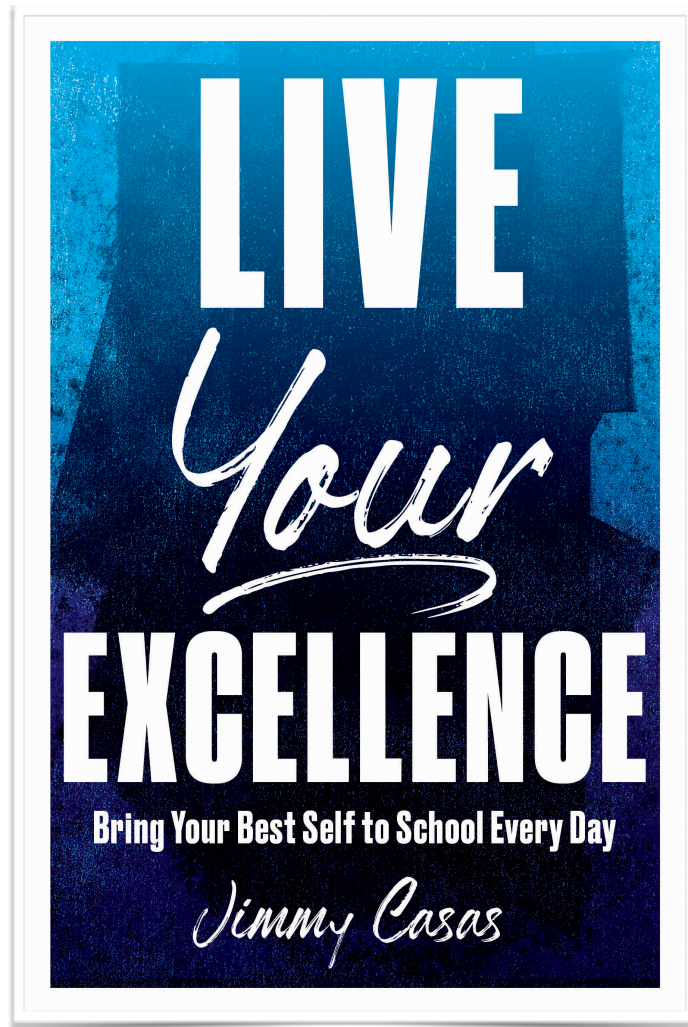


A Study Guide for

# LIVE *your* EXCELLENCE

BRING YOUR BEST SELF TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY



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# A Study Guide for **LIVE** *your* **EXCELLENCE**

## BRING YOUR BEST SELF TO SCHOOL EVERY DAY

This study guide was created to help readers like you cultivate a mindset that centers on investing in students, colleagues, and most of all - themselves, to help educators shift away from a culture that runs on compliance, blame and fear. By embracing an investment-based approach to everything from collaborative leadership to challenging students to feelings of inadequacy, my hope is to inspire each of you to believe that you can overcome the negative undercurrents that exist in school culture today. As you work through the study guide, you will see that it aligns with the four core beliefs that I have shared below that I eventually came to understand, value, and aspired to create after years of serving as a building leader.

1. **A Culture of Investment**
2. **Reaching Students**
3. **Valuing Colleagues**
4. **Developing Leadership**



As you read through the guided questions, you may select to discuss each question before reading the chapters or you may wait until you finish reading each chapter before engaging in a dialogue with your team. Each chapter is filled with content, strategies, idea, stories, reflections anecdotes, quotes, and challenges to provoke honest and meaningful discussion.

Thank you for investing in Live Your Excellence, but more importantly, for investing in yourself and others in order to inspire our entire school community to live our excellence and bring our best selves to school...every day!

# Introduction

**What do you think Antwan meant when he made the following statement? "I hate you all! You lie! You tell us that you care, but you don't. You are all fake!" Can you think of a time when your own decisions or behavior may have led to a student or staff member feeling this same way?**

**What are some strategies you utilize in your classroom to help manage students who are off task and may be preventing you from giving ample time to others students who are on task? What suggestions might others have that would allow us to understand and respond to their frustrations better?**

**What other challenges are you currently facing as a student, staff member, or parent that is keeping you from bringing your best self to school every day?**

**One of the most difficult places to look when things aren't going the way we hoped is at ourselves; how our own attitude, behavior, and skillset plays a role in the outcome. What area(s) would you identify as needing to invest in to bring a better version of you to the conversation and/or situation? What would that look like?**

**What area(s) do you feel like you were not prepared for or what challenges have you faced that looking back you realize you were not exactly sure what to do? What did you learn from those experiences?**

# Introduction

**Reflect on this quote: "When we lose our why we lose our way." Can you describe a time when you lost your way? What did you do to get yourself back to where you felt ready to bring your best self to school again?**

