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ALL NEW

A+ Faculty Training and Development
Defeat the Tyranny of the Trivial

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Why are there never enough hours in a day? Why can’t you get done what you hope to get done? Why are you always rushing to cover the course material at the end of the hour or term? If you can relate to any of these questions, it might be that you’re experiencing the tyranny of the trivial.

As I observe my work behavior and that of others, I’m continually struck by how much effort seems to go to accomplishing what ultimately matters the least. I’m betting this daily struggle to accomplish the important may resonate with you.

Persistence and perspective

How can you get on track and accomplish the things that truly matter and defeat the tyranny of the trivial? The first step is to persistently remind yourself of what is the most important use of your time right now. One way to flush out what is unimportant is to think long-term, perhaps even in life-time frameworks. Taking the long view generally exposes the trivial for what it is.

When you teach, take the long view—teach with the end in mind so that you can picture in your mind’s eye what your students will now know, do and feel. With this image you can keep your focus on the most important learning goals and away from trivial, time-wasting management activities or instructional discussions.

Here’s a good question to ponder daily, “What do I really want accomplished at the end of my day, week or even my life?” Am I placing my focus and energy in the right places to move forward?

Suggestion—start each day by writing your top-ten goals. Why? Writing goals again and again might seem tedious, but this simple act keeps your goals at a high conscious level, instantly recallable. Then, when you are bombarded during the day with pleas for attention and action you can rapidly assess the value of engaging in an extemporaneous activity in relation to your paramount goals.

Take charge

Applying goal-consciousness-raising techniques to teaching translates to writing your top instructional goals for the day, week and term before beginning each traditional or online class session. With the important ends fresh in mind, you’ll be better prepared do deal with the unexpected.

You’ll know if you should stop the flow of the class and address a question or statement—perhaps briefly now and more in depth outside of class. You’ll make better choices and know whether to defer a question or action request until next meeting, answer the question via e-mail, defer a query for an office-hour meeting or refer the student to a web or print resource.

Alternatively you might recognize the unplanned event as a golden learning opportunity to be exploited. Furthermore, you could use this interruption in the flow as a special teaching moment about the value of goal setting and time and effort management. Time is the most valuable commodity in a learning situation especially when large numbers of learners are affected by each time allocation decision. The best time-use decision is one that prevents the trivial from watering down your instructional efforts. When you and your students share a commitment to the most important learning goals, they can assist you in keeping learning progress on track.

Losing time is only one consequence of bowing to the trivial. What’s even worse is the trivial’s insidious drain on emotional energy. With the trivial in the driver’s seat, it’s disheartening to assess what progress was made toward your instructional and personal goals at the end of the class or work day. Not only can the trivial slow or prevent you from ever reaching your objectives, it can actually move you further away from your destination creating feelings of helplessness and discouragement.

On the other hand when you and your students confidently make choices, set goals and stubbornly refuse to waver from the path, you feel energetic, purposeful and great! When you accomplish the important and ignore the trivial you teach for success!

TFS Action Step

Observe and analyze the use of time in your next class meeting. Then, eliminate the trivial for good.
Teaching For Success
March 2004

Key Ideas:
- Click to go!
- Teaching For Success
- Critical Success Factors of Good Teaching:
  - Leadership
  - Management
  - Instructional Design
  - Communications
  - Evaluation

Bumper Sticker Mania
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This technique is a terrific one for creating an engaging review of course material. I describe the following scenario in my health class: "You are drafted onto the wellness committee at work. In order to promote wellness to your coworkers, your committee decides to create prototype bumper stickers."

I then cut standard 8.5 by 11 white paper into halves lengthwise and provide crayons, markers, stencils and stickers, etc.

On one side of the paper, students are urged to use any concept that we have discussed during the term, and proceed to create a bumper sticker based upon that construct. On the flip side, students write an explanation of why they believe this idea is important. After a period of time, students then trade their creations with each other until everyone has a chance to read all of them. In addition, this activity is a great opportunity to answer questions and thereby increase the breadth and depth of learning.

