

Quality Education News

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Too much to do in too little time



A 21st century teacher has a busy and demanding workday. At a recent workshop, a grey-haired teacher with forty years of chalk dust on her fingers gave the audience a nostalgic description of days gone by.

In those far-off days when the Friday afternoon bell rang, the weekend truly began. Weekend school activities were a rarity. Marking of books and catching up on admin work were minimal. School holidays were real-time holidays.

For quality teachers of today, there's far too much to do in far too little time. There are schools where children are on site at 06:00. At this early hour there might even be sport practices for athletics, swimming and water polo. On top of the many hours in the classroom, teachers have afternoon and evening extramural activities. Find the time also for the marking of books and attending meetings. School activities can also eat into the teachers' time over the weekends.

So, how do teachers survive, manage and keep on smiling?

Teaching is often described as one of the 'giving' or 'serving' professions. Such dedication can result in teachers taking on more than is good for their emotional, mental and physical health. Too often, teachers don't know when to say enough is enough.

Carl Jung, the psychiatrist, made the brutally blunt comment:

Somebody who's tired and needs a rest and goes on working all the same, is a fool.

Teachers need to firmly yet ever-so politely refuse to have their goodwill exploited. That means looking over-demanding colleagues, education department officials and parents straight in the eye and make a statement. That statement is: Aowa! Neel! Nein and No!

Until the 1990s our world was digital-technology free. Telephones and fax lines were major sources of daily communication. Look at us now. Desktops, iPads, laptops, tablets and smartphones are part of daily life. Today there's a relentless bombardment of communication through emails, Facebook, twitter and the like. How does one cope with the technological overload?

A solution is to control the digital overload rather than let it control you. Larry Rosen (2018: 32-33), a psychology professor, makes the point that we turn to technology to soothe our anxieties. We want to be part of what's happening all around us. We want to be in the loop.

To deal with digital overload, use behaviour principals to wean oneself from digital devices. For example, at the start of the school day, read your emails. Give yourself about fifteen minutes to read, respond and maybe delete. Now forget about what's in your inbox until you return to it later at a scheduled time several hours later. This simple practice will help you become better focussed, increase your productivity and give yourself more time for other tasks.

Once upon a time it was seen as a professional skill to be able to multi-task. It was believed that it was a clever short-cut to tick-off everything on one's 'to do' list. Research done world-wide has smashed that fallacy. You're 40% slower at problem-solving when multi-tasking. There's also an issue of good manners. Why give someone your half-attention when they'd like your full-attention? The time management suggestions in this newsletter have a focus on the time-starved teacher. Yet they can also benefit children. Their days are also packed with activities from dawn to dusk and into the night. Making every minute count is important – whatever our age.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

Reference

Rosen, L2018. Take a break. *Harvard Business Review* – ONPOINT. Winter.



This newsletter is a social responsibility initiative of SAQI. The newsletter is emailed to educators, private individuals and education institutions. If you'd like to be on the mailing list, please contact Mrs Vanessa du Toit on vanessa@saqi.co.za

Dr Richard Hayward, the editor, does school leadership and management programmes under the aegis of SAQI. Programmes are endorsed by the South African Council for Educators (SACE). Attendees earn Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) points. For workshop details, please contact him on rpdayward@yahoo.com or ☎ 011 888 3262.

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Yeah! Another meeting!



Does a single week go by at your place of work without a meeting? Hardly likely. In fact, does a single day pass without a meeting with either an individual or a group? Meetings are a reality for every organisation. They can be of long-term great importance. What's decided on at meetings often impacts profoundly on the success or otherwise of the organisation.

Depending on how they're managed, meetings are a bane or a blessing. Efficiently and effectively managed meetings can be exciting as well as invigorating. They can focus everyone towards achieving outstanding organisational goals.

Lesley Perlow, a Professor of Leadership at Harvard Business School, cites three negative aspects of meetings (2018: 106):

1 Time is zero-sum Every minute spent in a wasteful meeting eats into time for an individual to do solo work. That's essential time lost for creativity and efficiency.

2 Price to the organisation Dysfunctional behaviour occurs when people wander off the topic and spend time complaining as well as criticising. Their rants can reduce the spirit of innovation.

