

When you have been teaching as long as I have, two things happen.

1. You learn that teaching is a science and an art that you never completely master.
2. Some of your former students become teachers themselves, one of the greatest treasures in a teacher's heart.

These two things prompted me to write down some of the lessons I learned the hard way in an attempt to encourage and guide the sweet little boys and girls in my classroom that are opening the doors to their first adventures.

To those students:

Never stop learning, be curious, do your best, and always remember how very much I love you.

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Note about how this book is set up:

In my classroom, I try to make sure my students are able to learn in little bites they can handle at the time. I tried to set this book up that way for you as well. It is so easy to drown in information as a new teacher. I also make lists on my board each day of what students need to accomplish, so you will see this book is also set up in list form. If you are a person who likes to see the big picture first, you may want to just read through the entire thing and then come back to the part you need. If you are a more detail-oriented person, you may prefer just checking off each chapter as you go along.

Either way, remember my grandmother's words of wisdom about advice, "Take the advice that works for you. Throw out the rest and forget about it. No one ever knows everything anyway."

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Chapter One

All About the Money

I know you didn't enter the field of education for the money, but there are some money issues I want to make sure you know.

1. Ask when you will receive your first paycheck and how often, preferably before you even sign the final contract. It is also a good idea to find out when the last paycheck each year comes to you. This applies not just when you take your first job. You should ask every time. Why? Well, each school district may have different paycheck dates. Some places may pay only once a month. Others may pay twice a month. You will most likely find that you will need to work for up to a month before you receive your first paycheck. If you move districts, depending on when the final paycheck for the year comes, you may even find yourself with TWO months to wait between checks. This occurs when your first school is super nice and pays you early....then the next school pays you the first check late. If you find you're in a real bind and need cash faster than the school will pay you, don't just starve to death! Many schools will work with you. Go to the business office, explain your issue, and see what they can do. Some schools will give you part of your yearly salary a little early and then reduce the monthly amount for the rest of the year. The ideal situation would be that you have a small savings to cover you during transition periods. Keep this in mind and try to have some savings to live on before college ends if possible.
2. Buying school supplies: DO NOT DO THIS! I see so many people complain yearly about how much money they spend on their classrooms and classroom supplies. I have taught 26 years, and the only times I have done this have been when I genuinely wanted something to make myself happy or make my life easier in some way. If you need something, the first thing you should do is ASK your administrator. If they say no, ask around and see if someone else already has it. Start by asking the school secretary because they know literally everything. You might be surprised what other teachers have hidden away in their closets that they would love to help you with. Some people like to use DonorsChoose.org or publish an Amazon wishlist. Those are fine, but I have found that there are a lot of things I can just do without. It will be tempting to spend a lot of cash to decorate your room or buy things for your classroom your first year. Your room

will seem empty compared to many veteran teachers' rooms. Just remember that we all started out that way and having less junk in the closet isn't a bad thing anyway.

3. Calculating a budget. I'm not going to spend a lot of time reinventing the wheel and telling you how to budget your money. I am going to tell you a good summary: live below your means. Just because you HAVE 2000 a month to spend doesn't mean you should spend it all. Try to avoid the temptation to buy a new car the first year. Keep your college car as long as you can. Also, it is a common mistake to forget to include health insurance when you budget. You need it, even a high deductible plan is better than nothing. Ask for information on health insurance plans right away. Your district business office or human resources staff will be able to help you.

Chapter Two: After You Sign Your Contract

Once you actually have signed a contract, you are going to be so excited!! There are going to be some things you will have to wait to do and some things you can already get started on. The more you get out of the way before school starts, the easier the beginning of the year will be. Here are some first steps. I will go over each of them in a more detailed manner in future chapters.

1. Ask when you can have a key to your new room and begin to set things up.
2. Ask for a way to contact the people you will be working most closely with. This would include other grade level team members and for upper grades, other department teachers (basically anyone who teaches the same grade or content you do). If your district has a curriculum director, get that contact info too.
3. Ask when and how you can begin to access your school email account.
4. Ask when and how you can access the lesson plan platform the school uses.

Chapter Three: Your Room

Once you gain access to your room, you will want to set it up and organize it to your liking. Notice I said to YOUR liking. You are going to spend a tremendous amount of time here. Don't worry about what anyone else thinks about it. Make it work for you. Here are a few things to consider as you set up:

1. Go through everything in the room and see if there is anything you don't think you will ever possibly use and get rid of it. This is sometimes tricky. If it is something consumable (meaning it can't be reused over and over), you can probably just toss it. However, it is actually in some places against the law to throw away certain items purchased by the school. If it is in the way, and you won't use it, just ask your administrative team what to do with it. They may tell you to toss it, or they may give you other storage options. They may also surprise you by telling you that you are required to use that textbook from 1974. The way to ask admin without getting in trouble is to first say, "Is this (insert material), something I am required to use?" Then if the answer is no, say, "Is there another place to store this item since I probably won't be using it?" About nine times out of ten admin will tell you to toss it. Always, always ask before throwing away anything you feel uncertain about. Half-used pencils and the sort can always go in the trash, but if it looks like it cost the school some money, ASK. Often schools have an inventory that you will be required to have checked at the end of the year. I don't want you to find out that you owe money for something you tossed.
2. Look over your furniture in your room. Is there anything broken that needs fixed or anything you want moved out? If so, ask your principal how to submit a request to either maintenance or the summer cleaning staff to get those things done. You can also sometimes request large pieces of furniture to be moved around inside your room. If there is something you need (a bookshelf, filing cabinet, etc.) don't hesitate to ask your principal about it. All they can say is no. You might be surprised what is in storage that needs a new home anyway.
3. Organize furniture and supplies in a way that will work with how you plan to teach. You can google classroom desk arrangements and find the most popular

ways described at length. Remember that there is no right way, and you can change it at any time if something isn't working. Just find a way to start and begin with that. When organizing supplies, think of the supplies you think you will need most and keep those someplace handy. I always like to keep student supplies together in a place they know they can access at any time. It is a good idea to have some place in your room where things can be locked. If you don't have such a place, you should speak to someone about at least getting a filing cabinet with a lock. There are many papers that are legally required to be kept under lock and key.

4. Lastly, maybe, maybe add some decorations to your room. Consider practical decorations first, such as things to hold supplies or display anchor charts with curriculum content. Just remember that no matter what kind of pressure you feel, you are not required to decorate your room in any certain way. In fact, many teachers prefer a minimalist look with as little clutter as possible. You do NOT have to spend a lot of money to make your room look a certain way. I honestly don't decorate anything at all before school until I have completed at the very least a couple weeks worth of lessons and gathered the materials needed for those lessons. If you spend all your time decorating, you will start the year behind in your lessons. Get some lesson things together and then go back to decorate if you like. If you, like me, are not a decorator at heart and are feeling sad that your room doesn't measure up in some way, you have two things you can do. You can just let it go, or you can ask for help. Often, you will find a veteran teacher or even an entire crew that would love to help you. They may even arrive with items to actually decorate with!