Motto Mojo
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I use mottoes to help students remember key ideas. Mottoes express the guiding rule or ideals of the class. For example, in my Assertiveness Training course, I ask students to memorize the class motto, “No, I'm just not comfortable with that.” This saying gives students an all-purpose phrase to use when they lack the words to handle a sticky situation. In a course on Stress Management, I offer a “Quote for the Day” for each session. The quote is a pithy, memorable adage that is worthy of becoming the class motto for the day. I know this technique is successful when students ask, “Where's the quote for the day?”

When Things Get Tough
Follow Grandma’s Rule
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Have you experienced some of the many stress-related events inherent in teaching? These include: student assessments, grading deadlines, lesson planning, enforcing proper classroom behavior and perhaps, a little stage fright. These can all occur during a typical semester.

How do you motivate yourself to deal with stressful situations so that you can reduce their negative affects? Up until now, possibly, you have not given this question much consideration; you somehow have gotten the job done but feeling little better as a result. So what can you do to improve?

Psychology offers a motivational tool that is so simple and effective that anyone can use it with surprising results, yet it doesn’t cost a penny. Grandma’s Rule is the time-honored truism that when applied at the dinner table to children states: “Eat your vegetables first and then you may have your dessert.” To put it in other words: “First, do something you HAVE to do. Then, do something you WANT to do as a reward.”

It’s so simple; it’s so effective. Take the example of grading a stack of student papers or tests. Unless you truly enjoy this task, turn the papers into your vegetables and then read a favorite book, take a short walk, cook your favorite dish, compose an e-mail to a friend, browse the frontiers of Web or just relax while taking a cat nap and turn that activity into your dessert.

Teachers must accomplish a great amount of work each term. When you are motivated, the same work seems less daunting and overwhelming. Grandma’s Rule is a motivational tool that you should include in your management repertoire.

Do You Know About Synchronized Organizational Flexibility (SOF)?

Have you heard of SOF? It’s new, it may be revolutionary, and it’s a completely meaningless acronym. Have fun creating your own buzzword phrases; it’s easy and fun. Visit http://www.acronymfinder.com/buzzgen.asp#about. It’s a dessert!
Teaching Tips from Corporate Colleagues

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Corporate trainers must instill a variety of intricate behaviors into a diverse audience of people. In addition, they must do this in fewer sessions and in shorter periods of time than available to college faculty. Learn how to apply their strategies to your teaching.

College science teaching can be a great chore. The onslaught of technical information given in lecture and laboratory sessions is often a burden to both faculty and students. Faculty are given the onerous task of inculcating students with an understanding of many complex concepts within a short time span.

Students must then try to absorb this information dedicating much time outside of the lecture or laboratory sessions. There is little opportunity during the class time for students to seek clarification or to let the information sink into their long-term memory. This situation is not unique to science educators. It’s a common issue faced every day by corporate trainers.

Trainers also face tough teaching challenges

Corporate trainers must instill a variety of intricate behaviors into a diverse audience of people. In addition, they must do this in fewer sessions and in shorter periods of time than available to college faculty. Fortunately, they have a series of tools that helps them achieve their goals with a high degree of success, and many of their strategies are applicable to college teaching.

Hearing is not necessarily learning

Principle number one of training is to distinguish between what the audience is hearing and what the audience is learning. Hearing means the audience is merely is listening to you talk. It doesn’t mean they are learning. To a trainer, all a lecture does is provide information. It doesn’t guarantee the audience is learning the information.

Learning is achieved when the audience talks about the information. Good trainers provide time for the audience to discuss what they hear. They do this by soliciting feedback in the form of questions and they make corrections based on what they learn from the audience. Trainers know that an audience retains much more information when learners translate and speak what they hear using their own words.

