

Lessons from the bedroom

Robyn Pearce

“**M**y dad was a 2 Star General. I learnt some great life-long attitudes and habits from him,” said Penny Wing, participant in a group I worked with in London earlier this year.

“Every morning I would wake up to him knocking on my door saying: ‘Time to get up. Another day in which to excel.’

“One of his other favourite maxims was: ‘Make the bed as soon as you get out of it.’

“His rationale – no matter how your day goes you have accomplished *one* thing. Even if you have a bad day you return to a well-made bed.”

In a moment we’ll look at how this applies to schools. But first a confession.

As Penny shared her Dad’s wisdom on that hot London day I had a flashback to a younger Robyn. In my earlier adult years I was a very sloppy housekeeper. It was my lovely mother-in-law who triggered my transformation.

Molly’s house-keeping methods were far superior to mine. She never criticised my untidiness but I began to notice the sense of calm when I walked into her house, even if my six little kids were running in behind (or ahead of) me. Her home was always tidy, well-maintained and attractive. Bit by bit, using her as an aspirational model, my methods improved. One of those practices was to make the bed before leaving the bedroom.

As well as setting the tone for the whole day, if you put clothes away and leave the bathroom tidy as well, at least one section of the home isn’t shrieking ‘don’t let anyone come in here – it’s a mess!’ It seems obvious once you get into the habit of it, but many people live with messy bedrooms and frequently unmade beds. (The same principle applies in every other room of the house – bottom line: **put away as you go.**)

If you’re struggling in this area, you might also get value from an encouraging role model.

Two simple techniques to go from Messy Martha/Matthew to Organised Odette/Oliver

This simple domestic habit also has relevance in schools, for both teachers and students. What we’re really talking about is the value of:

- The Habit of Momentum
- The Habit of Completion.

How do we build or capitalise on momentum?

In a car, think of how much faster you go through a set of lights if your wheels are still



turning when the light turns green than if you’re stationary when it changes.

It’s easier to keep going on any activity when you’re doing other similar tasks. Phone calls, email, filing or other paperwork – it’s faster and more efficient to batch or chunk similar activities than to chop and change constantly.

And what about completion?

In a school, think how quickly the whole place would sink into chaos if students didn’t put

sports gear away as soon as they’d finished with it, or library books weren’t replaced on the correct shelves – and that’s just for starters.

Putting things away as you finish with them or at the next natural break is a simple and very visible example of the habit of completion. However, this really powerful success habit is a struggle for many people. How many teachers have messy work stations? Quite a few, in my observation.

Especially when something is demanding attention, you’ve got someone waiting, or you’re

about to dash out the door to an appointment, the temptation is to think 'I'll get back to that later', and move on to the new activity. The old task is completed or taken as far as it needs to go. The pressure is off. The new activity is more interesting, or more urgent. The natural thing is to want to move forward.

But there is a better way. Here's another personal experience to illustrate it.

I spent years learning to finish things. Until I *did* learn it, life seemed to be one long disorganised roller-coaster, lurching from task to task with nothing ever quite completed. Occasionally I'd step back objectively and notice that a task was about 90–95 per cent done, but the feeling of satisfaction for a job well done often seemed elusive and out-of-reach. Finally I noticed it was because items were often not put away at the end of an activity, or a small part was left undone. I lived in a tension of nothing's-quite-finished. As most of us have experienced, a sense of incompleteness compounds stress and a sense of "too much to do". The common result is being overwhelmed.

Even after becoming a time management specialist I still had times where the old habits would sneak up and I'd find myself in another pickle. Then one day there was a breakthrough. I'd been working on a big task that involved many files. They were strewn all over the large office table. The task was completed and an

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appointment was looming. As I looked at the desk the thought was, "Oh dear, it will take ages to put this all away. I'll do it when I get back."

At the back of my mind a little voice said, "Robyn, do it now. It won't take long."

So, at first reluctantly, I started. The momentum quickly built. There was time urgency anyway but to my surprise it took only a couple of minutes to throw the files together and place the boxes in the cupboard. Decisions were quick and easy to make for I'd just finished working with the papers and everything was top-of-mind.

A few hours later I returned from my appointment. Walking in the door, head full of the new work required, my eyes fell on the clean tidy table. A memory of the earlier battlefield flashed across my mental screen, followed instantly by a wonderful surge of relief. In that moment I realised that, had the clean-up been delayed, it would have taken at least 15 minutes to sort on my return. And I probably would have said, as so many do, "I'll get round to it when I have time". Consequence? The mess would have sat there for days, an invisible but very

real mental burden, slowing down the creativity required for the next task.

Now, as soon as a task is finished the paperwork or item is immediately put away if its destination is within arms' reach. If it's going further away in the office or to another room I make a pile on the floor and pick it up at the next natural break. It takes only moments to return things when you've just been working on them, filing of both papers and equipment becomes an invisible non-task, and your office (or home) always looks tidy.

Last tip: Enjoy the journey. Sometimes you'll slip up but the benefits become their own reward. Before you know it you'll have the completion habit mastered.

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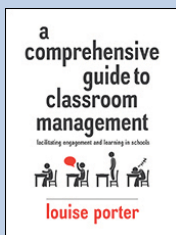
Robyn Pearce is known around the world as the Time Queen, helping people discover new angles on time. You can reach her at www.gettingagrip.com, where you'll

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Book review

A Comprehensive Guide to Classroom Management

Louise Porter
Allen and Unwin
ISBN 9781743311745
\$A69.99



Like many of my colleagues, I became a teacher because I wanted to help children reach their potential. I assumed that a love of my subject areas and a commitment to student welfare would make teaching a dream career. Once I got into the classroom I realised that no matter how much I loved the content of what I was teaching, a lot of time was going to be spent on actually managing the class. Just because I wanted to be there didn't mean my students did. At times it seemed disheartening, and I even gave up teaching for a while when I felt like I was spending more time getting annoyed at my classes and less time actually teaching. I needed help before we all went mad and this

is where Louise Porter comes in.

Dr Porter is a highly qualified (PhD, MA(Hons), MGiftedEd, DipEd, BA, BIntStuds) Child psychologist with a clear interest in helping children succeed. On the face of it, her book *A comprehensive guide to classroom management* should help teachers ensure the same goal. At over 400 pages, along with a further 100 pages of tables, references and footnotes it certainly lives up to the title 'comprehensive'. But how approachable is it?

Honestly, at first, not so much. The first chapter of the book features 30 pages of explanations for children's behaviour difficulties and I felt that it was saying most of the issues lie with the parents or guardians. While on the one hand that might seem like a boon for teachers so we can say 'it's not our fault', on the other hand it is very saddening, and I found myself wondering what the point of it all was, if I wasn't going to be able to influence my students' lives in the three hours I spent with them a week as a high school teacher. How could I change what happened in their home lives? Was there even any point in trying?

However Porter's book does go on to actually provide some information and techniques that can help. She discusses in detail two main theories that can be used in the classroom, the Controlling Approach and the Guidance Approach. The Controlling Approach looks at modifying the behaviour of students with the intent of changing their future behaviour, and the Guidance Approach focuses on the needs of the students in the present. Porter's experience is obvious and her advice appears sound. Unfortunately this is not the easiest of books to read. Yes the information is interesting and informative but the style is more akin to a university handbook than something a busy classroom teacher would necessarily have time to look at.

I have no doubt it could be beneficial, but I fear that many teachers would not have the time to really devote to studying the book, which is a shame, because anything that can help us help our students to learn and face the world is going to be worthwhile.

Anne-Maree Sleight