Chapter Four: Your New Teaching Team

Everyone needs a team to survive in education. This really isn't an alone kind of job. Even if you are the only person teaching a specific content area at a specific grade level, you must find your team. That may be other grade level teachers or other content teachers, but you need a team. When I first began teaching, my college professors had made me very leery of veteran teachers. I had heard a lot of horror stories about teachers who were "stuck in the old way" or generally negative. I was warned to stay out of the teachers lounge and eat lunch alone. This advice was very wrong. Yes, there are teachers who teach more traditionally. You can always learn something from the older ways. In fact, now that I have been around awhile, I have witnessed many of the old ways making a resurgence under new names. Yes, there are probably going to be negative and untrustworthy people you work with. That is true in any profession. Hiding from everyone doesn't solve this problem and denies you access to plenty of positive and helpful people. Make the time to have lunch with your team if possible. Maybe you don't have time every day, but at least once a week take the time to just have human conversations with your teammates. Once you have contact numbers for your new team, whether grade level or content, here are some tips:

1. Call up your teammates, if possible, before school starts and ask when they will be working in their rooms. Upper grade levels may not go before in-service starts. If that's the case, ask if there is a time you could call and ask them a few questions before then. Lower grades will probably go to work at least a week before in-service. Try to make plans to go in at least one day and time where your teammates will also be working. Ask if they could spare some time to meet with you during one of those days to ask them a few questions.
2. At your first meeting or phone call, be as open as possible. Express your willingness to learn and listen. Most teachers love to help and will want to help you as well. Make note of anything personal the person tells you. These are real people you are working with. Having a good working relationship doesn't mean you have to be best friends outside of work, but it doesn't mean getting to know each other well in order to make the best work atmosphere possible. This means learning the names of pets and family members. It means taking note of favorite snacks and general likes and dislikes. I'm telling you right now, you buy one favorite snack as a surprise for someone, they are in your corner for life!! Find

out about dislikes as well. I once unknowingly annoyed a co-worker by eating maple syrup flavored oatmeal everyday for two years, never noticing she only came to eat lunch with us until I had finished because the smell made her nauseous.

3. If the teammate gives you a lot of gossip about other people you will be working with, or even gossip about students, this is a warning sign in my opinion. It doesn't mean you have to hide from this person, but it does mean you should be very careful about what you share with that person. Most likely, you will be gossiped about by them in the future. Don't give them any ammo. All of us feel the need to vent sometimes. Be careful who you vent to and keep venting in check. It honestly isn't healthy for you anyway.
4. Similarly, if this person gives you a long speech about all the negative aspects of working at your new school, be on guard. Maybe they just had a bad day, but if they are constantly negative, this can be extremely draining on your energy. If you find yourself dealing with a negative person, there are two things you should avoid: expressing more negativity to them by joining their negative rant and arguing with them by telling them all the positive things they are missing. Neither of these things are helpful. Respond as little as possible. Try phrases like: "I see." "Okay." "I understand you are feeling upset." Then try to get out of the conversation. I usually try not to be alone with someone like this because it helps to have other people around to share the load. If the negative person expresses something positive, you should jump on that with more positivity. Sometimes, this can help turn the conversation around.
5. Ask your teammates how they handle discipline. There is often a school discipline plan you are given by the principal that is opposite from what actually happens. You can't ask, "So what is the hidden discipline plan?" That will get you in some hot water. Just ask how everyone handles discipline. Listen carefully to each response. The more people you ask, the better. You will figure out what is going on from there and be able to create your own plan based on all the information.
6. Ask your teammates to share what their lesson plans look like. Ask to physically see some of them. Just tell them you are super nervous about writing your first plans and want to make sure you are doing it right and want to see some models. The more of your teams' plans you see, the better. You will probably be given training by the district that says all sorts of things, but when you see the actual plans of real people, it will give you a better idea. I once spent hours writing

detailed plans because I was told to make sure anyone could take over my class based on my plans at any given time. I found out later I was the only person doing this. If your district requires pages of plans (sorry, this does happen), then ask your team for advice to streamline and make things as easy as possible for yourself. My team once came up with a way of basically copying and pasting something super generic to “fill out the form,” while only changing a few necessary items each week.

7. Ask your team (or the curriculum director), what resources are necessary to plan your lessons. Are there books you are required to use? Are there required curriculum guides? The faster you find this out, the faster you can start planning. Don't plan without specifically asking these questions. If there are no requirements, ask someone who teaches your content what they use.
8. Take help from your teammates when they offer as often as possible. In return, offer to help them whenever you can. Don't be a taker. If someone saves you an hour of work, find a way to ease their burden in a similar way. If nothing else--think SNACKS. Teachers love free food. :)
9. Keep pride in check. No one, no one, ever knows everything about how to do this job. You may sometimes disagree with how someone teaches, handles kids/parents, or an infinite number of other things. Just because you think your way is right, doesn't make it true. I once worked with a teacher who was always in trouble with the principal because he had a very monotone voice and taught from behind a podium. My son still says that same teacher was the best science teacher he ever had. It is important for each teacher to find the style that works best for their individual personality and the needs of the class. Don't judge that decision. A great book to read on this subject is [Teach Like Yourself by Gravity Goldberg](#).
10. Consider forming a team outside your school as well. Social media is full of various groups of teachers sharing ideas and resources.

Chapter Five: School Email

There are many things you should be aware of concerning your school email account. The most important thing being that it is for school business only. If you keep that fact utmost in your mind, you will be fine. Below is a more detailed list if you are inclined to read it.

1. Everything you write using this email can be used in a court of law. Anything, anything, anything you write is an open record. Do not put anything in an email you wouldn't want someone to read in a newspaper one day. Seriously. I am not exaggerating here. Nothing is private. Nothing. The same goes for your personal text messages in some instances.
2. Don't use this email to sign up for personal accounts (newsletters, etc.) You can use it to sign up for educational related accounts, but stay away from anything else. Not only does this draw a clear line between personal and business emails, it also prevents you from one day moving schools and being locked out of accounts on other platforms because you used the wrong email.
3. Many people don't even add their school email to their phone. I do because I like to be able to check it on the go, but it is okay to set this boundary for yourself. This is a business email. You should not be required to check it around the clock.
4. Do set email boundaries with yourself. Do not get into the habit of checking your work account multiple times a day. I have even known teachers to get in trouble for checking and answering emails during class time. I personally check emails in the morning before school, at my conference, and after school. To clarify, that is when I check them. I do not respond to any emails until after school. This keeps me current with anything important sent from the administrator, but it also prevents me from using too much valuable time during the day responding to and deleting emails.
5. Respond to parent emails (or any other messages) within a 24 hour window. Sometimes, it is a good idea to think a bit before you respond to an irritated parent. However, it is rude to keep them waiting too long, and it actually usually

just adds fuel to the flame. In fact, if a parent is really irritated, I usually just pick up the phone. The exception to this would be if I feel like I want to have my answer in writing as back up for myself later on.

