

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

HOW TO APPLY THE HIP HOP ATTITUDE TO EVERYDAY LIFE

The spirit that led to the creating of Hip Hop culture is still present in everything we do as a culture today. In a word, that spirit is innovation. Pure, raw, unbridled creativity in the face of challenge, lack and even outright opposition, is the basis for everything we have in the world of Hip Hop. In today's lesson, we are going to look at how we can allow our lives to be infused with that innovative Hip Hop attitude and how, even 40 years later, this spirit can benefit us in ways that transcend the culture.

WORK WITH WHATCHA GOT

When music was not present but someone needed a beat, beatboxing was born. When party DJs wanted to extend the breaks of songs to keep the B-boys on the dance floor, mixing (and then sampling) was born. When the DJ became too caught up with mixing and scratching to verbally host the party any longer, MCs were born. When kids weren't old enough or didn't have the money to get into discos, Hip Hop block parties and Jams were born. When expensive fashions couldn't be bought, street fashion was born. The solutions to all of our problems lie in reorganizing and applying things that already exist. The obstacles we face open our eyes to new ways of seeing the tools we have, which is what breeds innovation and creative problem solving. New inventions are made daily, by people of every age, to fix things that were either broken or waiting for a better way. The question is, where do you start? Start wherever you see something that doesn't work like you think it should. Maybe it's a problem of not having the time you want to do something. Maybe the issue is something that is literally broken in your life or around the house. Maybe you're challenged by something you've been putting off because the circumstances are just not right. Maybe your problem is boredom with the same routine or offerings out there in the world. All of these problems can be solved by finding new ways to employ the things you have right now. For example, let's say as above that time is my issue and I want to start learning to play the piano. As you look at your day, you realize that a significant amount of time is locked up in traffic-laden traveling. To solve this, you research and discover new routes that cut your travel time significantly. Adding to that solution, you look at your overall travel needs and realize that you are taking a lot of shorter trips daily which could be combined to reduce how often you need to be out and about. All of this time saving could allow you to start your new hobby. More importantly, you didn't need to spend any money or acquire anything new (besides knowledge) to create this solution. However, what if you cannot afford lessons, or even a piano? If you have access to the internet and internal motivation, many lessons are available online. If you can't access the internet at home, public libraries are a solution. If you don't have a piano, relatively inexpensive keyboards are often available online or in secondhand stores. Another option is to put out a call to family and friends, to see if someone can lend you what you need.* To get your mind going, here is a quick list of other examples: tear apart/combine existing clothes to create new fashions, ride your bike and create new moves for others to imitate, create a new board game for game night, create a neighborhood clean-up day and involve all of your neighbors, learn to fix something you used to take to a professional for repairs, start an online channel about your favorite social cause, mix up music that has no business being mixed up and then make up new dances to that music, organize a "no-technology" weekend once a month at your house to get your family to spend more time together without outside distractions. The point here is that everything from work problems, school problems, social problems, neighborhood problems, political problems, to artistic problems and money problems have solutions that you do not need to wait on anyone or anything else to solve. If you learn to work with what you have, you can overcome any challenge you face.

PROMOTE YOURSELF

Before there were any rap albums, people at parties were grabbing the microphone and shouting out their MC names in rhymes. Before The Lockers found fame on Soul Train, they were putting on their own shows around Los Angeles. Before Jay-Z got a big record deal, he was selling tapes and CDs out the back of his car all over New York. The empire known today as Def Jam Recordings was started in Rick Rubin's dorm room at NYU. Each one of these groups or people today are cultural phenomena, but before they were, they promoted themselves. Applying it to today's lesson, most, or all of the ideas you might have come up with in the section above would be greatly benefitted by presenting them to the larger world around you. For performers, the most traditional route of "discovery", has been to attend auditions and competitions. However, with the relative ease of access to recording equipment and the ubiquity of the internet, another very viable way of getting your art out to others is posting videos online. These videos might be highlight reels of your work, a video performance you created, a show you produced, or some other kind of demonstration of your talents. The term "YouTube Famous" or "YouTube Sensation" has become common now because of the amount of people achieving mainstream popularity based on self-promotion.

*Just to illustrate the point: an actual keyboard is currently sitting around the FUNKMODE offices not being used by anyone

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However, the important thing to recognize here is not technology or the internet per se, but the idea of getting to work instead of waiting to work. People often delay putting in the time and effort to do new things because they think it is not their place. Many believe that big ideas and solutions only come from the top, from rich people, celebrities or those with far more skill than they. The idea of greatness being concentrated elsewhere is not reality. In fact, an hour or so spent researching “young entrepreneurs”, “new entrepreneurs” or “unlikely entrepreneurs” will fill your mind with more examples of successful self-promotion than you may have ever thought possible. It is not necessary, in most cases, for you to have some grand gesture of endorsement or acknowledgment to begin work on great ideas. You do not need a record deal to make an album. You do not need to belong to a theater company to be in or produce a show. What you do need to do is put in a lot of hard work and then tell the world about what you have created.

