Podcast: The Power of Rapport

"If a leader wants to be seen as trustworthy, he or she needs to build a connection through rapport", shares Mike Gilmour, elementary principal, and the author of *"The Power of Rapport."* Mike walks through six focus areas for building rapport, all of which can be consciously practices and coached: Body Language, Communication, Authenticity, Consistency, Energy and Enthusiasm, Intentionality.

Connect with Mike Gilmour on LinkedIn or at: https://thepowerofrapport.com/

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.330] – Steve [Intro]

Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As instructional coaches and school leaders, you have a challenge to guide continuous teacher growth that promotes student

success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from our experienced guests and insights that I've gathered across many years. I'm thrilled you're here. Thanks for listening.

[00:00:26.570] – Steve

"The Power of Rapport." That's the title of a book written by today's podcast guest, Mike Gilmour. Mike is an elementary principal at the Dubai American Academy. I had the chance to meet Mike when working on a PD program at his school. I heard about his book, I ordered it, and before I was halfway through, an email went off to Mike trying to schedule him for the podcast. So I'm so pleased that he agreed and is here with us today. Welcome, Mike.

[00:00:55.730] – Mike

Thanks so much, Steve. It's really great to be with you. I appreciate the opportunity. I appreciate you buying my book as well. That's always a good thing, but yeah, so glad you found it helpful and looking forward to chatting to you and the listeners about it today.

[00:01:11.350] – Steve

I'm looking forward to sharing it with other people in my work. So thanks again for giving us the time. I know from your book that you have a background that is corporate as well as a background in education. So I wondered if you'd share with us just a little bit of your experiences.

[00:01:31.550] – Mike

Yeah, absolutely, Steve. So obviously, I'm working in education now, and I really feel that I've found my calling in education and especially education administration and leadership. I'm so grateful to have the opportunities that I do to lead a wonderful school with outstanding faculty and students. But prior to getting to education, I actually had a

sports science background. And then I was involved in corporate nonprofits, essentially nonprofit sports, charities, and heading up a fairly large charity in South Africa and seeing the growth in South Africa of that charity, which had a head office in the US and was funded primarily from the US, but had a wonderful time doing that and really enjoyed that. And then when the financial crunch came in 2008, 2009, unfortunately, that came to a fairly abrupt end. And then I was able to fall back on my education training and transition into education. And then it's just been a wonderful journey since then, just being able to move overseas, teach both in South Africa but also in Southeast Asia and now in the Middle east. So, so grateful for the opportunities that education has given me.

[00:02:49.030] – Steve

What led to your focus on the topic of rapport?

[00:02:53.270] – Mike

So, as I say in the start of the book, I've always been fascinated by the role of relationships and human interactions. And growing up, I would find myself often just analyzing or observing how people would interact and how some people were able to interact and build good connections fairly easily and other people struggled with those interactions. So whether those interactions were with myself, whether it was a teacher or whoever, I really paid attention to that. Now, I thought that was normal for everyone, but I quickly learned that I was a little bit unique, maybe a little bit special, we should say. But, yeah, it's just sort of a little interest I've always had. And I suppose this book really is nothing more than a passion project, if I'm honest. It's really my thoughts on this topic in a book, and I just felt that I wanted to have the opportunity to write the book. I felt that alone was a wonderful challenge that I could take on, but then to just put out my thoughts and publish them. And it's been really so encouraging to hear feedback from people who have

read the book, who found it beneficial.

[00:04:05.330] – Mike

And it’s definitely something that I can talk for hours on. I’m not claiming to be an expert by any means, but it’s something I’m definitely passionate about.

[00:04:14.610] – Steve

Well, I will share with you what led me to the quick connecting back with you to come on the podcast was that the passion part shines through.

[00:04:23.750] – Mike

Thank you.

[00:04:24.460] – Steve

Yeah, it’s very clear.

[00:04:26.250] – Mike

I appreciate that.

[00:04:27.720] – Steve

There was a quote that I pulled from your book that kind of captured me, and I’d like to read it to you and then just have you respond to it.

[00:04:38.400] – Mike

Yeah.

[00:04:39.180] – Steve

“The leaders who commit to building authentic relationships are, more often than not the leaders who lead successful organizations and are able to inspire change and innovation. If a leader wants to be effective and seen as trustworthy, he or she needs to build a connection through rapport.”