**Can you recall a time when you wanted to be a part of something so badly that you could taste it? Do you remember what you said you would do if you were to get that opportunity? Do you still bring that same passion and energy to it every day? If not, why not? What happened?**

**What can you do to rediscover yourself so you no longer have to fake it until you make it? How can you reconnect with your core values and begin to live your excellence again...every day?**

**Casas states that we need to move from a culture of compliance to a culture of investment. Can you share where your current culture operates under a compliance practice? How can we shift that practice to investment, rather than compliance. What areas exist where you believe students or parents may feel we operate under a compliance model?**

**How can school leadership support staff in adopting a perspective of investment so no student ever feels the way Ms. Silver did? How can teachers and support staff do the same so no student ever feels like Antwan did? What would need to change?**

# Part One

## A Culture Of Investment

**Casas states that he had fallen into the trap of punishing kids for their behavior. Can you share examples of where your school community is showing a tendency to focus on punishing? What do you believe is the cause of these practices?**

**How can we shift away from a "gotcha" culture to an "I've got you culture" that emphasizes teaching over punishing?**

**Casas indicates that the foundation of healthy and positive cultures is found in the way the adults interact with one another on a daily basis. In what ways do you build trusting relationships with your colleagues? What can we do to ensure we remain consistent in this practice on a daily basis?**

**Reflect on this quote by Casas - "On the days that you are supervising students, try to avoid defining it as hallway duty or lunch room duty, playground duty, or bus duty. Instead, begin to see all of these as relationship opportunities. In what ways do you intentionally invest in fostering positive relationships with all students during assigned duties?"**

**Not all students will respond in the same manner when we begin to assign interventions for their behavior. In what way does your school community differentiate interventions for each individual student? What does your data show? Are your practices resulting in positive outcomes for both students and staff?**

# Part One

## A Culture Of Investment

**Casas believes we should always model the behaviors we hope to see in others when it comes to others meeting our expectations. Share what it is you expect when it comes to their performance and their behavior? Are you modeling these same behaviors and maintaining the same high expectations for yourself? Can you give an example of one area where you have fallen short and what you can do to remedy it?**

**How can we support students and staff who are still pushing forward in their daily work and help shift the mindsets of those who are just hanging on so they don't shut down and wait until next year or give up all together?**

**Casas stresses the importance of not trying to change the behavior of students or staff, but rather spend time trying to influence them in positive ways so they change their own behavior. He suggests seeing yourself as a coach. Can you identify a student or staff member who is not meeting your expectations and describe how it would look different if you were to refocus your efforts on coaching them rather than dealing with them?**

**What area(s) in your organization seems to be absent from an effective process or is currently lacking any process at all? By putting in an effective process, what outcomes would you hope to accomplish?**

**We often focus on taking care of the needs of our students and colleagues, while neglecting our own personal needs. In what ways will you commit to investing in yourself and behaving your way to a healthier mind and body?**

# Part Two

## Reaching Students

**Casas states that every day we miss hundreds of opportunities that walk right by us. What can we do to invest in all students and staff so no one feels invisible, like a failure, like we have given up on them?**

**Share a time when you were intentional in your interactions with a student, parent, or staff member that you believe made a positive lasting impact. Tell that story. What impact did it make on you?**

**Reflect on the following quote by Casas - "Relationships are not something you can outsource." Give an example of how you invest in relationships beyond the classroom environment or school building.**

**Casas talks about days where he struggles with his self-confidence. What things cause you to doubt your ability to be successful or elevates your anxiety or even stirs up emotions of fear?**

**We ask students every day to do something that many of us haven't had to do for quite some time. It's like we have forgotten what it feels like to be a student. How can we help students move past these feelings so they can regain their confidence and a belief in themselves so they can experience a sense of accomplishment?**

# Part Two

## Reaching Students

**Student tardiness is prevalent in many schools today and is often seen as a problem. How can you begin to address issues of attendance in a way that improves both student and staff morale? In what way can you change your approach, comments or response and come together as a staff and change your approach by re-investing in each student?**

**Students often complain that rules don't apply to adults. Discuss ways in which the adults currently are not adhering to the same rules we expect students to follow? What changes need to be made in order for us not to just talk about excellence, but live our excellence?**

**Examine ways in which things did not turn out the way you had hoped they would and rather than look inward, you may have placed the blame on others. Now looking back can you identify what you may have said or done that contributed to the outcome?**

**Explain.**

**When we label others we hold them hostage, oftentimes keeping them from reaching their full potential. What factors contribute to us labeling our students and colleagues? How can we change our approach to believe and prove that everyone can be a successful learner?**

**Casas believes that we have the power to make a kid walk out of class feeling better than they did before they walked in. How do you do this? What measures can we take to ensure staff walks out feeling better at the end of the school day as well?**



# Part Three

## Valuing Colleagues

**We know people who feel valued and appreciated will always do more than what is expected. Describe a time when someone took the time to invest in you. How did it change you?**

