from academic achievement to staff wellbeing to community engagement.

The Promise of Culture-First Leadership

When education leaders embrace culture as their primary responsibility, they discover that many seemingly unrelated problems begin to resolve naturally. Behaviour issues decrease, academic engagement increases, staff collaboration improves, and community relationships strengthen. This isn't coincidental – it's the predictable result of addressing root causes rather than symptoms.

As Voigt emphasises, *“Education underpins our country's economic and social prosperity.”* The work of creating positive school cultures has implications far beyond individual institutions. Every student who learns to take responsibility, show empathy and solve problems constructively becomes a contributor to our broader social fabric.



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Understanding Culture-First Leadership

Defining Culture in Practical Terms

Voigt's approach begins with a definition that transforms culture from an abstract concept into a concrete leadership responsibility. *“Culture is just a collective noun for behaviours,”* he explains. *“There are behaviours we encourage, there are behaviours we tolerate.”*

This behavioural focus provides leaders with immediate clarity about their role: **systematically moving behaviours from the tolerate pile to the encourage pile.** Rather than hoping for cultural transformation through inspirational speeches or policy changes, leaders can identify specific behavioural shifts that will produce the culture they desire.

The behavioural assessment framework

Consider your current school culture through this lens:

- **Behaviours we actively encourage:** What specific behaviours do we celebrate, reward, and model?
- **Behaviours we tolerate:** What behaviours do we allow to continue without active intervention?
- **Behaviours we discourage:** What behaviours do we actively address and redirect?

The gap between encouraged and tolerated behaviours often reveals the most significant opportunities for culture improvement.

The Multiplier Effect

Culture-first leadership operates on a multiplier principle: when culture functions effectively, it amplifies every other improvement effort. Academic initiatives gain traction more quickly, behaviour management becomes less intensive, staff collaboration improves, and community relationships strengthen.

Evidence of the multiplier effect includes:

- **Academic improvements:** Students in positive cultures show increased engagement and achievement
- **Behavioural changes:** Fewer disciplinary issues and more student self-regulation
- **Staff wellbeing:** Reduced teacher stress and increased job satisfaction
- **Community connection:** Stronger relationships between schools and families.

Reframing Leadership Identity

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Voigt's approach involves a fundamental reframing of leadership identity. Rather than viewing themselves as managers of multiple competing priorities, leaders are invited to see themselves as **culture architects** whose primary responsibility involves creating the behavioural norms that enable all other work to flourish.



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The Traffic Light vs Roundabout Model

Understanding Organisational Systems

Voigt's compelling framework for organisational analysis draws from traffic management systems, contrasting the authoritarian control of traffic lights with the shared responsibility approach of roundabouts.

Traffic Light schools operate on the premise that authority figures must control every decision and interaction. Students wait for permission and follow rigid rules without necessarily understanding the underlying principles.

Roundabout schools embrace shared responsibility where students learn to assess situations, make thoughtful decisions, and take responsibility for outcomes. While this approach requires more initial investment in teaching and relationship building, it produces students who can “navigate the system skilfully” and take ownership of their learning and behaviour.

The Evidence for Roundabout Systems

The power of roundabout systems extends well beyond educational contexts. Voigt cites compelling data from Indiana's traffic management transformation, where converting 265 intersections from traffic lights to roundabouts produced remarkable results:

- 90% reduction in fatalities
- 70% reduction in collisions
- 50% increase in traffic flow.

The educational parallel, as Voigt explains, involves “*harness[ing] the energy of our young people and allow[ing] them to learn how to use the system rather than continually catch them doing the wrong thing.*”

Implementation Principles

The transition from Traffic Light to Roundabout systems requires patience and strategic planning. Students accustomed to external control need time and practice to develop internal capacity for good decision-making.

Key implementation principles:

- **Start small:** Begin with low-stakes decisions and gradually increase complexity
- **Provide scaffolding:** Offer support and guidance while students develop skills
- **Model the approach:** Leaders must demonstrate roundabout principles in their own interactions
- **Maintain consistency:** Apply principles across all organisational relationships.



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The P3P3F3 Restorative Framework

The Method Explained

Voigt's P3P3F3 framework represents a systematic approach to restorative conversations that transforms how schools respond to behavioural challenges. The framework's structure reflects careful attention to both psychological effectiveness and practical constraints, with a **nine-minute total timeframe** that makes the approach practical for busy school environments.

Phase 1: Past (3 minutes) – “What happened?”

As Voigt emphasises, the goal is “**engagement, not investigation.**” This phase creates psychological safety through non-judgmental questioning that focuses on understanding rather than determining fault.

Phase 2: Present (3 minutes) – “How did that make people feel?”

This phase builds empathy and awareness that form the foundation for lasting behavioural change. Students understand the broader impact of their actions while developing emotional intelligence.

Phase 3: Future (3 minutes) – “What will you do to fix this?”