[00:05:02.690] – Mike

Yeah, absolutely. So I think if we have to simplify it, leadership is all about trust. And as a leader, if you want to bring about change or bring about, let's bring into a school context, school improvement, teacher development, all of those vital aspects of leadership, none of them can be achieved sustainably and over the long term without trust. And how do we build trust? We build trust by having connections with people, by being vulnerable, by supporting people. So I just think that is absolutely fundamental to the role of leadership. I've seen – if we think about more of a dictatorial type of leader, a leader who's just barking the orders down at people, they are highly effective in the short term. They will get a lot achieved in the short term by just micromanaging everything and getting it all done. But over the long term, that will fragment very quickly, and that's not sustainable. So to have a sustainable long term impact on an organization or on people, we have to develop a connection because that then leads to trust and we can truly bring about change and improvement in our organizations.

[00:06:17.850] – Steve

As I read that, and even more as I listen to you now, it seems to me that I could almost pull the word leader and organization out and put teacher and classroom in. It seems to line up.

[00:06:35.470] – Mike

Yeah, absolutely. Because essentially the teachers are the leaders in the classroom. They are leading those 25 children. They are also the salesperson in the classroom. They are selling a numeracy curriculum or a literacy curriculum to the children. So all of those titles absolutely apply to teachers in the classroom, to principals, assistant principals, you name it. It doesn't have to only be the head of school, the superintendent. We are all leaders because we have influence

and influence over people. And that really is the definition of leadership.

[00:07:12.570] – Steve

And influence without rapport isn’t possible.

[00:07:18.190] – Mike

Yeah.

[00:07:21.230] – Steve

Long term influence.

[00:07:23.300] – Mike

Yeah, you can have influence, but is it sustainable over the long term? And is that influence going to build upon itself and reproduce itself? Is that going to happen? No. So I think that’s the thing when we look at it, and I think for some leaders, that’s a challenge because we want to control the results, we want to control things. But really, that is very short term in its approach. Whereas if we take the time to intentionally build rapport, to build connections, to build trust, we are then able to bring about such a wide range of change and enhancement to people’s lives and to organizations that will be in place long after we leave those organizations. And I think that’s ultimately the goal of any leader.

[00:08:14.430] – Steve

Now I’m hearing the word empowering.

[00:08:16.770] – Mike

Yeah. I mean, leadership is empowerment. That is what we here to do. I know that’s why I’m here, is absolutely to empower our teachers to do what they do every day with the students in the classroom and to set them up for success. I can’t do that without rapport, without every day building that rapport. And we can get into what that looks like on a daily basis. But I

think another key word in this is intentionality. And it takes a high level of intentionality to build rapport with people because, like I say in the book, the example, if we take a tennis player, Roger Federer, there's a nice Swiss connection for you, Steve. So Roger Federer is naturally a way better tennis player than I will ever be. He is gifted with tremendous talent, and that's wonderful. But both Roger Federer and I need to practice tennis every day if we want to get better. Roger Federer can't sit back and just not train. He'll be overtaken. So I liken that to developing rapport with people. Some people naturally have a gift with other people to build relationships easily. For other people, it's a little bit harder.

[00:09:34.590] – Mike

But both types of people should be intentional to develop the skill of building rapport. I really believe it's a skill that can be acquired, and so that takes out the excuse that some people have that they might not be a people's person. Well, in leadership, in life, you have to be a people's person. That's definitely my approach.

[00:09:58.420] – Steve

Yeah. A lot of the listeners to this podcast work in coaching, instructional coaching in schools and administrators, coaching teachers. And I'm just more recently starting to work with several schools on leadership coaching. Some that I'm providing myself and some that I'm training them in coaching each other. And that purposeful practice is what really gets gained to be able to seek input from people around me on my rapport building strategies. What do you see that builds rapport, and what do you see that can get in the way of it?

