

How is Your Staff Doing This Year?

5 Steps To Boost Wellbeing

The press, media and multiple studies tell us that teacher wellbeing is in danger of hitting rock bottom. Nevertheless, there are many things we can do to make sure we aren't another one of those burnout statistics.

A NUT (National Union of Teachers) survey in 2015 found that over half of teachers were thinking of leaving the profession in the next two years, citing 'volume of workload' (61%) and 'seeking better work/life balance' (57%) as the two top issues causing them to consider this outcome. Research also shows that one in four teachers will quit the profession within the first five years of teaching. Yet, according to a Gallup survey in 2013, teaching was still voted number two out of the top 14 careers, topped only by physicians.

Why did you go into teaching? Most of us came into it because we had a vision of how we thought education should be, we loved children, believed that we could effect change, had an enthusiasm for our subject and we wanted to make a difference. Sadly, many have lost sight of that vision.

I often compare teaching to climbing a mountain where we are snowed under with never ending amounts of paperwork. We are ambushed by parents leaping out of prickly bushes when we least expect them. There are boulders in the form of SATs, Ofsted, budget cuts and redundancies. As we climb half way up the mountain, we find the media lying in wait for us with yet another negative story about what we haven't done and how we are



failing yet again. The government imposing never ending changes in the form of targets, exams, SATs, reforms and curriculum changes knock us down if we ever begin to get our footing! It's no wonder we sometimes find teaching hard.

Let's face it, the educational landscape can be challenging and stressful. We do have workload pressures, constant changes and demands, but there are many things we can do in order to not become a victim or martyr of the system. For a moment think about this: On a scale of 1-10, how stressful is your job?

The word stress can be defined as 'any force which causes an object to change.' When we suffer stresses and strains in our body, it is our physical, chemical, emotional or spiritual forces asking us to in some way to adapt. This is our warning sign to change

and enhance the quality of our lives. Too often, however, we do not listen to our bodies and end up in distress, which manifests physically as pain, muscle tension, injury or disease; or emotionally, with symptoms of jealousy, insecurity, feelings of inferiority, inability to concentrate, poor decision making, mental disorientation, depression or anxiety.

After a particularly stressful period of my life over eight years ago, I moved back to the UK from New Zealand, moved houses twice, had to find a good school for my daughter, started a new teaching post, re-established my business, faced family illness and divorce. Not surprisingly, I was diagnosed with stress and burnout and was off work for six weeks. Consequently, I decided something had to change and it sure wasn't going to be my circumstances! Without a doubt, I was what had to change.

The big secret I discovered about all kinds of stress is that what appears to be causing the stress, the stressor, is seldom what causes the damage. I also realised that stress only becomes bad when I handle it "badly," either by fighting it, running from it, burying it, intellectualising it, suppressing it or simply doing nothing about it. In fact, I would say that one of the biggest causes of stress is doing nothing about it.

The idea that all stress is bad is not true. Stress can be the spice of life, it can be exciting or even exhilarating. In fact we frequently thrive on it. However, as we also know too much spice, for some, leads to burn out. If we are suddenly confronted by an actual life-threatening situation such as a car hurtling towards us out of control, our response is immediate. The body goes on an emergency full alert and prepares for physical activity. Some people rage and get angry and some people go into a freeze mode, where they can't move or think clearly. Some do a mixture of

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these. This is often referred to as fight, flight or freeze response.

Any so called ‘negative emotion,’ be it fear, anxiety, worry, depression or guilt holds a wonderful potential of learning, growth and getting out of the way of a head-on collision. I remember thinking I had lost touch with myself by putting everyone else first, so when a coach friend of mine said, “Self-care is a necessity, not a luxury,” I recoiled with surprise at what I thought was decadence that bordered on the irresponsible. How could I possibly take care of myself in a way that delighted me and not feel selfish and indulgent? I’ve since learnt that by taking exquisite care of myself, I can serve others better and not be a victim.

In this article, I’m going to outline five steps to create excellent habits that will make you positively flourish at work! These are habits that I’ve learnt, work for me and I know they’ll work for you, too.

Step 1: Take Exquisite Care of Yourself: Put Your Own Oxygen Mask on First

I am sure you have heard it said in the preflight demonstration, “If there’s an emergency, put on your own oxygen mask before you help others.”

The idea is that you don’t become so preoccupied with trying to help secure everyone else’s oxygen mask that you forget to secure your own. You are not going to be much help to anyone, let alone yourself, if you’re in a state of near unconsciousness! Many of my coaching clients will tell me they have depleted themselves for the sake of others: students, management, staff, families, friends. Would they have been able to better serve, if they had taken care of their own primal needs first?

