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Word Count ??

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INTO THE TRENCH

By Isaiah Sterling

Foreword by Stephanie Small

Introduction

The Trench Itself

You're probably wondering how a trench relates to education. Let me let you in on this life changing secret.

Across the country, schools face challenges on a day to day basis. Most of the time, these challenges are not shared with students. Only educators or administrators will know the REAL truth. Or at least they think they are the only ones who know. All of the challenges that are not shared are lowered underground -- into a trench.

I'll never forget my superintendent telling me, "Don't air your dirty laundry! Always maintain the best image for our school district." As an educator, you'd probably strive to maintain the utmost "positive" image of your district. This may be true whether you'd be in the classroom teaching or at your district's administration office serving as a superintendent. This is what I call keeping the ground level. In this case, only "positive" things are above ground.

I'll never forget the day someone told me I needed to get into the trenches.

I've been in them for a while now.

I'm ready to share what I've revealed with the WORLD!

Let's dive INTO THE TRENCH!

CAUTION** This book may offend you if you are against breaking the status quo or getting a little muddy!!!

What's in your Trench?

Whether you are an educator or student, I am sure that you know of things that have been lowered underground by your district administration or even peers. Maybe that is student voice, opportunities for students, ideas for programs, thoughts on school rules and policies, etc. This includes things that we sometimes feel shouldn't be shared with students, parents, community members, or even other educators. For example, a couple educators just met to review their pass/fail rate for the year. The next day in class, a student asks about how the meeting went. The educator that was asked says, "Everything looks amazing!" In reality, only a couple students are passing their class. When we say everything is amazing, and it's not -- we put the truth into a trench.

Often, students are placed in a trench. Educators feel as if they are solely in charge of anything that takes place. School becomes by teachers for teachers and not by kids for kids. An example of this would be walking into a back to school event and seeing teachers doing everything but incorporating students. Student participation gets placed underground while the educator flourishes above ground.

At the same time, district "higherups" place their educators (the ones who are in the classroom everyday) in a trench. Educators become unhappy because they know, just like students, their thoughts and feelings are put away and appear to not matter. District admins become so used to reports, they quit listening. Any reports made get automatically sent the trenches. What district admins tend to classify as a "report" could actually be helpful information in order to take their

district from good to great. At times, we as humans are so reluctant to shut something down before we realize it may actually benefit us.

Remember, the great thing is that trenches aren't covered up. We choose to dive into them. They are open for everyone. Everyone has a chance.

I challenge you to ask yourself, "What is in the trenches where I am?" and "Am I in the trenches or am I just above ground?"

Your Trench

Have you asked yourself what is in your trenches? Is it student voice, communication, the frequent "no's" you get from your administration? It could be anything!

Whatever it is, we must establish how it got there and why.

Machine Mindset

Our trenches can be pretty low lying. If you're an effective leader, you should be in the trenches everyday, picking up something! But, do you have the machine mindset that is necessary?

Working in retail for a while, I know that bending over to pick up product can hurt the back. One day, I had a revelation. Maybe if I had a machine mindset I wouldn't damage my back as much. As unreal as that sounds in a retail environment, it actually ties in well for educational purposes.

Since our trenches can be low lying, we should develop a machine mindset so we can lower ourselves, like a machine, into the trench and simply grasp what we want to. For example, I see student voice in my trench. I'm not going to hurt my back and climb down into the trench. With climbing down comes the risk of causing more damage to your body, death, and more! Think as your school district or school as the the body. We want to cause as less damage as possible, but want to achieve a goal of getting our trenches clear. If we truly have a machine mindset, we can lower ourselves to the lowest of lows and grasp what we want and lift in above ground.

The Proper Wear

When we choose to get into the trenches, it can get rough from time to time. No one likes a game changer. No one likes a status quo breaker! We know those two statements to be facts.

When I became a game changer and status quo breaker in my district, there were multiple reports. As leaders, we should know that reports made on us mean we are doing something right. The shocking things is, most of these reports were made by educators. They claimed I was out of line and needed to get in my place. When we start lowering ourselves into the trenches, the people above ground feel a moving and shaking. They get frazzled because they know we are

about to bring up what they lowered in a trench. Not only bring it up, but bring it up in a way they've never seen before.

When I was first approached with these reports, I was shook. I wanted to jump out of the trench. I wanted to take everything that I had impacted, or brought above ground, away. This is because I didn't have the right shoes on. I was operating with dingy and weak shoes. I needed to put my steel toed boots on. We can't be the change without our steel toed boots. Without them, we get things stuck in the SOULS of our feet. For me, it was the reports. Every single report was a stab in my SOUL. It wasn't until I put my steel toed boots on that I wasn't worried about what others were saying.

I have become thankful for those reports. I say this because without those reports, I would not be as strong of a leader that I am today.

Turning the Propane On

I'll never forget hearing Dave Burgess say, "We've got to turn on the propane!"

Immediately, I was fired up.

What I didn't know at the time was, it gets hot when that propane kicks on. Do you see the heat as gossip, rumors, reports, etc? Focus on your propane being your FIRE to get something done or lead to the next change. Is your propane on? Let's go further... is your flame strong or weak? If

you're flame is weak, you can get SOME things done and be KIND of impactful. If it's strong you can get ALL things done and be SUPER impactful.

When dealing with propane on a grill, you have the possibility of fire coming back onto your face, or even burning yourself. Think of your school grounds as the grill plate where the cooking takes place! Usually, we always want to “keep cool” and don't want to turn on the propane! Im telling you, your next change is in turning your propane on. Do those activities you've always wanted to start listening to students and parents, communicate effectively, and GROW! Stop watering your school grounds with the cool “this is the way we've always done things.” Turn on the PROPANE and do something NEW! Who's going to take the risk of getting burned? I've gotta let you in on something, turning the propane on is ALWAYS a risk we take as leaders. If you need to, suit up with some armor and try not to get hurt.

Remember to watch out for those haters that will try to rain on your propane! Stand in front of your grill (your school), feet planted, eyes on the prize, turn the knob to the right, and watch your school get FIRED UP!

The explosions always happen above ground, right? Educators! If you are not in the trench, you will suffer the effects of the explosion! Get down in the trenches to avoid it!

Fixing Our Trenches