6. Learn how to use email folders to keep your account from getting cluttered. You can look this up on Youtube. There are many emails I feel the need to save. For instance, I save all parent emails in a parent folder and delete them at the end of the year. I also save certain emails from administration in a folder that I go through once a year and clean out (usually at the end of the year). It is a really good idea to keep your inbox as empty as possible. This keeps you from missing something important and feeling overwhelmed. I delete or move all emails to the appropriate folder at the end of each day. The one exception is an email that needs some sort of action that I'm not ready to do at that moment. I keep those in my inbox until they are completed.
7. Pay attention to who sent you each email. Notice if it was sent to you individually or to a group. Please, do not send a reply all message to the group unless absolutely necessary. Most people consider this rude and annoying. If you do not know the difference between reply all and reply, look it up on Youtube right now. Your coworkers will thank you for it.
8. Do not send political or religious emails to your coworkers or students.

Chapter Six: Lesson Planning

Once you get your room put together enough to have class, you should start planning as many weeks of lessons for the grading period as you have time for. I do not know how to emphasize this enough. Even after all of these years of teaching, I still find the first several weeks to be the most overwhelming. Something ALWAYS comes up that you didn't expect. There will be random meetings, parent phone calls, and so, so much random paperwork. If you can give yourself some breathing space by having your lessons ready to go, the first part of school won't be as bad. Below are some tips to make lesson planning as easy as possible.

1. Learn how the district expects lessons to be formatted and turned in. Then, before you start writing, ask someone on your team if you could see some examples of their lesson plans. See Chapter 4 item 6 for details.
2. After seeing some lesson plans, get a calendar out--either online or paper. Then, get any curriculum guides you might have. Some schools may give you a guide as to which skills/topics should be covered during a grading period and possibly even the order. If this is the case, then map out the skills/topics you will cover each day for that grading period according to the guide. You don't have to come up with specific lessons at that point. Just decide what day you will do what skill. If no one gives you a specific guide, find out what the state guidelines are. Then, you need to map out which skills you want to do each grading period for the year. I personally like to have a map of the entire year by grading period, then break each grading period down as I go along.
3. It is a good idea to build in some buffer days. Buffer days are days you leave totally flexible. These are days when you don't have a specific lesson or skill in mind. I plan a buffer day each Friday. Some people plan a few buffer days at the end of the grading period. I prefer Friday because I can plan out an entire grading period without being stressed about moving a bunch of days around for the grading period when one day gets out of whack. I know that I have one day each week that I can be flexible. When admin calls a surprise assembly on a random Wednesday, I don't have to get stressed because I know I can just bump

everything over a day for that week because I had a buffer day on Friday. If a class totally doesn't get a lesson one day, I don't stress. If a lesson takes longer than expected, I don't stress. Give yourself and your students some breathing room. What do you do when you don't need the buffer day on a Friday? Do you just let the kids sit there?? Of course not. If I don't need the buffer day on a Friday, I do fun review, reflection, or extension activities. These are not wasted days. In fact, I think they are some of my favorite learning days. I call these "Fun Friday activities." When these get cancelled because of one of the reasons listed above, the students do get fussy about losing their Fun Friday, but I promise they will survive.

4. Once you have sketched out what skills you will cover on which days and when your buffer days will be, you can start designing lessons. Honestly, this is one of my favorite parts about teaching because you get to be creative. Even if your district provides you with actual lesson guidelines, there is always room to be flexible with what your students need. Keep in mind that you can always adjust during the moment if something isn't going well. Don't keep trying to force your plan on a class just because you spent time planning it. Be honest. Admit to the class you can tell things aren't working and try something unplanned. Remember that plans can change. They are meant to be a starting point, not a script you must read from or the world ends. In fact, if you find yourself working in a district who does act like the world ends if you don't follow a scripted plan, I highly suggest you find a way out of there by the end of the year.

5. Time management is often something that is a struggle when planning. Try not to overplan every minute. Ask yourself, "What is the most important thing I want my students to accomplish on this day?" Then, stick to that. If you find yourself going short on time that day, then you will be prepared to cut all activities except the most important. Of equal importance is to find ways to use any extra time effectively. When I first started teaching, a teaching partner gave me a list of filler activities to do if I had extra time. Today, you can just google them. Either way, be prepared with some activities that relate to your content and are worthwhile for your students. My favorite filler activities today are activities that allow students to reflect, discuss, write, and share about something they learned that day. After some time in the classroom, you will find your balance when planning and get a feel for how long takes. Just know that even veteran teachers have days when plans are longer or shorter than expected. The main thing is to learn how to adjust when it happens.

6. When you are in college, you have a lot more extra time to create innovative lesson plans. Be super careful about how much time you spend now. You have to keep in mind you are a human being. If you work yourself to death creating over-the-top lessons every single day, you will eventually get way too tired. The students need a rested, happy teacher way more than they need a weekly room transformation. Read the chapter on time management for some more specific suggestions on this topic.

7. Try to get as much of the first grading period written down and start running off and creating any needed materials. Remember, the more you get done before school starts, the better.

8. Make a few days of sub plans and leave them in a place your team knows about. This is a PAIN to do in advance, but I assure you, it is so worth it when you wake up in the middle of the night with a stomach virus. I always tell my students sometime the first week of school to expect sub plans to be VERY different from our regular activities. Some people feel the need to keep everything as normal as possible with a sub. That's fine if you want to do that. I have just found that if you let your students know things will be different in advance, they have less stress. When a sub tells them to do something we normally wouldn't do, the students need to know not to argue. It is okay to do something out of the ordinary. It is NOT okay to be rude or disrespectful to the sub. My favorite thing to leave for a sub at all grade levels is some type of review game and some type of weekly activity they know how to do on their own that doesn't involve me running off things. You can see some examples of those on my blog [here](#). The main thing is that whatever you are going to leave, you leave it ready in advance with detailed instructions. It is also a good idea not to include technology in your plans just in case the one day you are out the server goes down.

9. Speaking of technology, if you include it in your plans, always have a back up way around. It will not always work like you want it to, and it is impractical to think everything can be fixed immediately. When technology goes down, I often just grab something from my sub plan box.

Chapter Seven: Students with Special Needs

You are going to be responsible for a room full of people, each with their own individual needs. Some of these students will come to you with various labels that you are required to address in a specific way legally. Some of these students will not. Either way, it is your job to find out what each student needs and provide that to the best of your ability. Below are some things to consider for both students who are struggling with learning difficulties and also those who need to do advanced work due to various gifts.

1. Be humble and curious. This may be the best advice in all areas of education, but it especially is when dealing with student needs. Don't assume you know everything, either about how to help the student or what the needs are. Ask questions. Ask the students questions. Definitely ask the parents some questions. When speaking with parents, acknowledge that no one knows the child better than the guardians. Ask support staff knowledgeable in the field where the student has needs. Use trial and error. Try some things and then ask all stakeholders for feedback. Then adjust.
2. Keep records. I always like to think of teaching as a social science. The best way to adjust to meet the needs of the students is to record how things are going. There are many ways to do that, and I think you have to find your own style. The main thing is to document things you are trying to help the students, whether it is required or not. For example, at the beginning of the year, you will receive a lot of paperwork from different departments. This paperwork will tell you the legally required accommodations and modifications for certain students enrolled in either state or federal programs. Keep this paperwork off your desk unless you are alone and keep it locked up the rest of the time. You are required, BY LAW, to uphold the requirements in such paperwork. If not, you risk your job and license. If you don't understand something on this paper, ASK.