[00:10:40.460] – Mike

Yeah, because every day we're teaching our children in the classroom to reflect on what they do and then make refinements

to what they do so they can continue that learning journey or that learning cycle. But yet sometimes as adults, we forget that the power of reflection and just reflecting on what we do in order to change. I say often in the book, awareness leads to regulation. Once we have awareness, we have an acute awareness of, let's say, our body language. We can then regulate that to be a strength for us, to use that, the power of our body language to build a connection with someone else. But if I haven't yet gained awareness of how I might be standing in a conversation or communicating with my verbal communication, how can I then regulate that? And so there's so much when it comes to being purposeful, but also just having a sense of awareness about these, what can be sometimes quite simple things, but very, very powerful if harnessed.

[00:11:43.900] – Steve

Well, you kind of walked us into the start here. Your book is laid out with a section that looks at six different strategies. And I'm wondering if I gave you the strategy one at a time here and kind of give us a nutshell of the importance of it, and then maybe an example of how somebody uses that strategy. And the first one that you started with was body language.

[00:12:06.640] – Mike

So let's pick it up. Well, I just think the research shows we communicate a message nonverbally way more than we communicate verbally. And I think when we have that understanding of how our body language, our facial expressions and the messages they communicate to people, both intentionally and unintentionally, we can harness that for good and for our purposes. I think we've all been in meetings or we've spoken to people and we've walked away going, wow, their body language was terrible. They're clearly not in a good place or something, right? We've all had that experience. But what about if we could change that? And if we could use our body language to portray or showcase an openness, a willingness to

connect, that's, I think, so important. I speak in that chapter about something as simple as smiling and what that does when we smile at people, it just opens a doorway for connection. I often find there's very few times if I smile at someone, they smile back. It's contagious. But I think having that awareness is so key and so vital. And sometimes we need an honest friend to tell us about our body language.

[00:13:24.910] – Mike

But I speak about a few things in that chapter. I speak about smiling. I speak about even how we stand walking tall, walking with purpose. These things, while we never want to be fake in what we do, we always want to be authentic, actually, I wrote a chapter on that, we can control how our body moves. And when we understand the power of body language and how valuable it is in communicating a message, I think we then begin to take it a bit more seriously and to be, if nothing more, just a bit more mindful about what our face is doing when we're listening to someone in a conversation. Are we rolling our eyes? Are we looking away?

[00:14:07.700] – Steve

Years ago, I was working with a brand new teacher, and I reached the spot where she had to write "smile" into her lesson plan notes because she was just so focused on how hard she was working, the kids were seeing this tension, and it wasn't here. It was really just hard work. And she'd looked at that note, then she'd look up and smile across the room. It also changed her then, because when she did that, it changed the way the kids responded to her. So that was really authentic when you say that. The next one?

[00:14:46.830] – Mike

If I can say one more thing, there's a theory in the book. It's a little bit disputed. It's called uncertainty reduction theory, and it speaks about what happens in our brain when we

meet someone for the first time and how our brain is working so hard to figure out if this person is someone who we will like, who we'll connect with or not, that our brain is working so hard to reduce the uncertainty in the person we're speaking with. If we meet someone for the first time, before we've even spoken, we need to know that their brain is sussing us out and is already sending messages as to whether this will be someone I will connect with or not. So if we know that, and that's universal, I believe, for all human beings, okay, well, when I meet someone for the first time, I'm going to be mindful about how I greet them, how I connect with them, so I can help their brain in reducing any uncertainty they may have in me.

[00:15:44.720] – Steve

Powerful. So the next strategy you look at is communication.

[00:15:50.430] – Mike

Yeah, look, I think we can all agree that communication is probably the most powerful, in terms of building rapport and building connections with people. It's how we communicate with them. I speak in that chapter a lot about listening and how powerful listening is in the process of communication, because without that, and it happens so often, I'm guilty of it at times. I'm sure we all are, we listen to reply and to respond as opposed to just simply listening and pausing and even allowing a little bit of awkward silence. And we're so often in the mold of trying to fix the problem, but communication is really just so important. I speak in that chapter a little bit about how we build rapport and what it looks like. And I sometimes use the analogy, companies sometimes think that they'll put on a big Christmas party and they'll do absolutely nothing for eleven months, but then once a year they're going to put on a big Christmas party and there's the rapport for the year. We've done it, we've got it all locked in, everyone's happy. But really, I see rapport being like a sieve, really.

