

The eight most powerful time tips for effective teaching

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I was talking to a busy principal at a local school the other day. He wanted some advice on how his time-pressed teachers could use the end of Term 1 and the onset of winter as an opportunity to reassess how they manage their work day.

Hopefully the following eight quick and easy-to-apply tips might be useful to you too.

'No' is your most powerful time management tool

When we know what our values are, and when we have a clear set of goals in all areas of our lives, we're in a much stronger position to politely and appropriately say 'no' to potential time-stealers and less relevant activities.

Every week, block in a few important non-urgent actions

It's too easy to get caught up in the momentum of the school day and week. Change that emphasis by making appointments with yourself, written into your diary or organiser, to work on one or two activities per week of long-term and long-lasting value. Not sure what you could do? Think of the big tasks put off until you 'have time'. Almost certainly they can be broken down into small chunks.

Constantly ask, 'What is my highest priority right now?'

This is a great focusing question. When applied we find it easier to stay on task with activities that really make a difference. We're also less likely at the end of the day to find we've not dealt with our highest priorities.

'How can I do this task more efficiently?'

Become a 'walking question mark'. There are always better ways to do things. Every time you do a task, look for a shortcut, a way to trim a few seconds or a minute off the task. They mount up to a surprising total over a week. How do you manage your paperwork? Do you put things away when finished with them? How many unnecessary steps do you take in a day? Notice how often you say in frustration, 'Bother it. I forgot to get (or do)...' Time-saving efficiencies are all around us, but most people don't go looking for them. Instead, they just complain about lack of time!



Block in regular sanity gaps

Why be wonderfully efficient if we don't take time to enjoy life and the amazing world we live in? When did you last take a complete weekend off – no email, no marking, no responsibilities other than the people you're with? Many of us know it's important to clean out old files and regularly defrag our computers – it's a house-keeping process that helps them run better. Think of taking regular time off as a defrag of your brain. You'll come back fresher and you'll also produce better results (just like the computer!) Give your conscious and subconscious time to talk to each other – you'll be amazed at the results.

Manage your energy well and time looks after itself

Around the world I'm hearing the phrase 'energy management' more and more. Think of your energy levels as your filter or indicator as to whether you're doing the right things. Sluggish energy is a powerful clue – if something isn't flowing smoothly there are almost always ways to either change activity or improve things. A good filter question: 'What's blocking my energy here? What can I do about it?'

Eliminate clutter in all areas of your life

This links in part with the previous point. When you walk into a clean tidy environment, how do you feel? The more you're connected to that environment, the more impact it will have on you. Someone else's messy and untidy space may or may not have an obvious effect on you, but I guarantee you'll virtually never want to linger. Some people only sort out possessions and 'stuff' when they move houses; others do

it every spring. Run a constant 'clutter filter' on yourself. Make it part of your daily routine and it's never a 'big' job. Instead of saying 'I'll just put it here while I think about it', get into the habit of completing at the time.

The reality is, even if you do think about it again, why would you want to? Old 'stuff' is seldom used again by you. Why not recycle it and let someone else have the chance to get value. Imagine every item you hang on to has an invisible silver thread connecting you to it. Does it energise you or pull you down?

Don't make email the first thing of the day

This point is more relevant for non-teaching staff. If you're a classroom teacher you probably can't do email very often in the day anyway, but if you do get computer time before class, try to be very minimal and swift with the email.

However, if you're non-teaching staff you're got every chance of being seduced into an email ping-pong session all day long. Problem is, email is addictive. And if we're answering emails, guess who's in charge of our priorities? Yep – not us.

Instead, you take control of your day. Spend time on the most important tasks for the day, and (unless it's truly vital) don't look at email until at least mid-morning, and then only for a defined chunk of time. Have two or three email slots through the day and you'll keep on top of most of it, with the occasional bigger catch up session. If people rely on email for urgent information they're using it wrongly. A phone is still almost always the best way to alert someone that there's something urgent waiting. Communication is only what's received, not what is sent. How do you know someone has read your urgent epistle unless you've spoken to them? **ET**



Robyn Pearce is a Certified Speaking Professional (top speaking accreditation in the profession of speaking and held by only about 800 people around the world).

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