This can often be overwhelming to keep up with. I always make a master sheet of legal accommodations for each class. I do NOT put full names on this chart. I use my own numbering system based on where the student sits in the room, but I know some who put just an initial. This helps me so that if the sheet is on my desk nearby, no one knows what it is about. This is important because all of this information is legally private and should always be kept secure. I check each class period to make sure I am holding up my responsibilities here. As the year goes on, I begin to have these pretty much memorized. I also document as much as I can using my gradebook features. Most online grade books will allow you to make notes on individual grades. I use these notes to record any kind of accommodation or modification I made. Remember, these comments are public record, so anyone can ask to see them. Make the comments short, accurate, and polite. If you can't find out how to make the notes, ask someone. If you can't record something in the grade book, make a file folder and keep whatever paper copies you can. This could be a copy of a paper you accommodated, or it could just be a handwritten note by you of something you did for the student.

3. What about a student that doesn't have a legally documented need, but you see a need anyway? There are no laws that prevent you from allowing help to a student in need. However, if you do, keep records in the same way you do for those who have documented needs. This is extremely important. Each school has a different process for getting students the help they need from various programs, but all of them will require you having the needed records to prove the student actually will benefit from such help. If you suspect a student has a need, contact the person in charge of that area of need and ask them what kinds of records and information they will need from you and what you need to do to start the process of getting the student help. It will be an annoying amount of extra paperwork for you, no doubt. However, if you are in this career to help people, it is your responsibility to do so. For instance, I have had many, many students come to fourth grade with serious speech impediments. These were obvious to all the previous teachers, but many just didn't want to take the time to be responsible for all of the paperwork involved to get that student help. That. Is. Wrong.
4. Many people will tell you to be careful not to fail a student with special needs. They will tell you that you shouldn't fail a student with special needs in order to prevent a lot of extra paperwork and because you don't

want to have to show all of your own documentation and risk being found lacking. While those things may be partially true, the real reason you should be careful not to fail a student with special needs is because they are human beings with special needs. Your first responsibility should be how to address those needs so they can be successful in your class. If a student is struggling with the accommodations being legally provided, then find ones you can add that will help. Once you find them, contact the correct support staff for that area and have them added to the legal paperwork. Talk to the guardians. Talk to other teachers who have been successful with that student. Try something else. Then, keep trying until the student is successful.

5. Learn the acronyms/names for all the special programs in your school. These are different in each state and country, but also individual schools have different codes occasionally. Ask someone on your team you trust to literally write them down for you. Ask for a list of programs and contact staff. Ask the process for getting help for an unidentified student. Be ready. You will need that information.
6. Ask administrators how they want you to handle this classified information with substitutes. A student should be set up for success when you are away, however, each district may have different rules about what and how to share this information with subs. I personally like to ask this question in an email so that I can get that question answered in writing. I try to teach my students to advocate for themselves if I am away (or even when I am there). Students with special needs, even very young ones, need to be aware of what works for them in class and how to respectfully ask for that if you are away or even forget yourself. Of course, these are private conversations with students. For example, if a student needs portions of assignments read to them, I have a conversation about how important that is for them. Then, I practice what they should say if someone doesn't provide this help. In my sub plans, I often write, "Some students will ask you to read portions of this assignment. Please accommodate this request." That way, I am not writing down names or announcing the reason why this might happen.
7. Keep accommodations and modifications as discreet as possible in the classroom. No one wants to feel singled out. Definitely don't announce anything to class about these changes. If a student has to be pulled out of your class to go to a special program, be careful not to announce that to

the class. It is actually against the law for you to announce to class, “Richard, it is your time to go to speech class!” No one needs to know that. If the student announces it, that’s fine. It isn’t your place.

Chapter Eight: Take Care of the People Who Take Care of You

There are some people at school you should always take care of. These people are often forgotten about because they don’t ask for any credit. Yet, without them, the school falls apart. If these people ask you for anything or give you any rules, do what they say without arguing or questioning. Go out of your way to be polite and helpful to them. If you can save them any hassle, do it. Find out their favorite snack and leave it for them occasionally. These people are superheroes.

1. Any single person who works in any office staff position. Please don’t make things hard on them. Follow instructions, ask questions if you are not sure, and answer the phone when they call! Set an alarm to post attendance, and do it.
2. The school nurse: Avoid sending students to clog up the nurse’s office if possible. Fill out any required paperwork. In fact, ask if you are filling it out correctly. I keep peppermints and bandages in my room at all times. I never apply bandages myself. If the cut is enough that the student can’t handle it, I send them to the nurse. You would be surprised how much a peppermint, Band-Aid, or a wet paper towel can cure. I usually try one of these remedies first, and if the student still complains, I send them to the nurse. I always, always send any head injuries. I’m not qualified to say what is okay in that instance, so I don’t try. If you are ever in doubt, send them. Just don’t send kids down just to get them out of your hair.
3. Custodial staff: At the end of every class, ask the class to clean up before you let anyone leave. If you do this, you won’t have a giant pile of tissues and half-eaten pencils on the floor for the custodians to deal with. Make an investment when you can and get a cheap broom and dustpan for your room. Make kids sweep up any giant messes. Make students pick up trash in the hallways, and pick it up yourself as well. Don’t put anything liquid or really heavy in the trash can. This really, really annoys custodial staff. Sometimes people clean out filing cabinets or closets and pack the trash cans with years worth of paper. Go ask for a bigger, rolling trash can on that day. In fact, if you have a party, clean out lockers, or any other big trash event, just ask the custodian how to handle it.

4. Technology staff: Do what they say. Don't download anything without asking. Actually read and follow the staff technology contract. For real. Most of all, be patient. They make everything look so effortless that it is tempting to be frustrated when it takes them a second to fulfill a request. Take a breath and remember how hard your life could be without them.
5. Professional support staff: Do not take these people for granted. Some teachers can be really condescending to support staff. Just remember that people are also condescending to new teachers, and treat other people the way you want to be treated. You can always learn from other people, no matter who they are.
6. Bus drivers: If anyone ever drives you anywhere, you say thank you. Period. If you are in charge of the class on the bus, you don't let them off until they pick up their belongings and trash.
7. Cafeteria Workers: I think these people may be some of the most underrated people in the building. Train your students to use good manners in the cafeteria and always model it yourself.
8. Librarians: I don't know how they do it, but these people somehow know where everything is in the building. If you are looking for a resource, ask the librarian first. Then, turn everything in on time and express your gratitude.

Chapter Nine: Classroom Discipline

This was the area I was most concerned about my first year. In fact, I still sometimes get scared!! Some of the tips below are from some very wise people who mentored me as I grew up as an educator.

