The Magic Phrase That Makes It Happen

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The Magic Phrase That Makes It Happen

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The antidote

What is the antidote?
How can one unlearn learned helplessness? Replace the destructive self-talk, “I can’t” with the positive affirmation, “I’m responsible!”

The successful person is not immune to pain from disappointments, frustrations and failures, but he uses this awareness to trigger the growth response, “I’m responsible. I’ll learn to do it better next time.”

The success-schooled person then asks two extremely important questions when facing a failure, “What did I do right in this situation and what do I need to do better next time?” The answers provide a springboard for new insights and the resolve to learn, innovate and try again.

Success is a difficult trip

On the outside, it may look like others magically achieve great success without much struggle, challenge or difficulties; however, when the truth is known the story is usually one of great determination, persistence and creativity. High achievers learn to prepare mentally to deal with failures and setback before they happen. They practice by planning and preparing responses for as many imagined stumbling blocks and reversals as they can fathom.

Application to teaching

Should instructors say, “I’m responsible?” After all, aren’t the students responsible for what they learn and the grades they earn? My answer is “Yes, as an instructor you are responsible for your teaching actions and attitudes,” and “Yes, students are responsible for their learning actions and attitudes.” Teaching and learning is a symbiotic success relationship. It serves no purpose for one to blame the other for failures.

Success is served when you and your students discuss and plan contingencies for likely setbacks and obstacles that could occur during a course or class session. Concise written contingency plans should be created for each course and communicated to students. Also, encourage students to codify their own academic emergency plans. For example, students should know what they will do if their first test scores fall below their expectations. This exercise cements course commitment and reduces anxieties.

Like tough, flexible shrubs that can survive the weight of winter’s ice and snow, successful people work to build their mental flexibility so that the tough winters of failure don’t break their spirits. When the warmth of spring comes, they are ready to bounce back and even add growth as the direct result of repeating the magic success phrase, “I’m responsible!”
Creating an Energetic Mindset—Teaching Is A Ball

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As you make your lesson plans for next week’s lecture or for that new class you’ll teach for the first time next semester, keep in mind that teaching is a ball! You accepted the call to teach because you thought it would be fun and meaningful work, but you may be so mired in the slog of course administration that you feel like the fun is gone. What is the answer to this dilemma?

Teaching should be a ball. It’s the time you spend in front of a classroom of open-minds that is your raison d’être. To restore your sanity, you must make teaching fun once again. One method I’ve discovered that works for me is to remind myself that teaching is a ball, both symbolically and imaginatively.

Envision yourself standing at the front of your classroom bouncing a ball to your students. They either bounce it back to you, or if it misses its mark, it bounces out of reach at a crazy angle reminiscent of particle collisions in physics. Thinking of how a ball bounces; sometimes back to you, sometimes at obtuse angles so you have to dive to catch it, is how I view trying new ways of presenting materials.

I am constantly bouncing balls - trying new approaches to teach my students. So, for some of you who are afraid to try new things for fear of failure, try to imagine bouncing a ball. Sometimes it will come back to you as when your lecture sinks into those open, curious minds, but every so often it will bounce away at a crazy angle just like those blank stares you receive when your students haven’t a clue about what you just said. Don’t despair, walk over, pick up the ball and bounce it again. If it doesn’t return as expected then, shift your body, twist your wrist, change your release, do anything to try new styles that may yield the desired learning result.

So, don’t be afraid to try those new lecture styles you read about in the books or magazines. Don’t be afraid to bounce the ball. Know that it will not always hit its mark, but you can walk over, pick it up, and try again. I often carry a small orange rubber ball in my pocket and occasionally bounce it down the hallway outside my office—now you and my division chair know why!

Make-up Test Policies Can Be Tricky But These are Proven to Work

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When a student misses a scheduled test, what is your policy? If you’re a part-time instructor, you probably have limited and imperfect choices. You may only teach one or two courses a semester and you may not have official office hours, so what can you do that is fair to the student, but also manageable for you? Here is a list of policy recommendations that may help:

- All important classroom policies should be written and distributed to students. Also it’s a good idea to include test make-up policies in your class syllabus.

- Students who have a legitimate excuse for missing a test should not be punished for something that is beyond their control. You must define what is a legitimate excuse. I request students notify me in advance, if possible that a test will be missed.

