

Book Review: Pyramid of Behavior Interventions

A vice-principal in Lake Cowichan reviews a new book by a trio of educators and discovers new ways 'to do the right thing.'

by Dani Garner

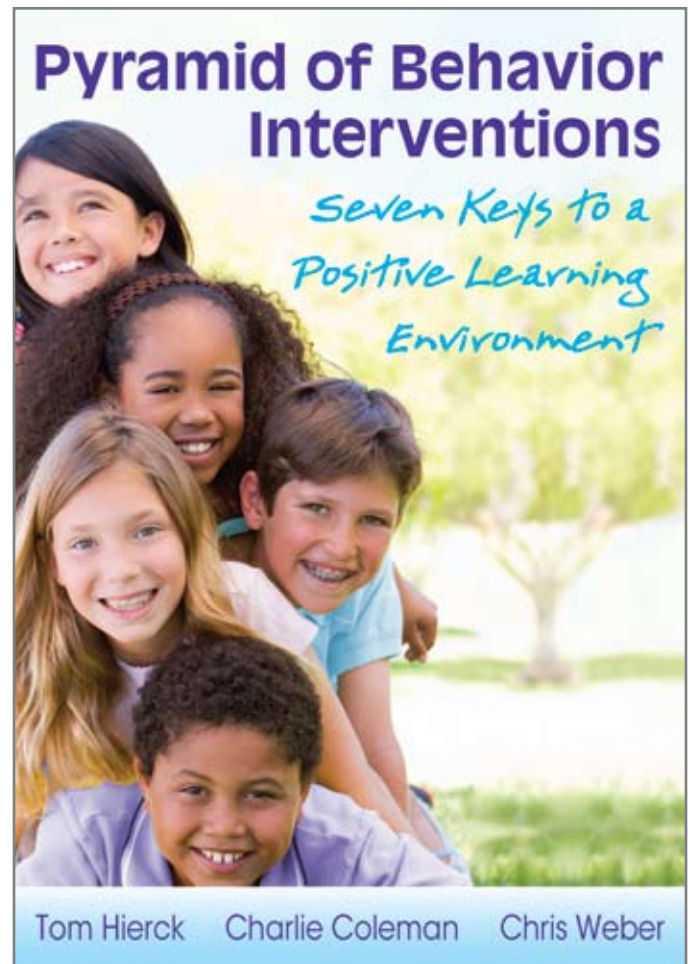
Ever since I was a teenager, I've collected quotations or lines from books that have stuck with me. I'm picky; not just any quote is going to get a spot in the cranium. The quote must be relevant to my current reality, must inspire me to do "right," and must be short enough to remember.

"If we can predict it, we can prevent it." This line, from *Pyramid of Behavior Interventions: Seven Keys to a Positive Learning Environment* by Tom Hierck, Charlie Coleman and Chris Weber, is the latest addition to my collection. Ever since these words have burrowed themselves in my brain, I can't have conversations with parents, teachers, students, or educational assistants (*okay, maybe even my husband too!*), without thinking, "if we can predict it, we can prevent it" for whatever situation we are troubleshooting. And, as it must do to find a place in my collection, the quotation must inspire me to actually do the right thing, not just think about it. As a result, I now have some students who I have convinced to stay in for

Homework Club twice a week (*that certainly wasn't happening in the first semester*), some teachers who are thinking outside of the box regarding their struggling learners, and some parents who are checking with teachers about their children's progress on a regular basis (*and a husband who has made the fence double-secure to prevent escaping dogs!*). It was a good sign for me, a self-declared nerd about professional reading, to find such a line in the prologue of this book. I took this as a sign that the rest of the book would be worth a read. I was right.

Tom Hierck, Charlie Coleman and Chris Weber have, through their new book, taken what many of us know

about the benefits of professional learning communities (PLC) and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), and provided real-life stories and strategies that show what these well-known acronyms can look like in actual schools and classrooms. *Pyramid of Behavior Interventions*



tions showcases stories from all across the continent, spanning all grade and subject areas.

As I have been trained to do when presented with new information about teaching strategies or leadership ideas, the first thing I did when I opened up the book was skim for information regarding the effective size of PLCs and PBIS. When I didn't find the numbers or the data I was looking for, I was surprised. But then, after some careful thought (*and maybe a conversation or two with author Charlie Coleman*), I realized that Hierck, Coleman and Weber didn't need to provide me with the numbers, because I already knew them. And like myself, those educators who pick-up a copy of *Pyramid of Behavior Interventions*, will do so because they already know that these things (PLC, PBIS) work and are ready to explore tried and true strategies in which to plan and support PLCs and PBIS in schools. *Pyramid of Behavior Interventions* doesn't tell readers again, in different words from new people, what we already know. It provides readers with a variety of ways to try these things. It is these stories behind the data that the authors have found and shared that will inspire and support educators as we move forward in our schools and classrooms.

The authors identify PLCs and PBIS as two areas in which to focus on for supporting a positive learning environment in schools. From there, they pinpoint seven "keys" to making this happen:

1. Common Expectations
2. Targeted Instruction
3. Positive Reinforcement
4. Support Strategies and Inter-


ventions

5. Collaborative Teams
6. Data-Driven Dialogue
7. School-Wide System Approach

These "keys" are each outlined in detail within six chapters. Each chapter contains a description of the key and a number of real-life stories that demonstrate different ways the key might look in a variety of settings. The authors then make connections between the stories and the research that has been done in the fields of education and leadership related to that particular key. For example, in my favorite chapter, *Collaborative Teams and Data Driven Dialogue*, readers will find what we've all heard before from any number of other books, conferences, keynotes, etc: Leaders must establish a climate of trust in order to foster powerful collaboration.

After the description of what Collaborative Teams are and what Data Driven Dialogue looks like, the authors share a number of stories related to one or both of these concepts. One such story follows a principal as he took the time to talk privately to an individual teacher about her high failure rates (85% in one term!). The story outlines ways in which the principal made sure the teacher felt supported and the ways he kept her from feeling that she needed to be defensive about her marking or assessment practices. The story also describes a number of specific actions that he and the teacher took after their conversation that helped turn her failure rate around to an 85% pass rate the

following semester. And, like the other chapters, the authors follow-up the story with an exploration of how the keys and the stories are connected to what we know about education and leadership.

What I like best about the stories in *Pyramid of Behavior Interventions* is that they can be read in any sequence. The first time I read the book, I did so in the traditional way: from start to finish. Since then, I've flipped through it forwards, backwards, and sideways and always stopped at a story or two. Even though the stories span all ages and grade-levels, I have been able to find something in each of them that I can connect to my own professional setting or myself. For instance, in the above-mentioned story, the authors summarized the interactions that the principal had with a teacher with high failure rates. Presently, my principal and I are having similar conversations with our staff around school-based data. While we don't have any staff with such high failure rates, we are navigating our way through these conversations for the first time. *Pyramid of Behavior Interventions* offers not only advice and stories, but also a reminder that many of our daily hurdles are not ground breaking situations or unique only to us or to our school; there is someone out there somewhere who has been through something similar. Tom, Charlie, and Chris have found these people for us and through their book, provided us a venue in which we can gain insight from the work of others. 

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Pyramid of Behavior Interventions will be available from Solution Tree (<http://www.solution-tree.com>) beginning in July.

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