1. I'm going to start with the easiest one, knowing it also has the smallest impact. Dress professionally. If you are feeling especially worried, maybe because you are close in age to your students, dress even nicer. This doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of money. Shop thrift shops and remember you can literally only need five outfits each week. It is better to wear the same thing and have a "school uniform" than to dress unprofessionally. If you are unsure if an outfit is suitable, it probably isn't. How does this help? Well, for some reason, just dressing a little differently than the students helps separate your position in the classroom. I personally just think that I want the principal to walk in the room and know for sure that I'm the teacher and not a student! Okay, I know the grey hair gives it away now. :)
2. Don't go overboard with a bunch of little specific rules. First of all, no one will listen to a long list. Second, you don't want to trap yourself in a situation where you have to enforce a tiny rule that might be unfair in some situations. I always had just two: be respectful, and be responsible. That covers just about everything.
3. Pick your battles. Not everything is worth fighting over. Sometimes people think that if they don't enforce a million tiny things, they will be seen as a pushover. This is really a fear of lack of control. The truth is that we are really totally in control of very little other than ourselves and how we react.
4. Do not lose your own self-control. If students see you throw a temper-tantrum, it shows your weakness. Some students will fear you, but many will also just want to push you until you do it again. If you feel like you are losing control, step in the hall a minute, take some deep breaths, or come up with your own coping

mechanism. I had a teacher friend once that allowed students to bring one small snack to class each day. She didn't let them have the snack until "snack time" was announced. She didn't do this for nutrition. She called "snack time" when she personally needed to shift focus and calm down. I've seen people have music breaks and stretch breaks that they use to accomplish the same thing.

5. Be firm. When you do make a decision, stick to it. Carefully determine discipline consequences when needed. I promise no one cares if you take a little time to make a good call, maybe even ask for some advice. This doesn't mean to ignore a situation. It just means it is okay to say you need a while in order to be fair. I highly, highly recommend looking into restorative discipline practices. There are tons of free resources on the internet. This is one area it pays off to research.
6. Relationships matter. I think perhaps the best thing you can do to make your classroom run smoothly has nothing to do with what most people think about when they consider discipline. If you form good, professional relationships with students, you will find you will have few problems after several weeks. The best, and I mean BEST, resource on this is a course on [student motivation by Dave Stuart, Jr.](#) If your school won't pay for the course, buy the book, [These Six Things.](#) There is a chapter summary, along with some other really great advice.
7. Follow the school policy on discipline the best you can. Do not take serious infractions into your own hands if you can help it. Fighting, threats, bullying, are for admin to deal with. However, make sure you cover yourself by keeping a paper trail concerning serious issues. Almost all schools have a form that must be filled out for serious issues. If they don't, send the information in an email and save a copy of your email. If you don't receive any information back that the issue was handled, follow up until you do.
8. Humiliation is not a discipline technique. It is mean. Try to handle any discipline matters as privately as possible. Call students into the hall. Hold them after class for a minute. If at all possible, avoid embarrassment. I try not to interrupt my lesson to discipline if possible as well. If it is something little, I may ignore it. Often, you can use a facial expression or just stand near a student to convey a silent message. Using humiliation is not only wrong, but it is also a really good way to get fired.
9. Physical punishment-- This is different from corporal punishment, which is just a fancy word for a spanking. You should already know that spanking or hitting a student in ANY way is not acceptable. If you are asked to do so by a supervisor,

just say no. What I want to address is physical punishment. I have known teachers who require students to do jumping jacks, sit-ups, stand with their nose in a corner, etc. This is basically a form of humiliation with the added annoyance of a physical activity. Unless you are coaching a physical sport that is an extracurricular activity that students may opt out of, do not give physical punishments. Even in that instance, I would try to find another way around the issue.

10. Keep a paper trail. No matter how you choose to discipline, write it all down. Find a way to keep track of it somehow. Ask some veteran teachers you trust how they do it. No matter how small the issue, write it down and keep records. In addition, I find it best to communicate all discipline issues with parents. This can be a phone call, note, or a school message service like [Remind](#). I especially like Remind because it serves as my record. You can print out every Remind ever sent to a particular parent.
11. Learn to read the energy of the room. When I was doing my student teaching, my mentor pulled me aside and asked, "Do you feel that? Do you feel the energy changing in the room?" Frankly, I did not. It takes awhile to get that feel, but it helps if you know it exists and can watch for it. You can sense when students are getting bored with an activity and need something new. You can feel when students are getting frustrated, either with a lesson or each other. Watch for those things and adjust quickly to it. Being flexible enough to change gears can often head off a lot of problems.
12. Group discipline: Don't. Unless you are absolutely positive every single person in the group is guilty, do not condemn the entire group. This is a sure fire way to lose respect from both your students and their parents.

Chapter Ten

CYA--Cover Your Ass

Just like you should always keep your students safe, you need to make wise decisions to keep yourself safe as well. These are not in any particular order because they are all necessary.

1. Join a teacher organization or union. Texas, for example, does not allow unions. It does allow you to join a teacher organization. Do it. Now. I shop around each year in the summer and find the best deal. It often changes year by year. It doesn't matter too much. Just make sure you have access to free legal coverage in case you are sued. These are my two favorites here in Texas: [ATPE](#), [TCTA](#).
2. Keep careful discipline records (see the chapter on discipline).
3. Keep careful records for students with special needs (see the chapter on students with special needs).
4. Never, never hit a student or throw something at them, even if you are just playing or acting. This seems like common sense, but there seems to be a lot of people who get in trouble for this.
5. Never, never be alone with a student. Sometimes you are forced to for various unexpected reasons. In this case, move to a location where a camera can see you both in a public hallway or space and call for help. Get another student to come in, another teacher, or an administrator. This includes when you are driving a school vehicle. The only exception would be a bus driver who must be alone with the first/last rider of the day. In this instance, insist your bus has a camera installed.
6. Do not ever allow a student or students in your personal vehicle or home. The one exception would be if you are close friends with their parents prior to having

them in class. Even then, only allow this if the parent is also going along, and you are never alone with the student.

7. Be careful about what you post or comment on social media. Don't post photos of your students in class on your personal media without written permission. Don't post names of students. Avoid posting things that would put your school in a negative light. Basically, remember that everything you say or do online can be seen by anyone at any time. This includes private groups because people can always take a screenshot of it. It is also a good idea to not friend or follow students on social media. Keep a barrier between your professional and personal life.
8. Don't use anything that belongs to the school district for your own personal use, especially technology.
9. Be careful how you touch students. If you are teaching little kids, they may constantly want to hug you. If a student tries to hug you, you have a couple of choices. You could politely say, "I'm not comfortable with hugs." If you do decide to allow the hug, turn your body to the side so that the student hugs your side body. Also, I know this sounds weird, but most students do not like to be touched on the head. A head pat is rude. Slapping the back and bottom--also rude. I don't care who you are. Coaches, you don't get an exception here.
10. Keep careful records of any kind of parent communication. Include the date, names, and a brief description of the communication. Click [here](#) to make a copy of my own form.
11. Don't throw any kind of record containing private student information in the trash until you have shredded it.
12. If you suspect, at all, for any reason, that a student is being neglected or hurt in any way, YOU call Child Protective Services. You are required to call. You WILL lose your license if you don't. Do not worry about if you should make the call. If your gut tells you something is off, call. Don't wait around either. Call within 24 hours of the incident. If the CPS agent feels like there is nothing to worry about, they won't investigate. Then, keep a record of your call, including any case numbers or call numbers you receive. I usually keep those records for at least two years after the student leaves my care. I generally let both the school counselor and admin know that I'm calling before I pick up the phone, but if they are unavailable, I call anyway. If admin or the counselor tells you that they will

call in your place, politely say, “ I am more than happy for you to call as well, but I will not feel better unless I make my own call.” In addition, if you think a student is in immediate, life-threatening danger, call 911 first. Then, call CPS.