[00:17:08.510] – Mike

We're pouring sand in every single day and it's slowly leaking out and our job is to make sure that it remains full and never gets completely empty. Whereas if you just dump a ton of sand in that, it's going to leak out in a couple of months time. So that's where communication comes in every day or every couple of days, just checking in with people. "Hey, how are you doing? Good to see you. How can I help you?" Those little checkpoints that are seemingly so insignificant and small are simply just such a powerful check in to building that flywheel of rapport that we have. And when that is just flying with momentum, there's so much trust. Even if things do go wrong, there's such a trust base that people have in you. So communication is powerful. Listening is such a key part of that. There's many other things I speak about, about language and the way we communicate and those things. So I need to clarify that I'm still learning these things as well. I need to state again, I am not the expert.

[00:18:12.990] – Steve

Next chapter that you had was authenticity, which you mentioned a little bit.

[00:18:17.810] – Mike

Yeah. So when you think about these strategies, you can think, well, isn't this fake? Are we not just manipulating people? And are we manipulating the situation in order to gain something from people or to build artificial trust so that we can achieve something? So authenticity is so, so vital to building rapport. In fact, there's nothing more repulsive than someone who is inauthentic. I think we can see it right when we meet someone and we just know they're just trying to get me to do something or achieve something for their purposes, I don't know about you, but it turns me off right from the start, and I actually want to do the opposite of what they want me to do.

[00:19:00.890] – Steve

I'm in the store looking to buy a washing machine, and the salesperson comes up and compliments me on my tie. I want to turn around and tell him it's for sale if he's interested in buying one. [Laughter]

[00:19:12.110] – Mike

[Laughter] Yeah, exactly. It's so vital. And so while implementing these strategies is authentic, right? It is absolutely authentic. What makes it authentic is when we want the best for the person we're building the rapport with. So if I'm building rapport with you, Steve, yes, I'm mindful of my body language. I'm mindful of how I communicate. And the whole purpose of why I'm doing that is so I can see you grow, see you succeed, versus getting what I need or what I want to try and achieve. So that's the differentiator when it comes to authenticity. And, yeah, just, man, just so valuable.

[00:19:56.830] – Steve

I really connect with that because I've had times when I'm sharing strategies with teachers, they'll say it's manipulative. And my response back to them is, you can't help but to be manipulative if you go into class and frown if you go into class, stand on your head in the corner, if you don't show up for class. Whatever you did is having an impact on kids. So now the question is, are you selecting a behavior that you're implementing because it's for the best of the student? It's manipulative when it's for the best of the teacher, and I think we see that a lot in leadership. It's when a teacher gets a compliment and then they get a request to do something.

[00:20:43.230] – Mike

Absolutely.

[00:20:44.020] – Steve

They know when you start the next compliment run.

[00:20:47.290] – Mike

Yes, exactly. I know. There's another job coming.

[00:20:53.970] – Steve

The next one you labeled as consistency.

[00:20:57.410] – Mike

Yes. So kind of closely linked with authenticity. One of the key things we need to do in order to build trust is to be consistent in our mental approach, in our emotional approach, in our social approach with people. Let's all think for a minute. I'm sure we are aware of some people who, we might have even labeled them a bit of an emotional roller coaster. We never quite know what we're going to get. One minute they're up top, next minute they're down low, and you kind of walk on eggshells around them because you don't know what mood they're going to be in. That is exceptionally tiring to be around. And we see that quite a bit. So if you can carry or conduct yourself in a manner that is consistent in terms of your emotional state, in terms of your social connections with people, that it's so valuable. But it's also not denying times that things get hard and things are tough, and that's okay. We don't have to smooth over those. That ties back to authenticity. If we're having a bad day, well, hey, that's okay. We can have a bad day, but does it have to influence the other person's day?

[00:22:05.910] – Mike

So being consistent in our approach is very valuable because it just helps people build trust in us. So they know regardless of what kind of day I might be having, they can approach me, they can come to me, they can speak to me and the way that I will respond to them or connect with them will be

similar every single day.

[00:22:26.290] – Steve

So consistency allows them to be vulnerable.

[00:22:30.750] – Mike

Yeah, it does. And allows yourself to be vulnerable as well. Because you can say, you know what, guys, I'm having a bad day today. This happened, and that's okay.

[00:22:40.610] – Steve

I've worked in places where folks come into the secretary and try and get a read on is today an okay day to go ask him about this, or should I wait till tomorrow?