- I clearly communicate that I rigidly enforce the makeup policy while I also mention that I have a heart and am willing to consider legitimate excuses. And I give specific examples of some irresponsible excuses that I have rejected in previous classes.

- My policy states that if I accept an excuse, then the student is required to write a two-page paper based on topics from the missed test chapters. This paper is graded pass/fail. Assuming the paper earns a passing grade, the next test the student takes counts twice the normal value.

- Ideally, students who legitimately miss a scheduled test should take an equivalent test as soon as possible. This, however, has proven to be unrealistic for me to manage as a part-timer. Furthermore, it is not a workable solution to construct a second test for one or two students because I simply cannot find time to administer a second test.

As a part-time instructor, I’m expected to accomplish many of the same tasks as full-time teachers. This expectation does not always match reality, but what I can do is be fair, flexible and creative in solving every-day teaching challenges.
How to Use Hot Topics Effectively

Instructional Design—Critical Success Factor

**Teaching strategy**

Simply presenting and explaining an interesting science tidbit does not improve student learning or retention of the information. The following format improves learning with hot topics:

- Teach the foundation content appropriate for the hot topic.
- Briefly introduce the hot topic showing the students a copy of the article. It’s best to project an image of the article.
- Ask the students to individually list the scientific principles and terms related to the hot topic.
- Have the students break up into groups to answer the following questions:
  1. Explain the mechanisms of the concept covered in the class.
  2. How do these mechanisms contribute to explaining the hot topic?
- Use the mechanisms to create other possible explanations for everyday scientific observations or technologies.
- Use a brief question-and-answer session to review the student answers.

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**Classroom Energy Lagging? Turn Up the Heat**

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One the goals of introductory science classes to is to instill the ability for students to use the science they learn to understand and appreciate current scientific applications.

College faculty who teach introductory science classes are well aware of the everyday applications related to their disciplines. Unfortunately, this knowledge is not obvious to students.

Research shows that few students have the intuitive ability to explain everyday events using science they learned in introductory classes. Yet, the best learning occurs when students are able to apply and evaluate information in “real world” applications.

Simply introducing students to an interesting science factoid, as is done in many textbooks, does not ensure that students will fully understand the link between the factoid and what they learned in class.

Many students do not adequately learn from the factoid because they may not understand the link to the topic taught. Even if the link is shown they may compensate for a lack of understanding by merely memorizing the connection presented by the faculty.

Students of all ages need to experience the information by the instructor guiding the students through relevant higher order thinking activities. Relevant means putting the information in a context that familiar to the students.

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A simple way to remedy this possible impediment to student education is by having students analyze factoid hot topics in the various science fields. Hot topics are interesting contemporary applications of a scientific concept.

**Sources**

Hot topics are contemporary newsworthy stories that have everyday applications or capture the public’s curiosity. Newspapers are a very good source of “hot topics”. Most newspapers in large cities regularly report science articles in a special section at least once a week. National papers such as USA Today routinely have science and technology sections. Tabloid newspapers are a humorous source of “science” tidbits that can be analyzed as credible or not.

Science News and Scientific American give equal coverage to contemporary science issues that impact everyday life. Profession and technical trade journals have columns that highlight interesting newsworthy applications of the discipline. Nature and Science are excellent sources of detailed information that span all areas of science. Other sources of hot topics are professional organization and special interest group websites.
Seven Steps to Service Learning Marketing

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Service learning provides a unique experience for students to link what they are learning in the classroom to the work world. Unfortunately, students often know precious little about service learning and thus miss out on this superb experience, so try these six, highly effective service-learning class marketing steps to increase enrollment:

- Bring a representative from each service learning site to your classroom to clarify the duties of the experience.
- If the site has hired any students as a result of their service learning (a common practice) gently remind the service learning speaker to mention this.
- If a current employee is a former service-learning student, ask for this person to speak to your class.
- Ask your media services department to film a video of comments of former service learning students.
- Honor the service learning students at the culmination of their experience with a small certificate ceremony.
- Ask an administrator to hand out the certificates and explain how this credential might enhance a typical resume.

Suggested Hot Topics

Biology
- Biodiversity.
- Biopharming.
- Genetically modified food organisms.
- Human genome.
- Stem cell applications.

