

STAYING ON TASK: A PRIMER FOR NEW TEACHERS

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Whether you're fresh out of university or you're a transfer teacher, you will meet challenges--maybe even disappointments--in your new school. Reflect on the fact that God has called you to enlighten minds, and to prepare students for the School of Heaven. You have a mission. Do what lies in your power to be the best teacher you can possibly be, and take advantage of the wealth of success tips that are available. Here are a few great ones:

Adopt a mentor. As mentoring programs gain momentum, many organizations and institutions are adopting employee induction and mentoring programs. If your school does not offer this resource, look around for a veteran teacher and form a supportive professional liaison with him or her. Entering the school system is like taking a tour of an historic site—without a tour guide. Not only will you not know where to turn, you may become frustrated and quit the quest. Numerous individuals with the potential to change lives for time and eternity have walked away from the classroom because they did not receive the personal nurture they needed to become empowered teachers. Don't be timid to invite a colleague with time-tested experience to share his or her career experiences with you. Here's a word of caution: be an active protégé. Seek your professional coach before a problem becomes insurmountable.

Foster a personal relationship with God. When the piles of assignments become a sea, and deadlines try to drown you, it is your connection with God that will become your anchor. Always find a fresh wind and comfort in God's word. Do not substitute the preparation of lesson plans for it. Do not substitute rest or recreation for it. The Bible text, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21), is just as relevant today as when Christ gave this counsel over two thousand years ago. Be faithful in your duties as a teacher. Do not rob "Caesar" in time or talent. But be a balanced steward. Did you know that next to God as Master, comes your high position as steward? Build up the Lord's kingdom by returning to Him faithful tithes and offerings. As a Seventh-day Adventist educator, your presence and participation in your local church will be a positive message to prospective parents who will choose your school for their children's journey to excellence.

Invest quality time in strategic planning. You may or may not accept the "80-20 Rule,"¹ but you do know that planning plays a pivotal role in successful teaching and learning. It helps you to take focused, efficient steps, as you examine where the students are, and with the aid of the curriculum and the Holy Spirit, envision where they are to go, and how and when they will get there. Good planning is like preparing to climb Mount Logan: it takes an enormous amount of courage, time, determination, patience, and sound judgement— among other skills. However, if you keep your eyes on your goal, the mountain is yours! Effective long-range planning is the guide that will make your days good, your weeks better, and your months the best.

Empower your students to take ownership of their learning. Quebec’s educational reform is based on the premise that students make better learners when they construct their knowledge, rather than having it transmitted only by their teachers. In other words, “. . . a student will study the theory of science and technology and then be called on to put that knowledge into practice by building and operating a windmill . . .” (*The Gazette*, November 29, 2006). Inspire your students to be responsible learners, and you will have a more positive classroom experience. Keep in mind, also, the challenge of technology. Today’s students are wired to technology; they do not expect traditional lesson delivery very often.

Continue to read and to practise effective classroom leadership. After teaching college students for several years, I became a secondary school teacher. An eighth grader made me regret the move. For a while, whenever I went to grade 8 and I turned to write on the whiteboard, a sound between a wail and a siren went off. The whole class would then burst into derisive laughter. Infuriated, I’d demand, “Who made that sound?” Silence. This went on for a couple of weeks. Eventually, I caught the wrongdoer. I reprimanded her in front of the whole class. This did not deter her misbehaviour, and neither did I modify my high-profile intervention. Things got to the point where I dreaded going to the class. I felt as if I were up against a strong tug-of-war team and I was on the losing end. Finally, I had to admit that my verbal maelstroms were ineffective. One day I asked the student to see me in private. Connecting one-on-one with this child revealed to me that she was in great need of love and attention. From that day onward she became my daughter and defender.

Make it your ongoing concern to evaluate the effectiveness of how you manage student behaviour in your classroom. It is also crucial for you to check out your personal skills in enhancing other salient areas of your practice such as content delivery, evaluation, faith and learning, time management, role modelling, and the physical environment. Finally, remember that if you acknowledge the Lord in everything you do, He will give you success (Proverbs 3:6).

¹ Koch, Richard, *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret to Success by Achieving More with Less*. New York: Doubleday Business, 1999.

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