Take the time and care to secure your oxygen mask. Then, when the challenges of school come hurtling towards you, you will have some foundations with which to deal with them. So what does putting your own mask on first look like? Start by creating daily habits that nurture and sustain you.



Step 2. Daily Habits: Eat a Healthy, Balanced Diet

Drink water throughout the day. By staying hydrated, you’ll be taking care of your most basic needs first. Water is also essential for cleansing the body so try to drink at least four to six glasses a day. Cut down on all refined and processed foods, sugar, fried fatty foods, additives and all stimulants like tea, coffee and alcohol. Instead eat more whole grains, vegetables, fruit, whole wheat pasta, seafood, free range/organic poultry and dairy products. Make sure to eat enough to ensure your blood sugar isn’t crashing. Have healthy snacks around, especially when you are ruled by your school breaks and busy schedules.



Step 3: Exercise.

Start an exercise programme: walking, running, swimming, aerobics, dancing or yoga. Follow it regularly two or more times a week. Medical research indicates the better shape you are in, the easier you will find it to handle stress.

Take time off from the digital screens in your life. While screens may feel relaxing, and allow you to turn ‘off,’ try and find a screenless activity to truly take time for yourself.

Skip the TV and enact even the smallest rituals of self-care, like:

- A bath
- Time to clean and moisturize your face
- Legs up the Wall with eyes covered for 5-10 minutes
- A five minute foot massage
- Listening to relaxing music with a cup of tea
- Journaling

Remember, you are not really going to be much good for anyone else in your life if you are depleted, lacking energy, or are in a state of constant irritability.

Put your own mask on first, so you have enough fuel to actually support everything and everyone else in your world.

What do your self-care rituals look like?

Create a list of five things you would like to do on a regular basis. These are

not things that you feel you should do. These are activities that if you are to do them, you would feel like you were spoiling yourself. Next, look at what you are putting up with that's stopping you from being the amazing, talented professional you are.

Step 4: Become Tolerant Free

Everyday we lose energy unnecessarily by spending time and energy on areas of our lives that perhaps we'd rather not be spending time and energy. Examples of this are as follows:

- Picking that towel up off the floor because there's no towel rack;
- Grimacing in the mirror at that terrible hair-do;
- Wincing at that tooth pain when eating but not making time to go to the dentist;
- Stressing over the state of your finances but not spending time to bring them up to date;
- Incurring fines as you can't find that gas bill in the pile of bills and papers;
- Avoiding people at parties as you didn't remember their birthday, or say thank you for a gift;

This list can go on and on. We become like leaky sieves. Promising ourselves that one day we'll clear these things up but not making the time to do it. The nagging feelings go on draining our energy and

taking away energy from the very areas we would like to spend it on.

- Where in your life are you spending energy on thoughts, actions and non-actions that are costing you energy?
- What would you rather be doing with that energy that you are spending on clearing up your past?

Answer the following questions and keep the list close by. Plan to eliminate whatever is holding you back from being the best you that you can be. You need the energy for your evolution. Think about what you are you 'putting up with' in your life: What are you tolerating in these areas?

- Your house
- Your wardrobe
- Your physical appearance
- Your work environment
- Your professional relationships
- Your health
- Your finances
- Your paperwork
- Your personal relationships
- Your future

You may like to create a grid that looks like this:

Step 5. Unhealthy Workloads...Say, 'NO!'

This is the hardest word for a teacher to say! Most of us are kind and caring individuals, high achievers and hugely diligent. We teach because we want to make a difference and the word 'no' is so hard to say. But we MUST say it, if we are to survive in this culture of an ever-increasing workload. Try saying, 'Not now,' and then give a future time frame.

Nottingham's Education Improvement Board created the fair workload charter. In brief, the charter defines what 'reasonable' means in terms of the additional hours teachers are expected to work beyond directed time each day. They say that school policies should be deliverable within no

more than an additional two hours a day beyond directed time for teachers, and three hours a day for those with leadership responsibilities.

Schools adopting the charter receive the Education Improvement Board fair workload logo to use on their adverts and publicity. This reassures potential applicants about the workload demands that will be placed on them in choosing a charter school over one elsewhere that has not adopted it.

Step 6. Laugh A lot

Take time to laugh. Watch a good comedy on television, go out to a comedy show or alternatively meet up with those amusing friends of yours. When it comes to stress, if you can laugh at it, you can live with it. Laughter can help us see things differently, make us feel happy and inspire us. What nourishment!

No one can ever be immune to close encounters of the stressful kind, but remember it's how you handle it that counts.

Therese is the bestselling author of 101 Playground Games and 101 Wet Playtime Games and Activities. Her latest book, 'How to be a Peaceful School,' has just been released. She runs Positive Playtime and whole school social, emotional and behavioural skills programmes nationally and internationally. You may contact her at www.theresehoyle.com or info@theresehoyle.com.