Chemistry
- Alternative energies.
- Biochip chemistry.
- Chemistry of recycling.
- Chiral pharmacology.
- Natural versus synthetic chemicals.

Earth & Atmospheric Science
- Age of the universe.
- Earth quakes.
- Exobiology.
- Life on Mars.
- Global pollution concerns.

Environmental Sciences
- Air quality.
- Endocrine disrupters.
- Glacial retreating.
- Global climate change.
- Water quality.

Human Sciences
- Alternative medicine.
- Atkin’s diet.
- Child obesity.
- Gene therapy.
- Sport enhancers.

Physics
- “Frictionless” machines.
- Hydrogen fuel and superconductors.
- Nanotechnology advances.
- Sports and athletic performance physics.

Key Ideas:
Click to go!

- Taking responsibility; its implications for success.
- Creating an energetic teaching mindset.
- Missed tests and other work can be a class management headache, you must have clear polices.
- Current application activities turn up the heat when done right.
- Marketing Service Learning.
- Survey teaching.
- PowerPoint tip.

TFS Critical Success Factors of Good Teaching:
- Leadership
- Management
- Instructional Design
- Communications
- Evaluation

Teaching For Success
April 2004
Quick and Easy Steps to Survey Success

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A survey is simply a series of questions used to gather data and information from a group of people. What's more, surveys are resilient teaching tools, as they can be used in any subject area at any time. Surveys are most popular today for the evaluation of governmental program performance based on public opinion.

In the education theater, survey respondents may range from a classroom of students finishing a course, to a graduate student interviewing subjects for research purposes. They are fun for group project development, too. There are three commonly used types of surveys: the personal interview, the questionnaire and the telephone interview. All three yield effective and useful statistical results when carefully written and analyzed.

Good questions

The top-five characteristics of every successful survey question are:

- Relevancy.
- Clarity.
- Brevity.
- Precision.
- Reliability.

Good questions use simple and positive language, and should always be kept as short as possible. Participants will most likely complete a survey if the questions you ask are clear and consistent in both format and style. Neither a hint of your own attitudes, nor expected results, can enter into the question construction process.

Take your time, too; it is easy to think survey writing will be a simple task, but that is not true. Watch out for hidden meanings, open-ended sentence structure and the impact on participants of the question order; do not lead them, or cause them to give up on finishing the survey.

Multiple-choice questions are the best and most often used, but true-false questions can be very useful, depending on the needs of the researcher and the audience involved. A good, closed-ended, multiple-choice question from a car dealership survey would look like this:

What is your primary reason for visiting us today?

- Purchase a new car.
- Test drive a vehicle only.
- Purchase parts.
- Price-comparison shopping.

Take the survey as a practice test yourself to eliminate any ambiguity or interpretation snags. Such a review will assure you the cooperation of your respondents, and that you will gather responses that are measured on a uniform standard and yield valid results.

Format tools

People often think of surveys as easy and simple ways to gather data, with the answers to questions as their most important element. But, in truth, survey design is of far greater importance for survey success. The physical format of your survey is defined by the quality and consistency of the questions asked and the format of data collection used. This is the most important phase of survey research.

In order to decide on which type of format to use, you must give thought toward both your survey purpose and to the participants involved. You may even want to write a brief introduction to your survey, possibly including a short purpose statement.

Generally, the three most commonly successful formats for data collection are:

- Checklists.
- Rating scales.
- Inventories.

continued on page 7
Key Ideas:
Click to go!

- Taking responsibility; its implications for success.
- Creating an energetic teaching mindset.
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- Current application activities turn up the heat when done right.
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TSF Critical Success Factors of Good Teaching:
- Leadership
- Management
- Instructional Design
- Communications
- Evaluation

Using Surveys in Instruction

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Inventories are best for factual data collection; multiple-choice questionnaires are very popular for closed-ended questioning. Grids are sometimes used, but more complicated to construct and very unpopular among instructors and students alike. Checklists present a list of items that ask participants to indicate whether each applies within a certain context.

Rating scales use the same checklist idea, but qualify the answers over a defined range of criterion. For example, a pharmacy satisfaction survey might use a rating scale like the example in column two.