13. Don't let your administrators be caught off guard. If you are having an issue with a parent or student, handle as much as you can on your own, but keep the admin informed. That way, if they get an angry phone call, at least they have heard your side first.

14. Sometimes students will jokingly make threats towards others or themselves. In order to CYA, make it clear to students that you don't allow them to speak that way to each other or say they want to kill themselves even in a joking manner. If a student threatens another student, I don't have a private hallway conference. I say as firmly as I can, “I will not allow threats in my classroom, joking or not.” Then, after class or in the hallway, I notify the student that made the threat that I must, by law, inform the principal of the statement. Then, I do and keep a paper record. If the principal chooses not to discipline because it was a joke, fine by me, but I am never going to treat it as such. I handle it the same way if a student threatens to harm himself/herself. The only difference is that I also inform the school counselor and the parents. I would always rather be accused of overreacting than to have a student death on my conscience.

Chapter Eleven: Dealing with Parents

The best thing you can do when dealing with parents is to remember that no matter how much you care about the kids, the parents outlove you by a million times. Parents want their kids to be safe and happy first, education may be down the list somewhere after that. And, you know what?? That's fine. I know this isn't very teacher-like, but I have known many, many students at this point who have wonderful lives and failed my class. As seriously as we take education, it really, really isn't more important than the health, safety, and happiness of a child. Be more like the parents. Love first.

1. Set the tone off right quickly. The one thing I took from college that has never failed me is to call every parent at some point the first six weeks. The quicker the better. Let them know who you are, that you want to work together with them in order to make this the best year possible, and something complimentary towards the student. That last bit is the most important. Some parents that I have called tell me they have NEVER received a positive phone call from the school. That is embarrassing to our profession. Many times over the years, staff members have come to me to call a parent because I am the only one in the building the parent will speak to. That isn't because I am such a great person. It is because they know from the beginning of the school that I saw something good in their child. I also then ask them to sign up for our Remind message platform. I rarely have people tell me no. If they do say no, I make a note and ask how they want to be contacted.
2. I also try to send as many compliments home as I have time for. I set aside one day each week to send a short compliment home using Remind. In the dark ages, I wrote a note. I keep a master list of all my students and mark them off as I send a compliment. I try to make sure everyone gets a couple a year. These compliments should be genuine and specific to the child. Sometimes, you have to think really hard to find one. Find one anyway. If nothing else, it is a good reminder to yourself that each student has bright spots.

3. I let parents know from the beginning that I will let them know about any discipline infractions using Remind. I tell them also that I am sending that information home not so that the parent needs to discipline the child also, but that I want them to always know what is going on at school. Honestly, I don't think it is their job to discipline the child for something at school.
4. Keep records of all parent communication (see the CYA chapter for my form).
5. Pay attention to grades. Before email and text messaging, it was a lot of work to keep parents informed about grades. It should only take you a minute or two now. I put all my grades in each Monday. I then start sending out Remind messages to anyone with a missing assignment, who needs to do corrections, is failing, or who has an average that has dropped more than ten points that week.
6. If a parent gets very angry with you, try very hard to be open-minded instead of defensive. Did you make a mistake? Own it. Apologize. Make a plan to move forward. Is there a compromise you could make? Remember that your main goal isn't to be right or powerful. Your goal is to make your class a place where each child can flourish. That happens best when parents are on your team. Try to keep them there. However, if a parent begins to cross the line, s bullying you, or is unwilling to listen to reason, then get your admin involved.

Chapter Twelve: Time Management

The biggest struggle I have ever had with teaching hasn't been teachers, parents, or students. The toughest years in my career have been working for administrators who don't value my time. I'm going to give you some advice below that can help you manage time and get things done in a more efficient manner. However, if you are working for a place that doesn't value your time, my advice is to find a new place to work. If you don't have time to give to your family, friends, and personal interests, you need a new school.

1. If you find yourself really struggling with time management and the tips in this chapter don't help at all, save up some money and join [Angela Watson's 40 Hour Work Week](#). I have never joined the club myself, but I have listened to many of her podcasts over the years, and the advice she gives is right in line with what I learned the hard way over the past two and a half decades.
2. The biggest advice I have is to set boundaries around your time and stick to them. This can mean different things to all of us. Don't think you have to leave every day as soon as the kids are gone. Very few of us can pull that off. Instead, decide when you will leave in advance and do it. One year, my son had band practice until 9 on Mondays. I stayed until 9 those days and left by 4:00 on the other days. Right now, I leave early on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. The other two days I stay no later than 5:30. Decide on a time that leaves you feeling like you are doing a good job at work, are rested, and have a personal life.
3. Create daily tasks and do those ONLY. I have always loved to make a list of things to do and cross it off. I quickly found that I didn't have time to even make a list!! So, instead of making lists, I create habits for the things I know I will have to do over and over each week. Then, I keep a list of unexpected tasks that occur. I actually got this idea from my grandmother who did a set of daily chores in a similar manner. I have found this to be the most helpful thing I've done over the years for my mental health. Before I did this, I could NOT turn off the never-ending list of things to do spinning around in my brain. Now, I finish what needs to be done for the day knowing I will get to the rest eventually.

Here are my weekly habits:

Monday: Put grades in the online grade book. Send Reminds to parents about grades, missing work, corrections, etc. I only do online grade on Monday. The rest of the week, I have a paper grade book that I use to record grades as I complete grading in class. I don't have time to log in and put everything online, so I just transfer from the paper grade book once a week. This is also nice because I then have a paper record as a backup. My online grade book has comment codes for accommodations, corrections, etc. I use the same ones in my paper grade book so that I remember to transfer them later.

Tuesday: Send positive Reminds to parents, look at my lesson calendar for the grading period (see the chapter on lesson planning) and create a sketch of activities for the next week. I don't actually write official lesson plans on this day. I can do this sketch on a Post-It Note. Make a list of anything that needs to be copied or created.

Wednesday: Make any needed copies for the next week. There is always a line on Mondays and Fridays, and for some reason, the copier always breaks on those days. Another copier tip, if you know you have to run something off every single week and have time, run off some extras for future weeks in case a Wednesday comes that you are in a hurry.

Thursday: Create any special materials if needed. Remember that no one cares if things are laminated or have beautiful graphic designs. Kids do NOT care. If I don't have any special materials to create, I use this time to work on the list of unexpected things.

Friday: Input lesson plans into the school platform. I save this for Friday because I can always do this on a Sunday evening at home if I run out of time on Friday. I do not recommend deciding on lessons on Friday. Do that earlier in the week so you can get things ready. If you wait to decide what you are doing until Friday, you will be working all weekend. Remember that I sketch and think this out early in the week. Friday is just the day I write it out in whatever form the admin needs.

Here are my daily habits:

Before school: Check email, delete anything I don't need, and make note of any unexpected things I need to do for the day.

Conference Period: Work on my weekly habits list

Lunch: Check email, delete anything I don't need, make note of any unexpected things I need to do. Relax and eat.