CONFIDENCE (SWAG) AND PRIDE

Showing off is a much a part of Hip Hop as rapping or b-boying. And, you do not have to have much to be proud of what you've got. Hip Hop in its early days never apologized for what it was not or could not do. Hip Hop pioneers were confident in what they were able to do, knowing that they were doing the best they could with what they had and still were always striving to get even better. They did not hide from the limelight because others might have thought that they were less. Hip Hop became what it is today by owning the stage and doing it with style and boldness. The aforementioned Lockers are a good example of confidence and pride. It is now well known that the group's founder, Don Campbell, was failing at doing the popular dance called “The Funky Chicken” when he came up with Locking. However, did this cause him to shrink back or feel down about himself? No, not only did Don not hide, he made his own dance group, dressed them up in the flashiest costumes possible and took them straight onto national television. Every idea is vastly improved when confidence is brought to the table. In Hip Hop dancing, you may have the moves, but confidence and pride cause you to add your own style, put in an extra hair toss, give a eye-grabbing facial expression or go into the battle circle when your fear is telling you to wait one more round. Hip Hop teaches you not to hold back when the light is shining. This is an important lesson, because in all of our lives, opportunity is constantly knocking. Hip Hop says to answer that door and do it with a bang. When you have a chance to do something new, create something new, or promote something new, having a Hip Hop attitude moves you to jump at that experience. Whether it's doing a new dance, wearing a new fashion, singing a new song, creating a new business, employing a new idea or just being yourself fully, do it with the confidence and pride that allowed Hip Hop to take its rightful place on the stage.

COMPETITION

We become stronger through challenge. Early B-boys battled each other over and over and the result was the creation of incredible, stylish and acrobatic moves that are still being improved today. MCs battled their way to creating a multi-billion dollar industry that dominates the world music stage. DJs battled and still battle creating masterful mixing, cutting and scratching techniques on the turntable that created a whole new industry of music and technology. Graffiti artists battled to literally take the art form to higher and higher heights. Here is the formula for Hip Hop's battle-induced success: (1) Come up with a great idea (2) Show it off with confidence and style (3) Send your opponent home inspired or shamed (4) Said inspiration or shame causes your opponent to train hard, innovate and get better (5) You battle again and this time your opponent shames or inspires you (6) Repeat. Because of these six-steps (pun intended), Hip Hop has reached world-shaking levels of skill and popularity. Again, competition and challenge creates strength. The lesson for us today is that not only is it necessary for us to keep challenging ourselves, but it is necessary to surround ourselves with like-minded people who challenge us. The battle circle teaches us to always associate with people who are better than us and motivating us to be better. The battle circle teaches us to accept defeat, realizing that it is only temporary, using it as motivation to work hard to come back stronger. The battle circle teaches us that you can make others better by becoming better yourself. Finally, the battle circle teaches us that this entire process of hard work, failure, success and getting better can be a lot of fun.

ALL LOVE

At the end of every true Hip Hop battle, the participants exchange gestures of respect for one another, be that words, gestures, daps, pounds, handshakes, hugs or just more friendly battling. Hip Hop knows that only by acknowledging and appreciating the contributions of everyone who has the courage to bring their skills to the circle does the culture grow. This is possibly the most important lesson of all, for none of us exists as an island. We are all here because of what each of us individually brings to the table. We owe our existence and betterment to the support of our families, our friends, our schools, our teachers, our neighbors and our communities. Showing love for all of those people and groups is a necessary part of keeping them going and growing. Showing love for those outside shows love for yourself, because loving yourself is a prerequisite for being able to love others. All love is what keeps the circle tight and it is what Hip Hop is all about.

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While Hip Hop did not originate any of these ideas, they are obviously major blocks upon which the culture was built. These ideas creating the essence of Hip Hop are an attitude, a mind set. They are a spirit of creativity and expression that weaves itself into everything you do in life. They are a formula and pattern of success that, when used properly, will allow you to find similar success in your own life.

HIP HOP WORD OF THE WEEK

Flip it: Similar to "Flip the Script", meaning to change things up, to reverse direction, to go with a new idea; as in to flip over to the other side of a matter.

EX: "He thought I was gonna rap about something wack and then I flipped it on em."

Song reference: "Work It" by Missy Elliott: "It is worth it? / Let me work it / I put my thang down, flip it and reverse it"

BONUS: NAME ANOTHER SONG/ARTIST THAT HAS USED THIS HHWOTW

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) What is a challenge in your life currently that could benefit from one of the essential attitudes of Hip Hop?
- 2) Come up with a potential solution to this problem using the ideas in this lesson.
- 3) What is one of your specific talents that you can allow to shine to inspire or motivate others?
- 4) Who is someone that has inspired or motivated you that you can give/is overdue for an expression of all love?