



Wyoming Enrichment Network Time to Thrive Conversation Series: “Engaging Adolescents: Insights from *10 to 25* by David Yeager”

By Aria Heyneman for the Wyoming Enrichment Network

On **Tuesday, Dec. 2**, the Wyoming Enrichment Network (WYNE) Time to Thrive Conversation Series continued its second of four webinars: “Engaging Adolescents: Insights from *10 to 25* by David Yeager”

WYEN “bridges the gap between Wyoming’s out-of-school programs and the communities they uplift, fueling them with resources, support and opportunities that inspire lifelong learning, growth and connection.”

Director of the WYEN **Michelle Sullivan** introduced the conversation with a guiding quote from Yeager’s book.

“Imagine a world in which older adults engage with young people in ways that reliably leave the next generation inspired, involved and ready to contribute.”

Dr. David Yeager is a professor of psychology at the University of Texas Austin who specializes in social-cognitive development, adolescence and research methodology among other related topics. His book, [*10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People*](#), is a national bestseller and uses cutting edge research to explain how to harness young people’s brains and hormones, rather than fearing them. Yeager encourages readers to treat adolescents like “training adults, not failing adults,” and to step into a “mentor mindset” when engaging with youth.

In her introductory notes, Sullivan spoke to the development of neuroscience and its key identification of adolescence as a particular window in a person’s life for growth and expansion. She noted WYEN’s mission as reframing adolescence in line with this narrative. Individuals experiencing this period are “not a problem to be solved or a time to be endured but rather a wonderful opportunity to be capitalized on in ways that will have long term benefit for young people and communities,” Sullivan said.

Two keynote speakers highlighted the presentation:

Kelly Bryant is a 4H educator, former teacher and special education staff member and current member of the University of Maryland Extension team. She is a former educator and special education staff member with a wealth of knowledge, enthusiasm and love for empowering young, diverse minds.

Mitch Craft is an independent education consultant with over 24 years of experience as a teacher, principal, district administrator and trainer. He now designs custom professional development and coaching for leaders across numerous school districts. He previously served as assistant superintendent for Sheridan County School District 2 in Wyoming and was the principal of Sheridan Junior High School for nine years, receiving numerous national awards during this time period.

Highlights from the keynote speakers:

After sharing some broad strokes reflections about engaging youth from her years as an educator and parent, Bryant expanded upon ten of what she called “actionable practices” for engaging youth that she developed in a book study of *10 to 25*:

1. **Lead with respect, rather than expectations**
2. **Replace commands with questions**
3. **Explain the ‘why’ behind expectations**
4. **Validate their feelings**
5. **Give strategic affirmation**
6. **Hold high expectations**
7. **Make space for their voice**
8. **Assume positive intent**
9. **Teach them with meaning behind the moment**
10. **Treat them like an apprentice, not a problem**

Mitch Craft then shared ways he has dovetailed Yeager’s research into working with educational leaders and groups. Craft spoke about combining the “mentor mindset” with “wise feedback,” “transparency statements,” and borrowing from other coaching models to create a custom model for instructional coaches in schools in Sheridan County.

In the second half of his remarks, Craft spoke about a school principal he works with who has combined elements of Yeager’s *10 to 25* with the book [*Thrivers: The Surprising Reasons Why Some Kids Struggle and Others Shine*](#), which lays out “attributes we want to build in young people:” **confidence, empathy, self-control, integrity, curiosity, perseverance and optimism.**

Craft shared that this principal has made these qualities their school values and celebrates students each month with something they’ve done grounded in one of these qualities. When honored, students receive a specific ‘dog tag’ with the quality written on it, which the principal

said students then wear to school or hang on their backpack. This practice combines a motivating factor for young people, as identified by Yeager's book, *status and respect*, with *affirmation and support* from adults.

Craft said that in many schools he works with, many teachers and educators are reading *10 to 25* and "thinking hard about how to implement voice and choice in schools."

He closed with his biggest lessons from Yeager's book from a parenting perspective, as the father of four children under 25:

- Understand motivation based on status and respect
- Use "wise feedback"
- Reject neurobiological incompetence model that says that children make poor choices because they have not fully developed into adults

Sullivan introduced three "front-row" participants concerned with youth engagement who spoke to resonance with the lessons from *10 to 25*:

- Tim Cooper, Sheridan Junior High School Principal
- Joanne Pruitt, Youth Services Consultant at the Wyoming State Library
- Julie Greer, Project Coordinator for the Sheridan Center for Vital Community

Broad takeaways from the conversation and input from front-row participants:

- ★ Highlight student voice as much as possible → put students on advisory boards, in leadership roles, consult them on decision-making, ect.
- ★ Many youth engagement leaders and educators are already implementing some of these practices, but there is always growth to make and more lessons to learn
- ★ Intentionality comes through for youth through conscious language → how we talk to children matters
- ★ Yeager's work offers opportunity to learn and grow to find better outcomes for everyone

The next Time to Thrive conversation will take place Tuesday, Dec. 4 and centers on Career Connected Learning.