After school: Check email, delete anything I don't need, make note of any unexpected things I need to do. Respond to any emails that require a response. Put the date and list of things to do in class tomorrow on the board. Write objectives on the board for tomorrow. Do anything unexpected that must be done for that day and finish anything from my weekly habit list that wasn't done during my conference. If I run out of time, I push it to the next day if possible and leave at my designated time.

4. Manage grading IN class. I am not saying that you should sit at your desk and grade papers while students work. That doesn't do anyone any good. The purpose of grading or marking papers is to give students feedback they can learn from. In addition, they need that feedback as fast as possible. As a writing teacher, I struggled for YEARS trying to figure out how to grade essays, provide effective feedback, and get essays to students in a timely manner. Now, I ask the students to grade their own essays with a checklist. You can read more about that [here](#). Give up some control and let students grade some of their own work. Even if they cheat here and there, they are usually still learning from their mistakes at least. What usually happens if I get behind on grading is that I pass back a paper, the student glances at it, and tosses it in the trash without looking at a single thing or learning anything. Here are my guidelines on grading:

If I can't grade it in class because I'm working with a small group while the larger class works in centers or on another assignment, I ask students to keep their work as they finish until a later date. Then, later in the week, I either ask the entire class to take out that assignment and have students grade it themselves, or if not everyone did the same assignment, I call small groups to grade the work together or even individually with me. Small group grading and individual grading with me are the two main ways I grade. Sometimes I even plan Fun Friday games groups can play that allow me some flexibility to grade with small groups.

If everyone is working on an assignment and I am able to walk around during that time, I put a check on any correct work I see and an x on anything wrong. Since I allow corrections, the student can try that part again for half credit at that moment instead of waiting for days for me to give the paper back. Then, as students finish, I calculate the grade, write it in my paper grade book, and give it back to them immediately.

What if I can't get it back during a reasonable amount of time? Well, truthfully, some assignments end up in what teacher friends call "file 13," which is the trash. I try not to do this because it feels wrong to make a student do work and toss it. But, I will admit I have done this (mostly with work done with a substitute while I was away). Another tactic is just putting a check on the work and handing it back. I glance over it, put a check on top, give it back, and move on. Then, the student at the very least has some acknowledgment that I at least briefly saw their work, and since it doesn't have a grade on it, we can both move on. Do I like either of these options? No. Yet, sometimes I just choose sanity.

Chapter Thirteen: The Copy Machine and Laminator

1. The laminator: My personal opinion is that this is the most ridiculous piece of machinery in the school. I know there is a kindergarten teacher out there ready to send me to teacher prison for this statement, but hear me out. First, it isn't that great for the environment to cover everything we own in plastic. Second, it takes forever to run things through the machine and cut it out. Lastly, there are alternatives to laminating. If I need to make tasks/game cards, I simply use card stock and be done with it. It does take a little longer to run cardstock through a copy machine, but I have things on card stock that are ten or eleven years old. Yes, they look a little ragged, but they still work. I also use a lot of sheet protectors in place of lamination. I have 15 year old sheet protectors that have saved me hours of cutting lamination. If you do decide to laminate something, please, please, please save yourself some embarrassment and ask for help the first few times you use it. If you ruin the laminator, there are people who will never forgive you. I'm serious. Don't ask how I know.

2. The copy machine: I prefer to copy as little as possible. If I can come up with a way to avoid it, I will. With the help of technology, you can use even less paper. However, you are going to have to use this horrible little device at some point. Every machine is a little different, but most of them have similar functions available. There are some things you need to ask someone to show you how to do. You can be like me and be too embarrassed to ask and just push a bunch of buttons and waste a few hours trying to figure it out on your own, or you can just ask for help. Ask how to scan a document. This is so incredibly helpful because you can digitize papers to save for future use, put paperwork onto an online platform, and send copies to parents, etc. Ask how to make two-sided copies--include asking how to make two-sided copies from a single page original and a double-sided original. Ask how to make the machine staple and punch holes. Ask how to make copies using specialty paper (especially cardstock). Finally, if the machine jams, ask for help and pay attention. There will come a time, probably a Friday evening when you stay way too late out of desperation, when you will have to unjam the torture device yourself. May the force be with you.

Chapter Fourteen: Meetings

The amount of meetings you will have to attend will vary according to each school. If you find yourself in a place where you are having multiple meetings a week that are taking all of your conference time for no good reason, get out.

1. Meetings for students with special needs: These are legally required and there is nothing any school can do about it. If you are having a lot of these, you are just going to have to keep in mind that they are for the benefit of the student. When you receive your first invitation to one of these meetings, ask the person who sent you the information what they would like you to bring. Then bring it. I usually bring my paper grade book since it contains information about accommodations I have made. I don't show this to the parents, of course, because it contains information about other students. I use it as a reference if I need it during the meeting. I rarely have to because I usually already know what I have done, but it doesn't hurt to have a back up to check. Please keep in mind that these meetings are about someone's baby. Find as many positive things to say about the child. Don't fake things, say honestly positive things. It is very frustrating and intimidating for a parent to come to these. Often the person running the meeting will use a lot of educational jargon that is confusing, as well as point out all the ways the student is struggling. Hearing even a few positive things will mean the world to these parents. Often you will be required to fill out paperwork for these meetings. Remember that parents will see these. Don't write anything you wouldn't say to their face. Turn these papers in on time. I try to be as brief as possible on these forms unless otherwise directed.
2. PLC and Faculty Meetings: PLC stands for personal learning communities. They are supposed to be meetings where teachers can get together with their team and brainstorm/share ways to help students. Faculty meetings are supposed to be a place where a larger group either solves a group problem or receives specific training or information from administrators. I'm sorry to report this, but most of these meetings are just a waste of time. Most faculty meetings could be handled with an email. Most PLC meetings become venting sessions. Do not ask questions during these meetings unless absolutely necessary. If you do ask a question, make sure it is a question that applies to the entire group. If it only

applies to you, wait until the meeting is dismissed and either send an email or ask the presenter after everyone is allowed to leave. Otherwise, you risk the absolute hatred of your teacher friends for prolonging the meeting. Try very hard not to vent during meetings of any kind. As a new teacher, it is best to learn to just sit quietly and try to relax. It is rude to be on your phone during these meetings, rude to grade papers, and rude to talk to others. Some people handle the annoyance by drawing. The best advice I have ever received was to think of a faculty meeting as a blessing. You get to sit still and finally let your mind take a break! One of my biggest problems at meetings is when the presenter says something that is just totally wrong or bad for kids or teachers. I am a fiercely protective person, and when someone comes for my kids and friends, well, I lose patience. I have been way too blunt and rude in these situations. I have learned the hard way this is a mistake. If you do feel like you need to stand up and say something about a policy, my advice is to not do it at that moment. Give yourself some time to calm down and think first. Decide if saying something will really accomplish anything. Sometimes it won't because the administrator is super stubborn about being right, or perhaps the directive isn't even coming from them. Perhaps it is coming from the school board or state. If saying something doesn't stand a chance of changing anything, then don't. Then, do what [Angela Watson](#) calls being "quietly subversive." In short, close your door and do what is right for kids regardless of a ridiculous policy. This is what most of us do. It is risky because you might get in trouble with admin. Most of us do what is right for kids until we get in trouble, which isn't as often as you might think because many times admin knows what is being asked is ludicrous. If you do get in trouble for doing what is right for kids, play nice. Apologize, ask for the administrator to come model how they want things done, then do it. Then, apply for new jobs and get out of that pit. Asking admin to model what they want done is my favorite strategy because usually they can't do it. I have defeated many ridiculous policies with that one strategy. Being a new teacher, you can get away with this strategy even better than a veteran. If you do think that saying something has the potential to change the situation for the better, say it in private and avoid embarrassing your boss (or yourself).