[00:22:53.760] – Mike

Yeah, exactly right. And it's just tiring to be around that. And everyone's walking on eggshells and the energy is just off in the place. And yeah, it's actually toxic. It never leads to good results.

[00:23:10.430] – Steve

Next chapter was energy and enthusiasm.

[00:23:14.430] – Mike

So this ties in a little bit with body language and how we portray ourselves and carry ourselves. And once again, authenticity in this is very important, right? Because there's nothing more irritating or annoying as that sort of energizer bunny. We know their life is falling apart, but they paint this picture that everything's fine and they're full of energy and enthusiasm. So we don't want to be authentic with it. But there's something about people who portray energy and enthusiasm in terms of their daily work. In terms of their daily life. It is attractive to people. I think we've all worked with people who suck the life out of people. I refer to

them as energy vampires in the book. People who just absolutely are constantly focused on the negative, always complaining and really just changing the energy. They walk into a room and it just feels different after a while. We want to be the people to walk into a room, to change that energy, to be a positive energy so there can be a wave of enthusiasm coming through the room or the building or the person who we speaking to. It goes back to our purpose.

[00:24:22.890] – Mike

If our purpose is to build connections with people, well, how am I carrying myself? Do I want to build a connection with someone who is not really enthusiastic or is lethargic or whatever? Well, probably not. But if there's someone who is portraying energy, enthusiasm, confidence, then I want to be a part of that and I want to connect with that person. But I can't stress it enough. It has to be authentic. And it can't be this false facade that we build, because then that just becomes so repulsive for people. So we need to once again be aware of ourselves, be aware of how we are. What are we portraying to those around us? Are we portraying the image of someone who is energetic, who is enthusiastic, who is positive? Or are we portraying the image through our body language and our actions of the opposite? And once we have that awareness, we can then begin to regulate our actions.

[00:25:20.870] – Steve

As I'm listening to you, I'm hearing the need for the rapport strategies to be connected to the purpose. So if the purpose isn't for the other people, it's going to throw off any of these. The words you choose, the body language, it's all thrown off.

[00:25:45.070] – Mike

It goes back to that salesman story, right? It just goes back to the salesman story. People can pick it up in a heartbeat

that you are not authentic and your purposes are selfish and not focused on the other person. And once you do that, it's pretty hard to recover from that because people will form an opinion of you. But if we can genuinely demonstrate a care for other people that we want to see those around us succeed and thrive and grow. If we can demonstrate that and they truly understand that the sky's the limit for them and for the connection that we can build for them. But it is all linked to purpose. Absolutely.

[00:26:29.310] – Steve

I think some teachers get in trouble there, not realizing that the kids read it. The kids read that disconnect between words, even just words and body language.

[00:26:44.770] – Mike

Yeah, they do. And look, the kids parents do as you know, think about it. At the start of the year, what do we always tell our teachers and even tell ourselves, build a connection with the parents. Because if we develop that trust bank at the start of the year, when Johnny loses his water bottle or when so and so is in a fight at recess, when all these things happen, because they're gonna happen, they can make a withdrawal out of the trust bank. And they're going to trust you as a teacher because you got a connection with them. But when it's not authentic, the parents can see that as well. And all of a sudden we get a deficit in the trust bank account. And when it comes to that little water bottle incident, which is a small matter, very quickly the superintendent is involved because the parents just simply don't trust you. You can definitely see when it's not authentic and it's just so repulsive. So if you break it all down, it is really just generally having a care for other people and wanting to see them grow and succeed.

[00:27:47.990] – Steve

I believe that repairing that deficit is a whole lot more difficult than building the bank initially. If you build the bank and you get a little bit of a deficit, you got something there. But if you start with that deficit, then no matter how hard you're working at it, the believability isn't there and to overcome that gets really tough.

[00:28:10.650] – Mike

Yeah, it is. And you see that. I do see it in some teachers where even a couple of months into the year, they just haven't invested the time in building those relationships and it's almost too late a couple of months in to try.

[00:28:26.390] – Steve

And you're behind the wave.

[00:28:29.020] – Mike

Yeah, exactly right. You got to get ahead of the wave to develop that, and then it can just absolutely multiply. But then when you get behind the wave, you're never going to catch up with it. So it actually ties in perfectly to the next chapter, which I'm sure you're going to ask me about.