3 Happiness levels drop Meetings are meant to improve communication and team work. Poor meetings torpedo these goals. People resent meetings that are excruciating and wasteful.

Well-managed meetings, however, can be most beneficial. If a school claims to have a democratic, participative leadership style, then meetings are opportunities to display that style. In this regard, Perlow (ibid: 106) quotes a senior executive in a North American pharmaceutical company whose words also apply to any good school:

I believe that our abundance of meetings at our company is the Cultural Tax we pay for the inclusive, learning environment that we want to foster ... and I'm OK with that. If the alternative to more meetings is more autocratic decision-making, less input from all levels throughout the organisation, and fewer opportunities to ensure alignment and communication by personal interaction, then give me meetings anytime!

Top tips for tip top meetings

1 Comfortable and pleasant venue: Ensure that there are enough seats and there's space for everyone to sit comfortably. Air-conditioning or fans help to cool the room on hot days. Heaters might be needed for cold days.

2 Something to eat or drink (before or after): Yes, this might be a 'carrot' to entice attendance! Yet it's a much-appreciated thoughtful gesture especially at the end of an energy-sapping day in the classroom.

3 Start on time: It's a courtesy to your audience to show respect towards them for their giving up of their time. Also, let everyone know at the start when the meeting will stop.

Don't wait to start the meeting because of late arrivals. Stick to the schedule as one would at a Swiss railway station!

4 Stick to the agenda: Meetings should be democratic but not outrageously so. The Chair is to pace going through the agenda items according to the allocated time. Encourage discussion and input but not if members meander off the topic to tell tales that might be enjoyable but are irrelevant.

There could be agenda saboteurs – deliberate or unintentional – who introduce new topics to the meeting. If it's not in the agenda, the item is to be deferred to the next meeting.

5 Stop on time: Again, it's a sign of respect to all in attendance. End the meeting at the agreed-on time. By so doing, appreciation is conveyed for the members' giving of their time.

Reference

Perlow, LA 2018. Stop the meeting madness. *Harvard Business Review* – ONPOINT. Winter.





Perfectionism can cripple productivity

Henry Ford (1863-1947): “You can have the car in any colour you like provided it's black.”

Perfectionism can get tasks done superbly but sometimes at too heavy a penalty. More time is often needed in order to achieve a perfect result. Yet in doing so what does it do to a person's stress level? Also, does perfectionism end in less being done?

Henry Ford, the car manufacturer, reduced the traditional 48-hour work week for his employees to 40. He didn't make the change because of a benign spirit towards the workers. It was a hard-nosed business decision. He maintained – and was proved right – that productivity and quality of work went up when the number of work hours went down. Faulty work workmanship on his factory assembly lines was reduced.

More time spent on a task doesn't guarantee better results. Also, time spent on one or two specific project often means that there's less time to spend on others. This is not to decry perfectionism but to get it in balance. Matt Plummer is the CEO of a company that helps professionals such as teachers avoid burnout. He states (Plummer: 95):

It doesn't mean you shouldn't ever perfect your work. It just means you should only do so when it will contribute significantly to the impact of your work.

To get the balance right of what needs to be done really well as against what's OK if it's done with a modicum of effort and time, there's a need to prioritise.

How does one prioritise? According to American psychologist, Jeff Szymanski (2018: 147) tasks can be put into one of four broad levels of priority. They are:

A tasks ★★★★	It's really important to do well	100% effort Do your absolute best.
B tasks ★★★	Doing an adequate job is OK	80% effort Try hard but be satisfied with 'good enough'.
C tasks ★★	Basic tasks that need minimum effort	Apply just enough to get by.
D tasks ★	Time consuming but unimportant	Don't waste the effort – set aside for an unoccupied moment

Another area where teachers can priorities is to deal with the avalanche of paperwork that is piled on their desks. Process the paperwork. To do it effectively, apply the DRAFT acronym. The DRAFT procedure is:

- D**elegation pile Pass the paper on to someone else to deal with it.
- R**eading pile This document or piece of paper has to be read/studied by you.
- A**ction pile You will have to move to action on its contents.
- F**iling pile Either you or someone else needs to file for future reference.
- T**oss pile Throw it away.

