

# Quality Education News

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education

## Which are the teachers' favourite schools?

Which is the best company in the world to be employed in? Fortune magazine did world-wide research on this question. The winner was Google in California, USA.

Google staff members get treated like royalty. They're always welcome to eat at the free mini-kitchens sprinkled throughout the campus. Google headquarters has thirty gourmet restaurants and every employee is no more than three minutes away from a food source. Then, of course, there are three wellness clinics, basketball courts, a rock-climbing wall, a putting-green and many more amenities. Manicured gardens and apiaries for recreational beekeeping are in the complex.

Thousands apply for posts at Google. Less than half of 1% who apply, get appointed.

In South Africa what would be the favourite school for teachers to teach at? No research has been done but there are certain schools that are far more popular than others. For example, in Johannesburg there are schools that get between twenty to fifty applicants for a single post. A neighbouring school not more than five kilometres away gets two or three.

What attracts a teacher to one school and makes them avoid another? What attracts a person to rather apply for a post at a school that might be poorly resourced as against one that has all the physical resources and even offers staff members financial 'top-ups'?

In the *Fortune* research project there was a realisation that there were excellent companies for employees even though they were poorly resourced. Never mind a staff canteen offering delicious

free meals throughout the day, these favourite companies were battling to find space for a bigger copier. The closest that they could afford in the way of freebies was a coffee and cocoa dispensing machine in the staffroom.

In times past, a good quality school was characterised by efficiency and effectiveness. Children and staff worked hard. Good results were achieved in the academic, cultural and sporting programmes. Today that's sufficient but definitely not enough. Psychological insights of the 21<sup>st</sup> century help create quality schools where everyone (well almost everyone!) can be highly motivated, achieve their full potential and be happy.

Happy schools are places where interpersonal skills are excellent, creativity thrives and intellectual endeavours are nurtured. As at Google, teachers are encouraged to experiment and show initiative. 'Failures' are seen as chances to learn and grow professionally from what went 'wrong'.

Ron Friedman in his book, *The best place to work*, makes the statement (2014: xviii):

*The secret to happy workplaces isn't spending more money. It's about creating conditions that allow employees to do their best work.*

Right now in 2020 it's tough being a teacher in many South African schools. In spite of the huge challenges, we need to make a teacher want to come to school. How about simply finding ways to make the teacher happy?! There's a cascade effect - the learners will be happy too. Their being happy results in creating a school of true quality.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

Reference

Friedman, R 2014. *The best place to work*. New York: Penguin Random House.



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# Creating an appealing environment for teachers

power sophistication mystery death	hope simplicity cleanliness goodness purity	love passion romance danger energy
intellect friendliness warmth caution cowardice	peace sincerity confidence integrity tranquility	authority maturity security stability
life growth nature money freshness	innovation creativity thinking ideas	royalty luxury wisdom dignity

Put fresh paint on the property. Start with the colours of the classroom walls. Colours such as green, blue and yellow are soothing. Many doctors' rooms and hospital wards use these colours. A bit of red in a classroom has advantages too. The colour helps a person become more alert and aware. Use the psychological understanding of different colours to create the preferred learning environment.

Control of the sound level in the classroom is an area where much can be done. Where finances allow and where it's practical, carpet the room. There are teachers who get their children to take off their shoes at the start of lessons.

Noise, however, shouldn't be seen in totally negative terms. A slight noise distraction can help one focus. Some teachers have classical music playing softly during lessons. It helps bring the noise levels down. Research has shown that the music of composers such as Bach, Beethoven and Mozart actually improves concentration. That applies particularly in a subject such as Maths.



Extreme quietness can be beneficial when absolute precision is needed. Focus is intensified. Yet when creative thinking is to be encouraged, absolute silence can be unnerving.

Furniture impacts on our thinking. Imagine walking into a classroom where the chairs are arranged in a circle. The seating arrangement could suggest that interaction and a sense of belonging are encouraged. A dialogue will happen. Contrast that where all the desks are in straight rows facing the front. There's a likelihood of less interaction between the audience and the person at the front of the room. A monologue by the teacher might happen.



Much has been done in recent times to make school furniture more comfortable. There's often plenty of space available below the desktop surface for children to store their books. Teachers' desks have bigger surface areas and more drawers. The days of the teachers having to sit on hard wooden chairs are also receding fast. Padded swivel chairs are becoming more and more common.

Teachers should be encouraged to furnish their classroom to their personal tastes. They might like to have their own curtains, favourite desk and chair. There are teachers who create corner mini-nature gardens. They bring their love of the outdoors, indoors. The more that teachers feel 'at home' in their physical environment, the happier they're likely to be.





# Setting different activities in different settings



If you're a teacher, which is your best setting if you have to mark a set of books? Some teachers sit in the staffroom and mark the books there. Then there are those teachers who prefer absolute silence and mark in a quiet room or at home.