Information pacing and chunking

Trainers also know how to adapt their talk to the amount of information being conveyed. They break up the information into manageable chunks giving the audience time to absorb each concept. In addition, good trainers gauge the attention span of their audience. A useful rule of thumb is to never present longer than the average age of the group. Younger audiences, such as college students, have shorter attention spans than mature audiences. So, college students stop listening after about twenty minutes. Trainers use these stop points to get the audience to talk about what they are learning.

Active and passive combinations

Besides chunking the information into digestible bits, it’s also important to intersperse active and passive teaching. Active learning means providing brief activities that engage the students in using the concepts that were just discussed.

Assigning five-minute problem-solving activities or asking the students to reflect on the concepts just learned can achieve this. A good reflection activity involves asking the students to write at least three major points they just heard.

Then, ask them to create an application for one of the concepts. Continue with the passive instruction by repeating the concepts they should have learned and continue on with the lecture.
Improvisation Fights Stage Fright

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Commmunication with one another is an everyday occurrence, but many students, when taking a public speaking course, cannot overcome the fear of facing a group of people staring at them, even after giving several speeches. Their effectiveness and self-esteem collapses as they dwell on their nerves and insecurity.

Ease them into speechmaking by doing improvisations. This relaxes them, builds their confidence and teaches them to think on their feet. Improvisation is a performance exercise that the class does as a whole or as teams of two or more.

Often exercises are based on the premise that two people meet for the first time. To make it more interesting, there is always an offbeat restriction, such as two people meet for the first time, but they may only speak one word at a time, ask questions, or may not ask any questions. An exercise the whole class can do as a team is to tell a story with each student saying only one sentence of the story as it becomes his or her turn.

Improvisations help students become comfortable with their peers; they become friends—strangers no more. With the restrictions placed on the improvisations, students begin to concentrate as they are speaking, have eye contact with the audience and use physical expression when speaking.

The students also have fun doing the improvisation and look forward to doing them every week. Improvisation becomes a warm-up act for the main event of giving their speech.

The final product becomes a more polished and powerful speech and a willingness to try different styles to see what works best for them. The goal with improvisation, as with any teaching tool, is to assist everyone in the class to become the most effective speaker they can be in order to attain their career goal upon graduation.

Storytelling—the forgotten mode

This next suggestion may sound silly, but storytelling is a very successful strategy used by trainers who present highly technical material. Storytelling means putting the information in context of how it’s used in real life. For example, when teaching the principles of thermodynamics describe the facts by giving a situation that highlights rule usage. For example, in toxicology, the thermodynamics of enzyme kinetics explains how particular toxins leave characteristic by-products that can be measured in the body.

Practical equals memorable

Trainers know that people more accurately remember facts if the information is presented as a practical application. Safety trainers are particularly adept at teaching safety precautions using stories or personal accounts. Stories do not have to be humorous or entertaining. They just need to be relevant to the topic and describe realistic applications. Non-traditional students greatly benefit from stories and anecdotes. They learn better when information is not presented in a factual, sterile, rote-memorization manner.

A systematic path instead of random cross-country hike

Lastly, provide the students with a direction or path. Trainers introduce their sessions by telling the audience what they are going to learn. Most of the time these goals are presented as learning objectives handed out to the participants. The learning objectives become the guide for breaking up the information and getting the audience engaged in active learning activities. Plus, a good trainer ends the session by summarizing what the audience should have learned. They do this by polling the audience with questions and then by reiterating the learning outcomes.

All of these training components are part of what it takes to be an effective educator. Educational research supports these principles and all of these instructional strategies are components of teacher education programs. Trainers learn these principles by trial and error.

You will see an improvement in your lecture and laboratory learning if you apply these principles consistently.

Action Step: Design an improvisational learning activity for your speech class. Or use the principle of desensitization in a class other than speech to help students reduce anxiety and quicken learning.