**Casas states that we are all responsible for our own morale. Do you agree or disagree? What types of comments or behaviors sometimes impact our mood and attitude - in either a positive or negative way?**

**How can we do a better job of acknowledging the contributions of others - regardless of how big or small? Share an example of how you are currently doing this in your classroom or campus.**

**What are the pros and cons to addressing some students and staff as "rock stars?" Why do some hesitate to receive recognition, especially in front of their peers? What can we do to change this so everyone can be recognized for their individual talents and what they bring to the classroom or school?**

**Reflect on this quote by Casas: Until we begin to address the gossip in our schools, we will never reach the standard of excellence most educational organizations aspire to achieve." In what ways do you manage or avoid gossip all together? Can your staff all agree on a set of norms and standards to which to conduct yourselves moving forward to combat this culture killer?**

# Part Three

## Valuing Colleagues

**Leadership was never meant to be a committee of one. What strategies do you use to build leadership capacity with students and staff? What skill sets should we focus on to help build confidence in others so they begin to see themselves as leaders?**

**Casas believes that anonymous surveys are culture killers and that the best surveys are conducted face to face. If you were to ask students and/or staff one change they would make immediately if they became the teacher/principal/superintendent, what response do you think they would give? Why do you think this practice isn't more common?**

**Casas shares how there were times when he realized that he needed to manage his approach differently in order to achieve the results he wanted to get. Reflecting on this quote, can you cite examples of where you didn't get the results you wanted and what adjustments did you have to make?**

**We live our excellence when we own our mistakes or shortcomings, apologize, and ask for forgiveness. However, one area we often struggle in is modeling forgiveness, especially when someone has wronged us. Discuss why this is so difficult and what changes you can make to forgive and move forward.**

**Reflect on this quote by Casas: When you start to feel like the work no longer matters, keep going. You will eventually see that it does matter to someone- even if you don't recognize it at the moment. Can you describe a time you felt like giving up, but you kept going? What did you take away from this experience?**

# Part four

## Developing Leadership

**Working with students and staff who are not fulfilling basic expectations can be challenging at times. What is one way you approach these difficult conversations so others don't feel hurt or offended? What problems can come from not addressing concerns in a timely or appropriate manner?**

**Casas believes that many of the issues we face in schools today are created by us, the adults, unintentionally because we don't see it. Can you describe a situation where you believe a staff member or administrator may have created or escalated a situation with a student or another staff member and then placed blame on someone else?**

**How do you overcome those moments or days when you feel that no matter what you do or say it seems like you can do no right?**

**How do you respond to students or staff who seem to complain more than others? How can we change our approach in working with them so we don't begin to label them and more importantly, influence them to have a more positive outlook?**

**Casas believes that everyone in schools today has the capacity to lead. In what ways do you lead by example? Why do some hesitate to take on a more prominent leadership role on their campus? How can we make this shift so more are willing to do so?**

# Part four

## Developing Leadership

**Self-awareness is a critical skill that can help us be more effective. What is something that you recognize in yourself that can sometimes complicate matters for you? How can you change it to achieve better results?**

**Why is credibility so important in our work? Casas lists 6 ways for us to maintain our credibility. What are some other ways we can either earn or maintain it? What are the small things that we do sometimes that add up and eventually hurts our credibility.**

**Reflect on this quote by Casas: "We cannot continue to accept substandard performances by our students, support staff and teachers, but more importantly, as supervisors and principals we cannot accept substandard performances by ourselves either." What are the challenges to addressing underperformance and how can we address them when they arise without hurting our culture?**

**What approach do you use when a family member seems reluctant or refuses to engage all together and their student is not performing at the level expected? In what ways do you continue to try and partner with parents/guardians to earn their trust?**

**How would you define what it means to live your excellence? In what ways do you try and model it on a daily basis? How do you support others and help them elevate their actions, responses and behavior to another level so they too can live their excellence?**

# Conclusion

**When you work with students who come to you with significant challenges, there is no shame in thinking what you do won't matter. What do you do to maintain hope with even the most broken children?**

**Describe a time when a former student or colleague reached back out to you. What is one thing they did or said that reminded you that others will often remember our words and/or how we made them feel?**

**Share a story that reminds you of Justin or any other student who was able to overcome tremendous obstacles to redefine success for both of you.**

# EXCELLENCE

Bring Your Best Self to School Every Day

*Jimmy Casas*

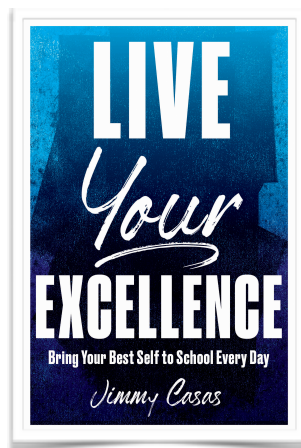
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