Yes, there's much to do and often nowhere near enough time. Use your precious time optimally. Prioritise.

Reference

Plummer, M *et al* 2018. The lie that perfectionists tell themselves. *Harvard Business Review* – ONPOINT. Winter.

Szymanski, J 2018. Budget your efforts in McIntosh, D & Horowitz, J (Eds.) *Stress: the psychology of managing pressure*. London: DK Books.



Before it gets too much ... 'veg out'!

Teacher at the beginning of the school year



Teacher at the end of the school year



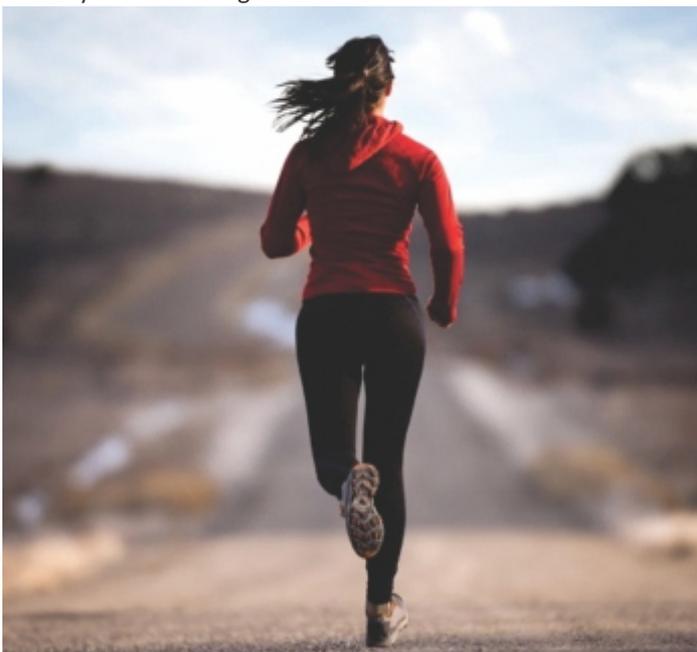
There are those times in the school year when the work tempo soars. Think of the first few weeks of the year. Think of the last few weeks in November before the start of the December holidays.

In the midst of frenetic times, it's important to find breathing space for oneself. Folk who don't do so are putting themselves at risk of loss of emotional and physical health. To avoid ill-health, there's a need to often 'veg out'.

How can a teacher find the time to 'veg out'? A simple tip used by many teachers is to block off time in their personal diaries. Give yourself time to have a life outside school. Don't fill up your whole weekend with lesson preparation and marking of books. Weekends are times to recharge yourself for the week that lies ahead.

The proverb rings true for everyone: All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy ... and a poorer achieving one too!

When it comes to having a break from the work regime, there are two common escape routes. One route is to do activities for their sheer pleasure. The second way is to do an activity that involves mastery or the learning of new skills.



Mastery activity: running

Mastery activities make one feel competent and enhance ones self-esteem. Two examples would be running a marathon or learning a new language.

Pleasure activities could be going to the movies, reading a book or taking the dogs for a walk. Whatever is being done, there's a high level of enjoyment.

Most activities have a mixture of both mastery and pleasure. The person learning to play a guitar, for example, is learning a new skill. On a mastery dimension of enjoyment the score out of 10 could be an 8. Yet as our novice guitarist learns and strums his favourite tunes, the pleasure level could be a 7. Going back to the marathon runner, the mastery level could be very high but the adrenalin rushes experienced could result in high pleasure scores too.



Pleasure activity: reading a book

Teaching is rated the third most stressful profession – after that of an air traffic controller and neurosurgeon – in the world. An obvious reason is the sheer huge volume of work that needs to be done every day. There simply isn't enough time to do it all 100% correct.

Yet sensible time management can help a teacher get it done right most of the time. When that happens, the teacher enjoys the school day. Almost as a direct result, the child enjoys the school day too.

For that mutually beneficial relationship to take place, the starting point is with you, the teacher. Care and look after yourself first.

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