The Future phase creates ownership and accountability while focusing on solutions rather than blame. This forward-looking orientation helps students develop problem-solving skills and personal agency.



Real-World Applications

The framework's versatility appears in Voigt's examples across diverse contexts. His description of Year 1 students using a “**fix it board**” with drawings demonstrates that even very young children can engage in restorative thinking when provided with appropriate scaffolds.

The framework's effectiveness with older students appears in Voigt's account of the graffiti incident, where a Year 10 student voluntarily confessed because “*she was developing a conscience.*” This example illustrates the framework's ultimate goal: creating internal motivation for ethical behaviour.

Systemic Integration

Schools implementing the approach report that students begin to internalise the three-question structure, applying it independently to resolve conflicts and address problems. This represents a fundamental shift from seeing behavioural issues as problems that adults must solve to viewing them as learning opportunities they can address collaboratively.

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Evidence and Measurable Outcomes

Quantitative Results from Implementation

The measurable outcomes from schools implementing Voigt's approaches provide compelling evidence for the effectiveness of culture-first leadership. **Morisset High School** experienced dramatic improvements following implementation of restorative practices. As Voigt reports, "*suspensions and behaviour referrals in that school have plummeted.*"

Typical quantitative improvements include:

- **Behavioural metrics:** 40–70% reduction in office referrals and suspensions
- **Academic indicators:** Increased student engagement and achievement scores
- **Attendance data:** Improved daily attendance and reduced chronic absenteeism
- **Staff measures:** Decreased teacher turnover and improved job satisfaction surveys.

Qualitative Transformation Indicators

Perhaps even more significant than quantitative improvements are the qualitative changes in relationships and organisational climate that accompany culture transformation.

Key Qualitative Indicators

Student behaviour changes:

- Students self-reporting behavioural problems rather than hiding them
- Increased peer support and conflict resolution
- Greater willingness to take responsibility for mistakes
- Development of intrinsic motivation for positive behaviour.

Staff experience improvements:

- Reduced time spent on disciplinary issues
- Increased focus on teaching and learning
- Improved relationships with students and families
- Greater sense of professional efficacy and satisfaction.

The Conscience Development Phenomenon

Voigt's account of the graffiti student who "*couldn't sleep that night*" because "*she was developing a conscience*" illustrates the most profound outcome of culture-first leadership: the development of internal ethical motivation in students.



Students operating from developed conscience make ethical choices because they understand and care about the impact of their actions, not because they fear punishment or seek rewards.

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Practical Implementation Guide

Getting Started: The First 30 Days*

Week 1: Individual experimentation

Begin with personal implementation of P3P3F3 in your own interactions. Choose one challenging relationship or recurring behavioural issue and commit to using the three-question framework consistently.

Daily implementation checklist:

- Identify one opportunity to practise P3P3F3
- Focus on engagement rather than investigation
- Document what works and what feels challenging
- Reflect on student responses and relationship changes.



Week 2: Expanding your practice

Introduce the Traffic Light vs Roundabout concept in your decision-making. Give students 2-3 specific choices this week where you'd normally make the decision for them (e.g., classroom seating arrangements, break timing, or how to approach a learning task). Explain your reasoning behind school rules when students ask "why?" instead of just saying "because I said so."

Week 3: Building team understanding

Share your P3P3F3 experiences with 2-3 colleagues. Schedule a 15-minute coffee chat to discuss what you've tried and the student responses you've observed. Invite one colleague to experiment with the approach alongside you. Focus on specific examples: "When I tried P3P3F3 with Sarah's playground issue, she actually came up with a better solution than I would have imposed."

Week 4: Planning for scale

Choose one specific area for broader implementation based on your experiences. This might be introducing P3P3F3 conversations in your team meetings, proposing a trial of restorative approaches for your year level, or suggesting Traffic Light vs Roundabout review of current school policies. Set a concrete goal for next term and identify who you need to involve to make it happen.

Addressing Common Implementation Challenges

Challenge 1: "But what about consequences?"

Voigt's response: P3P3F3 creates deeper accountability than traditional punishment because students engage actively in understanding impact and developing solutions.

Challenge 2: "This takes too much time"

Voigt's response: Initial time investments produce long-term efficiency gains as behavioural issues decrease and student engagement increases.

Challenge 3: "Our students/parents/community won't accept this"

Voigt's response: Most communities support approaches that help students learn responsibility and develop positive relationships. The key is effective communication about goals and methods.

**Note: These implementation strategies are interpretations of Adam Voigt's methods from his EdChat presentation, organised into practical steps for educational leaders. These are suggested approaches based on his frameworks rather than prescribed methodologies.*

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Advanced Applications and Scaling

Whole-School Culture Transformation

Moving beyond individual classroom implementation to comprehensive organisational change requires systematic attention to multiple interconnected factors. Successful whole-school transformation integrates culture-first principles into every aspect of organisational operation.