Chapter Fifteen

Protect Yourself from Burnout

I have personally seen way too many teachers leave the profession too soon because they pushed themselves to the brink. In fact, I have been there myself. Some years will be harder than others. Some schools will be more difficult. Be self aware enough to know when it is time for a change and make it before your mental and physical health suffer. Be especially guarded about your relationships.

1. First of all, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, do not stay in a school that makes you miserable. Commute a little farther. Move! Every school will have issues, but if you are feeling like your admin isn't supporting you, is keeping you from doing what is right for kids, or is not respectful of your time outside of work, then move on! Angela Watson has some great advice for making such a decision [here](#).
2. Avoid perfectionism and the savior complex. Most of us get into education because we want to change the world for the better. That's great! However, you have to keep in mind that you can't help anyone if you are so burned out that you quit in two years. You don't have to revolutionize the educational system the first day. I fell into this trap my very first year. My very wise principal caught me in the copy room one afternoon after 5:30. He told me if he ever caught me in the building after 5 again he would fire me!! He explained that he needed me to finish out the year strong, and that I wouldn't be able to do that if I wore myself out by January! He was so right. Guard yourself.
3. Watch your energy levels and adjust. I rarely, if ever, announce specific plans for the future for my class. First of all, you can end up with some really upset students on your hands if something falls through (ask my son about my fourth grade writing camp failure). Most importantly, it helps keep you from boxing yourself into something you don't feel like doing for the day. For example, maybe you have planned this great, hands-on science experiment, only to wake up in the morning with a terrible migraine. As long as you haven't promised the kids this great experiment, you can adjust. Maybe move the lesson over a day.

Maybe skip it altogether. Maybe you just teach the concept in a different way. Pull something from your sub box. You are human!

4. Say NO! You have a young, energetic face. The committees are going to come for you. Extra-curricular activities are going to come for you. Everyone is going to want your help with your special projects. Some of these may be assigned to you by your admin, in which case there isn't much you can do about it. However, if someone ASKS you, learn to say no. Guard your sanity and time. Only say yes to projects that you are passionate about and that fit within your schedule. Ask a lot of careful questions about what that project/committee schedule looks like before you say yes. My favorite way to say no is to be honest and brief. Say, "I'm sorry, but I am already overwhelmed with other responsibilities, so I have to say no."
5. Find joy in your job. This is so important. Find ways to incorporate things that make you happy. If you love music, play some school appropriate music in your room. If you love art, incorporate some art into your lessons. Some people need really specific classroom designs to avoid being stressed out. Maybe you need to invest in some lamps and turn off the fluorescent lights. Maybe you need fresh air and sunshine, in which case you could take your class outside every now and then. Watch especially for those special opportunities to laugh with your class or just do something totally spontaneous. One of my son's favorite memories of school is when his teacher called a radio station and requested a song for the class. One of my favorite memories is a reading group in which I said, "That is just a name, you can read names anyway you want. Don't let a name keep you from understanding the rest of the story." Then, one of my students suggested we replace the name with John Cena. We laughed so hard reading that story that I had tears streaming down my face. Not only was that a lot of fun for all of us, but I guarantee you no one ever worried about reading a name again! Don't be so serious that you forget that fun is allowed at school.
6. Take care of your physical health. I wish I had done a better job of this. Do not neglect sleep for work. Do not neglect exercise and a good diet for work. Not only will being healthier help you be a better teacher, but you also need a working body left one day when you retire!
7. Take care of your mental health. Chances are you are going to encounter some tough things on this job. Don't be afraid to get help. Isn't that what you would tell a student to do if they were struggling?? Model that by taking care of yourself too.

Chapter Sixteen

Always Keep Learning

I love the artistic, creative side of teaching. It speaks to my soul, but in order to be an effective teacher, you need a love of science as well, educational and social sciences specifically. In short, you need to be curious and willing to conduct continual science experiments in your classroom to find what works best for you and your students that year.

1. Be aware that the profession of education is always changing and BEHIND. For instance, the theory of learning styles has been debunked for years. Yet, you probably had learning styles on your certification exam and will hear it in almost every training you attend. Find some sources to stay in touch with current research on education. Find podcasts and websites that have current information. Look for dates. You will be disappointed to hear this, but anything within ten years is sometimes as current as you can get. Education doesn't get a lot of money, and the same can be said for educational research.
2. Join educational groups on social media. Learn the contact names and emails for the educational service center reps in your field that work in your area. Reach out to these groups when you have questions and ask for current information.
3. Ask your school about what training you are required to go to each year. Seek out training in your field that is not required and ask to attend things that look interesting. I have never been told no I couldn't attend a training, not even once. Your school has money in the budget to send you places. It sometimes even goes unused.
4. Trust your instincts. Just because a new educational fad comes out, doesn't mean it is the right thing. One year, a computer program was purchased by my state for schools. My admin was sure it must be the best program available. I was required to have my students on the program an hour each week. It was absolute trash. I had to fight and research to show my students were not growing

with this program. Turns out, the governor's campaign received millions for his campaign in return for buying it.

5. Teach like a scientist. Try new things. Record how it works. Then adjust or abandon that style if the results don't add up. Never stop trying new things. You will find over the years that some things work for you every single year. Keep using those things, but always be on the lookout for something new and better to add or improve.
6. About ten years ago, I was introduced to a book called [Teach Like a Champion](#). I haven't read the 2.0 version, but I would say it would be worth reading as a new teacher. My take on the first book was that I wished I had read it as a baby teacher because I learned so many of the strategies the hard way. Even so, remember that not everything will work for everyone. The book sent me on a never-ending quest to continually seek out the newest and most researched techniques each year. Australia has some excellent work out there you can check out [here](#). If you weren't exposed to it in college, I also recommend taking a look at [Hattie's list](#). These would be great places to start your journey as a life-long learner in the field of education.
7. Remember to make anything you do your own. Very rarely, if ever, will you take an idea, program, or curriculum idea straight out of the box and have it work seamlessly. You are an individual. Your students will be different every year. Take what works and throw out the rest.

One More Thing

I am sure not everything in this book will be helpful to everyone. Maybe not one single thing. I'm okay with that. I have learned over the years that no matter what I am teaching, not everyone will be greatly impacted no matter how hard I try. I learned that the most important thing I would do in my classroom wasn't really about education at all. You can read a little more about that [here](#). I tell my students at the end of every year that I hope they remember I loved them, and that if I can, I will always do my best to help them in the future. If you find yourself in need of help, I offer my help to you as well. As long as I'm able, you can contact me [here](#). In the event I'm not able, the love still remains.