Action Step: Using the Trainers’ Action Step list, determine a way to apply each step to your next class and evaluate the results using the one-minute paper technique described in the February 2004 TFS issue.
Distance Learning Help Is Only a Click Away

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Like many college instructors, you may suddenly find yourself faced with teaching from a distance as your institution jumps into the future. What are your concerns as you develop a distance learning course from scratch? Or, have you been doing this for a while and need a fresh approach? Whether you are looking for a new strategy, or need help with the details of successful distance learning course presentation, the Distance Learning Resource Network (DLRN) website at www.dlrn.org is for you!

The DLRN website’s main theme is presented by empowering visitors to eliminate the personal struggles sometimes found in distance education. Guests from all facets of distance education arriving at this website are quickly put on common ground through the diversity and modernism of the links offered. This site gets you where you want to go quickly and effectively. Tools offered are based on the sharing of useful and effective projects, tips and innovations in distance learning technology.

The latest research, development, trends, statistics and plans from the field are readily accessible by connecting to the site’s online library, just for starters.

The DLRN has been funded since 1988 by the U.S. Department of Education’s Learning Technologies Division, under the Star Schools Program. An Adobe Acrobat document of the Star Schools Program’s sixteen-page brochure is available for download from the home page.

Over the past 15 years, the program has awarded more than $300 million to nearly 50 projects all over the world, making it the most accomplished distance learning cooperative in history. The website is administered by the DLRN offices in San Francisco, California, where they update this site continuously, providing participants with the latest information available at all times.

Start Up Assets

The top half of the DLRN home page introduces viewers to the Star Schools Program, with links to all levels of the program’s distance learning offerings. The first link to “The Program,” defines and outlines the mission of the Star Schools Program itself. There are project overviews and resources currently online and active within the system. Links are provided. Contact information to their Learning Technologies Division in Washington, D.C. is also clearly identified.

Even though this section may not seem interesting to distance education professionals at first glance, the mission’s success and purpose are reflected and threaded throughout the DLRN sections of the website’s home page.

Community

Along the second line of the top tool bar of the home page, you will notice the link to the very valuable DLRN “Interactive Community,” where distance learning instructors are able to connect with each other via teleconferences, chats and virtual communities. This is a free service of the DLRN and you must log in to post messages and participate in virtual events.

The meat and potatoes of the DLRN home page is reflected on the bottom half of the home page, and through use of the left hand tool bar. Both are easy to navigate and quickly accessible and indexed separately. Specifically, site visitors including distance learning instructors, administrators and students from Kindergarten through college all have a place to go here.

From left to right, the links are graphically marked and clearly labeled, beginning with a chain symbol for the “Creating Connections” link, which briefly introduces users to the offerings of the DLRN part of the site. There, a comprehensive definition of distance education delivery is outlined. The reasons why distance learning makes sense are also discussed in depth, in a position-point format.

continued on page 7
The Big Three—Leadership, Learning and Motivation
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I have found a very effective way to stimulate my students to think, and motivate them to learn. What is it? I begin each class with a quote, vocabulary word, and short motivational speech. All three are tied together and related; the purpose is to foster enthusiasm, motivation and encouragement. Why and how does this work?

Activate the mental processes
First, let me explain my philosophy. When a person receives positive input, they learn better, because the brain is emotionally activated. This is one reason why study groups are so effective—they actively involve students in learning. Conversation is required to verbally converse, exchange ideas, and interact with other learners.

All this activity stimulates the brain cognitively and emotionally, and it makes learning easier and more natural. I apply these concepts to my introductory speech class. It begins when I set the goal to get them thinking and engaging.

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Publishers Note
Teaching For Success 13 is about learning the disciplines of achievement and improvement.

Goal setting in an extremely important first step to success. Completing action steps follows once you precisely define your goals. Then comes the development of the self-discipline necessary to complete the actions steps. How do you develop self-discipline and incorporate this trait in your teaching? Send us your thoughts.

continued from page 6
The other three links are depicted by pencils for K-12 Students, a stack of books for Adult Learners and an apple for Educators in the field of distance learning. The last link is the site library, which is the most widespread and functional part of the site. Its link is marked on the home page by a set of file drawers.