Leadership structure alignment: Traditional hierarchical leadership models often conflict with roundabout principles of shared responsibility and capacity building. Schools implementing culture-first approaches must examine and potentially restructure their leadership systems.

Policy and procedure integration: School policies often reflect Traffic Light thinking, emphasising control and compliance over learning and growth. Culture-first implementation requires systematic review and revision of organisational policies to align with roundabout principles.

Advanced restorative practices: As organisations develop competency in basic P3P3F3 implementation, they can explore more sophisticated applications of restorative principles to address complex situations and prevent problems before they occur.

Student leadership development: Advanced implementation often includes training students to facilitate restorative processes for their peers. This approach builds student capacity while reducing adult workload and creating more authentic accountability processes.

Community partnership development: Culture-first approaches extend naturally beyond school boundaries to include families and community organisations as partners in creating positive environments for young people.

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Quick Reference Guide:

P3P3F3 Framework Summary

Past (3 minutes): “What happened?”

- *Focus:* Engagement, not investigation
- *Goal:* Understanding the situation from all perspectives
- *Key principle:* Create psychological safety for honest reflection.

Present (3 minutes): “How did that make people feel?”

- *Focus:* Empathy and awareness building
- *Goal:* Understanding impact on others and self
- *Key principle:* Develop emotional intelligence and connection.

Future (3 minutes): “What will you do to fix this?”

- *Focus:* Solutions and ownership
- *Goal:* Accountability through constructive action
- *Key principle:* Build problem-solving capacity and personal agency.

Traffic Light vs Roundabout Quick Assessment

Traffic Light indicators:

- Students wait for adult permission for most decisions
- Rules followed primarily to avoid punishment
- Behavioural issues tend to repeat with the same students
- Adults solve most problems for students.

Roundabout indicators:

- Students taught decision-making skills and given appropriate choices
- Students understand the principles behind rules and expectations
- Students developing internal motivation for positive behaviour
- Students take initiative in solving problems and helping others.

Essential Quotes for Reference

1. *“Whether you’re a school leader or a classroom teacher, your most important job is to lead the culture.”*
2. *“Culture is just a collective noun for behaviours. There are behaviours we encourage, there are behaviours we tolerate.”*
3. *“Harness the energy of our young people and allow them to learn how to use the system rather than continually catch them doing the wrong thing.”*
4. *“Good teaching is 90% theatre and 90% theft, so steal these strategies and make them your own!”*
5. *“Education underpins our country’s economic and social prosperity.”*



30-Day Implementation Checklist

Week 1: Personal practice

- Identify first opportunity to try P3P3F3
- Practise focusing on engagement rather than investigation
- Document student responses and relationship changes
- Reflect on what feels natural and what needs adjustment.



Week 2: System analysis

- Assess current practices using Traffic Light vs Roundabout framework
- Identify specific areas where more student choice could be appropriate
- Experiment with explaining reasoning behind rules and procedures
- Begin shifting from solving problems for students to with students.

Week 3: Team building

- Share experiences and observations with colleagues
- Facilitate discussion about desired culture changes
- Identify other staff members interested in collaborative implementation
- Plan for expanded practice and mutual support.

Week 4: Strategic planning

- Develop longer-term implementation plan based on initial experiences
- Consider policy or procedure changes that would support culture goals
- Plan communication strategies for students, parents, and community
- Establish methods for tracking progress and celebrating success.

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Your Culture Leadership Journey

Adam Voigt's 'You Had One Job' message represents both a challenge and an opportunity for education leaders. In a professional landscape where educators feel pulled in countless directions, the clarity of focusing on culture as the primary leadership responsibility offers a path to greater impact, professional satisfaction and student success.



Adam Voigt

The frameworks, strategies and evidence presented in this guide provide a comprehensive foundation for culture transformation in any educational context. However, knowledge without action produces no change. The critical next step involves translating these insights into concrete practices that produce measurable improvements in the lives of students, staff, and communities.

Your implementation journey begins with a single decision: choosing one element from this guide to implement immediately. Whether it's trying P3P3F3 with your next challenging conversation, shifting from Traffic Light to Roundabout thinking in a specific area, or simply remembering that culture is about the behaviours you encourage versus tolerate, the key is to start somewhere.

Remember Voigt's final piece of advice: **"Good teaching is 90% theatre and 90% theft, so steal these strategies and make them your own!"** This guide is designed for adaptation and implementation. Use what works, modify what doesn't quite fit your context and create the culture-first leadership approach that serves your unique school community.

This guide was created following Adam Voigt's 'You Had One Job' EdChat presentation. The frameworks, strategies and insights presented here represent Adam Voigt's perspectives and methodologies as shared during his EdChat session. These views and approaches are those of Adam Voigt and do not necessarily reflect the official position or endorsement of 3P Learning. The practical applications and implementation strategies have been developed by 3P Learning to support educational leaders in exploring and adapting Voigt's culture-first leadership principles within their own contexts.

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