[00:28:44.950] – Steve

Intentionality, take us right into it.

[00:28:47.340] – Mike

And that, I actually purposely put it at the end of the book because that is the crux of everything. We can have all these wonderful strategies, but if we're not intentional every day to build rapport, if this is not something on our mind, if we don't see or understand the value in this, it'll just become something that we do every now and then, and then it sort of fizzles away. But if we truly understand that our ability to build rapport with people is a key to success in every aspect

of life, and I firmly believe that we will be intentional every day to build connections. Now, some of those will be things that come naturally to us, and other things will be things that we'll maybe make a note of, hey, I want to connect with that person today. When I walk past so and so, I just got a funny vibe. Let me check in, see how things are going. We're intentional every day. And I just need to stress as well, when we are intentional about building rapport, it's the small things that matter. It's not the huge, big thing that takes a huge budget to do those small, little check ins, all of those things.

[00:29:53.330] – Mike

Being mindful of your body language, thinking about how we communicate, how we listen, just demonstrating that energy and enthusiasm, that authenticity and who we are, those things every day will just develop such a groundswell in people's lives. And then as a leader or as a colleague, as a friend, we have the ability to support them, to develop them, to just help them grow as people and as professionals. So, yeah, it's so important, but without it, without that intentionality, it'll just become another thing that we might do for a little bit.

[00:30:32.410] – Steve

I'm almost seeing your six chapters there as a little line on a note card that I put somewhere on my desk. And every now and then, just pick it up and run through the day before I head home today, there's something on here that I'm not sure of. And so tomorrow, I want to take that consciously.

[00:30:54.450] – Mike

I was doing an interview just after I published the book, and I was speaking to the interview about body language, and so I was talking about it and all of that, and then all of a sudden, she got a little bit awkward because she was like, oh,

my goodness – I feel like you're just sort of, like, criticizing me or critiquing how I'm sitting and all these things. But, of course, that's never the case, right? But when you're thinking about things, you kind of always do sort of think about these things, but it's never in a judgmental way. It's actually focused on yourself and how you can change what you do rather than other people.

[00:31:32.270] – Steve

And the power of school leaders, being able to have several people on staff that can be your coach, that you can say, kind of look at this list, knowing that this is important to me. When you see a behavior on my part that doesn't click in with this, wave the flag, because that's not my intention. My reality is this, and if that's not what's getting communicated, that's what I like to work on.

[00:32:03.080] – Mike

Yeah, absolutely. And having that coachable spirit and attitude is so important. I just think the power of coaching in any context, but in particular, school is just so powerful and we seeing that, obviously thanks to our work with you, Steve. But having that ability to be coached, regardless of what level you're at, to always be able to have that critical friend, to be able to say those things to you and coach you through a process, just having that extra set of eyes is so valuable and I've benefited from it absolutely.

[00:32:40.130] – Steve

Any closing thoughts or comments you want to share with us before we wrap up?

[00:32:45.090] – Mike

I think we've done a good job chatting through everything. Like I said at the start, my whole purpose of writing this book is really a passion project. And if I can help encourage

a few people, then I'm even more happy. It is something that I truly believe is the key to success in life. And I'm not talking about financial success. I'm talking about success in life in every aspect. If we have the ability and have mastered the ability to build connections with people, I'll stress it one more time. It is a skill that can be developed in every human being. It's not a mystical talent that is given to a few and not to others. We can all develop it. And if we have an intentionality to do that, then we can. And yeah, if anyone's out there has any questions or would like to continue the conversation further, I'd love to.

[00:33:38.790] – Steve

What's the easiest way for listeners to connect with you?

[00:33:41.880] – Mike

So I've got a website as well, thepowerofrapport.com. You can also connect in on LinkedIn. I'm quite active on LinkedIn, so if you drop me a message on LinkedIn, we can always chat. And yeah, I enjoy that. I actually gain energy from talking to people and especially on this topic. I love it. So happy to hear people's perspectives.

[00:34:02.740] – Steve

We'll put both of those into the lead-in to this podcast.

[00:34:05.730] – Mike

Thank you so much. My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

[00:34:10.210] – Steve [Outro]

Thanks for listening, folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com