In some schools there's an unwritten rule about what should happen in the staffroom. It's a place to relax; it's a place to unwind. Try – as far as possible – to keep school work out of the room. Don't bring in piles of exercise books and test papers into the room. The staffroom should be a sanctuary away from what awaits them when they step out onto the corridor once more.

Schools can glean a few basics about office design from the business world. There are those times when a person needs to be alone with their work and their thoughts. They need to be able to concentrate. The cubicle is a great help in this regard. Some businesses even provide headphones to help block out noise.

Then there are those many occasions when a person needs to have an interview or meeting with one or two others. A private office meets that need.

Another basic of office design is the conference room. Here folk sit around a large table to brainstorm, share ideas and discuss issues. Interaction is crucial to help get to the best end result. Ideally, such a table will not have a top or bottom end. Nobody's meant to be sitting in a physical position where they're likely – even if unintentional – to take on a position of power. Sitting around a circular or oblong table reduces that likelihood. Everyone's input is welcomed.

Fortunate schools have plenty of space. Classrooms aren't crowded. There's sufficient space for sporting and playtime activities. Quality schools use open spaces optimally. There are colourful gardens with plenty of benches for children to sit on or simply be alone with their thoughts. A small number of schools have built water fountains to make the physical learning and teaching environment even more pleasant.

Then, of course, there are those schools that bring nature to the classroom door. They've built outdoor classrooms that are literally metres away from the blackboard or smartboard. As many lessons

as possible are held outdoors. This setting in itself encourages expansive thinking and creative ideas. The environment is soothing.

Sunlight – or the lack of it – can have a big impact on the way that we think. One form of depression is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This occurs in those countries that experience many hours of darkness in the winter months. There are northern hemisphere countries that have spikes in depression during the winter months when there are only a few hours of daylight.

South Africa has plenty of sunshine throughout the year. Yet there are those schools that as one walks along the corridors, one senses darkness and gloominess. Knock down those small windows. Install much bigger ones. Let the sun shine in to help create a sunshine work environment!

Even when a school lacks space, pictures of nature can be put on the classroom and corridor walls. Plants and mini-gardens can be placed in passages and in reception areas.

Bathrooms and staffrooms deserve special attention. These rooms help create a pleasant physical working environment. They are places where teachers can relax and restore their energy. The state of these rooms reflect the regard the school leadership and School Governing Body have for their staff's daily creature comforts. Staff appreciate being in a school where every reasonable effort is made to ensure that their physical working conditions are pleasant. When they're appreciated, they're likely to feel good about themselves and be happy.

## References

Friedman R 2014. *The best place to work*. New York: Penguin Random House.

McIntosh, D *et al* 2018. *Stress: the psychology of managing pressure*. London: Dorling Kindersley.





Here's a little song I wrote. You  
might want to sing it note for note.  
Don't worry, be happy.

— Bobby McFerrin —



## *Be a happy worker ... but not all the time!*

No workplace is a place of never-ending 'sweetness and light'. There are those times when we experience unhappy emotions such as anger, embarrassment or shame. They are unpleasant but they serve a purpose. Professor Ed Deci of the University of Rochester in the USA, stated in an interview with Ron Friedman (214:95-96) that negative emotions help direct our attention to elements of our environment that require a response.

Deci made the further point that blunting or suppressing our negative emotions comes at a cost. It prevents us from acknowledging our errors and adapting our behaviours.

By its very nature, a school is a cascading fountain of emotions. Hopefully, most of those emotions spill over with positivity. Yet there are times when negative emotions spew out. You might, for example, see someone being bullied or you yourself are being bullied. Anger and rage might soar. If your follow-up action is

effective, you'll be contributing towards a better working environment for others.

If we've done something wrong in our interaction with someone, we could feel guilty. That guilt serves as a motivation to right the wrong. By repairing emotional damage, we once more create a better working environment.

Research has shown that excessive happiness can have unintended negative consequences. There's an increased tendency to make mistakes. When we're happy, we're usually confident. That can lead to overestimating our abilities and ignore potential dangers. We become more trusting and less critical than we should be (214:96).

Be mindful that it might be enjoyable to sing Bobby McFerrin's 'Don't worry, be happy' song around your workplace ... but not all the time!



**SACE**

South African Council for Educators

*Towards Excellence in Education*

## Tips for tongue-tied terrified teachers

Does having to speak in public terrify you? You're one of many millions across the world! Having to speak in public can be a terrifying experience. Unfortunately, in the teaching profession, it's an almost 'must-have' skill. There's a need to talk at a variety of public events.

If you shake, shiver and sweat at the thought of having to do a public presentation, there's a new professional development activity to help you stop them. In fact, you might start enjoying talking to the crowds!

Under the aegis of SAQI (South African Quality Institute), Dr Richard Hayward does the above course. He also does a number of other professional development activities. Certain of the courses are SACE-endorsed and earn CPTD points. If you'd like a list containing a brief outline of the different programmes, please contact him on either [rpdayward@yahoo.com](mailto:rpdayward@yahoo.com) or 011 888 3262.

### Reference

Friedman, R 2014. *The best place to work*. New York: Penguin Random House.