Site Dividends
The DLRN library is the best place to visit from the home page. There you will be directed to the latest information and trends in distance education, both at DLRN and off-linked to other organizations in the field. The right-hand tool bar presented at the library precisely directs users to their needed location at top speed. The first selection is the “Resources and Articles” listing. The resources start strongly with a link to the DLRN’s own Technology Resource Guide, by Carla Lane, Ed.D. Resources listed are extensive, covering everything from funding to a “Glossary of Distance Learning Terms.”

The “Online Newsletters and Journals’ link is next, and features several dozen e-zines and paper home site links to many levels of monthly annals dedicated to distance learning. Most feature their own search function, if you are using this site to aid in a research effort.

The “Reference Desk and FAQ’s” section is short, but to the point for the novice in distance education information gathering. It is followed by the “Background Reading” area, which is divided into subsections that encompass topics from general to governmental to college research sub-fields of distance learning.

Finally, the “Library Archives” section links visitors to the DRLN: The Electronic Journal, from 1996, and to the “Trends and Issues” selection, where educators may take a look at the current buzz topics in distance education.

Return Investment
This website is a fantastic asset for all distance learning professionals. The DLRN has effectively and extensively presented a golden support system for distance educators at all levels. You will return again and again to find just the tool you need for whatever your distance learning challenge might be. Returns will always be profitable as you come back over and over again to enjoy meeting up with others successful in the field. Revisits will happen time after time for the latest updates in distance learning course offering, statistics, trends and shifts in the field. This comprehensive site will fill visitors with the confidence and currency they need to be effective leaders in distance learning all over the globe.
continued from page 7

Create content that relates

It works because it relates content to students in a way they understand. Many of my students are freshman or first-year students (excellent for more advanced students as well) who need some energizing and encouragement, especially those that are returning to school after a marked absence.

Here’s my recommendations for creating effective messages. Tailor the quotes to fit their situation. The more you get to know your students’ needs and characteristics the more you can create helpful motivational talks corresponding to their areas of concern. Attach value to your messages by showing them how they apply it to other areas of their lives—not just school work, but relationships, jobs, etc.

Humor adds energy and enjoyment

It works because of humor. I incorporate funny stories or illustrations into the message. It’s OK to use humor in the classroom; as a matter of fact, I often try to use humor to get a point across because it’s makes communication more enjoyable. I keep my assertions light, humorous and pertinent.

Here’s the best part—my students love it! They all tell me they learn so much from my short quips at the beginning of class. That tells me I’ve got their attention, a prerequisite for learning to take place. One of the extra perks besides learning, is they leave my class with positive feelings. How can you accomplish this?

Example

For the first couple of classes, I always recommend that my students take a more aggressive approach to learning. Therefore, I begin with quotes dealing with choice, and the concept of “what you give you get.” Here’s a quote I use by Zig Ziglar, “What you choose to give life today determines what life gives you tomorrow.” I then write the word, “Choice” as our word for the day. I read the quote, ask a student look up and read the word. I spend a few minutes elaborating on the word to ensure my students fully understand it. Then, I explain the application of this concept. I elucidate the power of choice, and I affirm their choice to attend college and come to class. Continuing on this path, I agree that what they choose to do each day, they will comprehend the material, reduce the required study time and perform better on tests. In later classes, I always reinforce and build on this powerful idea.

Starting each class on a positive note is terrific for students; it attracts their interest, and it encourages, motivates, inspires and prepares them for learning. It takes effort on my part to look for quotes and words, and to devise the necessary relationships, but it’s definitely worth it. Furthermore, it doesn’t take much time—usually 10-15 minutes, and I’ve done it in less than 10 minutes. Try it; you’ll like it!

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/SuperIdeas\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.