Do the Math
Surveys used as research tools that yield quality results are based on the rules of scientific method. There are three basic types of informational data that will be gathered for evaluation: attitudinal, factual and behavioral. For example, a survey designed for exploring the market for a recent visit to a doctor's office might include items regarding the participant's perception of the nursing care received, as well as their own attitude toward preventative health care office visits. Factual components of such a survey would include statistically significant biographical information on the respondents, such as age, height, weight, sex, race, salary and occupation—just to name a few. Behavioral survey characteristics include examination of the needs, wants and demands of the survey group. For example, would the patients rather have had an earlier appointment in the day, or were there parking issues involved.

When considering the mathematical evaluation of the data collected as the survey is administered, keep things as accurate, unbiased and as simple as possible. Become familiar with mean, median, mode and standard deviation of the mean, and coefficient of variation calculations. These mathematical processes help you objectively evaluate your survey results.

Resources
You and your students will be successful survey writers if you always keep the end game in mind. Focus on what you already know, and why, Stay organized, Support your plans and ideas with useful and current resources. One valuable on-line source is available from The Writing Center at Colorado State University at http://writing.colostate.edu/references/research/survey/, where survey support guidelines and a glossary of survey research terms are readily available.

Please check your response to each of following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug abuse at this school is:</th>
<th>Serious Problem</th>
<th>Average Problem</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>Minor Problem</th>
<th>No Problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My drug usage is:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student morale is:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Checklists present a list of items that ask participants to indicate whether each applies within a certain context. A school surveying teenage drug attitudes would use a checklist such as the sample above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating scales use the same checklist idea, but qualify the answers over a defined range of criterion. A pharmacy satisfaction survey might look like the example above.

TSF Action Step: Check your learning goals. Where might a survey instrument fit into your instructional design? List the advantages and disadvantages of asking your students to construct a survey.

Publisher’s Note

Thanks for teaching for success and being a Teaching For Success reader this academic year. It’s now time for the Annual TFS Super Ideas Contest. Please share your success ideas and teaching and learning tips and ideas by submitting an entry to the Super Ideas Contest. See page 8 for detailed information regarding this year’s contest.

Penny Shrawder
Jack H. Shrawder
PowerPoint Tips Help Speed Slide Production for Your Presentations

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If you are expert with PowerPoint®, this tip is not for you. If, on the other hand, you scratch your head every time the slide overflows and wonder, “How am I going to fix this?” Here is a power tip that you may appreciate:

- Open a Word Document,
- Hit View, Outline,
- Write the outline of the presentation you want to create by using the outline tools; make sure that your Heading 1 matches the title of each slide you want to create.
- Save your outline and close the document.
- Open PowerPoint® and start a blank presentation.
- At the first slide, go to “Insert” and scroll down to “Slides from Outline.”
- Choose your document from wherever you saved it in your computer.

Voilà—your slides are ready! It is now a matter of “Apply a Design Template” to make it look pretty and you are ready to go.

Ah! One more thing: when you are in a rush and want to add special effects to your slides, go to View menu, Slide Sorter (Ctrl+A), and in the Slide Sorter boxes select Random Effects and Random Transitions. Employ these two tips and you will turn out great looking presentations very, very quickly.

$300, Ah! This Is Way Too Easy!

W in a cash award; enjoy the recognition of being published; grow your career, and contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

Your teaching improvement idea could win you a cash award in the 2004 TFS Super Ideas Contest. There are two contest idea categories: SuperIdeas and QuickTips.

In the SuperIdea category, First place wins $300, Second place $200 and Third place $100. In the QuickTip category, First place nets $100, Second place $50 and Third place $25. Be sure to go to: http://teachingforsuccess.com/Contests2/ContestInfo.html for the contest rules.

Coauthored ideas are accepted and coauthors will split any prize awarded. But, to win you must enter. Send your entries to us by e-mail (preferred), fax or mail by May 31, 2004. Send to jack@teachingforsuccess.com; fax 530-573-8965 or mail to PO Box 8379 South Lake Tahoe, CA 96158.

All articles submitted will be eligible for publication in upcoming TFS issues. The winners will be notified after July 1, 2004 and featured in the August, September and October 2004 issues. Winners will be posted on the TFS website. The copyright to all published articles must be assigned to Pentronics Publishing.

Why not send us your electronic SuperIdea Contest entries today? You’ll be helping yourself, your colleagues and higher education.

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