Breaking Success Barriers—The Powerhouses of Change

The next step involves building the skills necessary to keep improvement on track and moving forward. Therefore, this month, add to your new zero-based thinking skills the four powerhouses of accomplishment:

- Desire.
- Decision.
- Discipline.
- Determination.

Once you know what you want to accomplish, desire provides the emotional energy to get going and make a firm decision to accomplish.

However, without adding a healthy dose of self-discipline, it’s all too common to be blown off course by the fickle whirlwinds of activity that surround everyone. Developing self-discipline means creating an internal compass to stay on track.

Finally, with desire, decision and discipline you can build unshakable determination—determination to reach your goal no matter what. These four powerhouses can help you teach for success and your students reach their goals.

Teach the four powerhouses of accomplishment to your students and use them to reach the outcomes you choose.

No matter how much we may wish to enter a permanent, problem-free nirvana in our professional and personal lives, we find that change not equilibrium is the reality of the universe in which we live and teach. The need to improve and solve problems is our constant companion.

Therefore, when you teach for success you strive to become an expert at guiding and nurturing change. You realize it’s a process that can be influenced; not just endured.

Cause and effect drives change. The more you understand this, the more you can target and alter root causes and gain control.

The August 2002 edition of TFS recommended adopting zero-based thinking as the starting point to creating sensible improvements and change.

Zero-based thinking requires that you continuously analyze, define and justify each of your goals and activities to ensure that they support the outcomes you hold most precious.
The Audio Advantage
Is It for You?

Howard Rosenthal, Ed.D.
St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley
St. Louis, MO
hrosenthal@stlcc.cc.mo.us

If I asked you to name the best technological breakthrough that enhances learning, you would probably cite the Internet, the CD-ROM, your favorite computer software package, or perhaps the personal computer. However, my vote is for the lowly audiocassette—a remarkable teaching device that has been passed over by advanced technology. Translation: the cassette tape is a gold mine, and most instructors have never come close to tapping its tremendous potential.

Cassette tapes save time. They also capitalize on research indicating that a high percentage of our students are auditory rather than visual learners, including a large number of students who protest that it is not true!

Cassette tapes are low cost and can be easily duplicated by your school media services or a local recording studio. Best of all, tapes can transform a boring traffic jam into a world-class learning experience. Here are a few brief examples of how cassette tapes can be easily integrated into your teaching process:

- Give your students an audiotape that explains the nature of your course before it begins. For example, our program requires students to successfully complete a practicum and seminar in order to graduate. I thus created a tape that explains precisely what transpires in a practicum and seminar and the tape literally answers the top 40 or 50 questions students ask. What a time saver!

- Prepare a lecture for your students to listen to outside of class. In the case of accelerated classes that are currently very popular, this allows you to cover more material than you would normally be capable of covering in the time allotted for the class. This is no small feat, to say the least, since it literally makes the class as if it had additional sessions.

- Is there a topic you cover that students routinely do not understand? Is there a unit that stumps even the stellar students when you give them an exam? Why not create an alternative lecture on tape where you explain the same subject matter using different examples and verbiage. You could even use it to ask the students, “Which presentation do you like best?” in order to fine-tune your teaching skills.

Start with these three ideas and then challenge yourself to come up with a bevy of other ideas so you too can plug into the audio advantage. [Then send them to TFS!]

Idea Cards Keep Class Fresh

Francine Armenth-Brothers, MS, TFS Partner Author
Health Adjunct
Heartland Community College
Normal, IL
francine_armenth@yahoo.com

While typing QuickTips for future issues, I’ve enjoyed rereading previous TFS issues that I have saved, and I always seem to find another one to adapt to my classes. To organize these ideas, I place them on 4 x 6 inch index cards. For very short QuickTips, I make a copy of the particular tip I want to try, and paste it on the card. I summarize longer QuickTips on a card, making notes for any adaptations for my classes and students. I then color code these cards. Blue marks are tips that provide ideas for review tasks, yellow marks are tips that emphasize assessment activities, and red marks are good ways to reenergize the class. Using a color-coded system allows me to plan class activities (blue & yellow), or pull one out to use spontaneously when students’ eyes start to become glazed (yellow & red).
When Students Want to Know, “How Am I Doing?”

Roy Day
Foreign Language Department
St. Louis Community College – Meramec
St. Louis, MO
Lday@stlcc.cc.mo.us

Many college students are very busy—too busy sometimes to know how they are doing in their courses. In my French courses, the response to, “How am I doing?” can be complicated. Since the final grade includes attendance completed near the end of the semester, how a student is doing in week ten may not be a good indicator of how he is doing in week fifteen.

Furthermore, even after reading the syllabus, students can lose sight of how best to manage their time to end up with a grade they feel is acceptable. To help students always know how they are doing and let them see what they need to do to complete the course adequately, I have developed a “Monitor Your Progress” grid.

(This “Grid” is available from the teachingforsuccess website at: http://teachingforsuccess.com/IssueSupport2/IssueSuptIndex.htm. Once you have downloaded this Adobe Acrobat file, use the password, “grid” to open this document.)

Syllabus tie-in

In my syllabus, I explain in great detail how the grid is used. I have a table for some areas where students are evaluated, and single blanks for the midterm, final exam and final oral project.

Attendance

Because attendance is very important in my language classes, I encourage students to keep track of their absences. I take role, but when students ask, “How many absences do I have,” I tell them they are supposed to know by looking at their own grid. If they have lost track, they can come ask me again at an office hour. Similarly, when I hand back quiz results (my quizzes do not circulate), they know exactly where to write their scores. I have different grids for different kinds of scores since those scores are weighted differently.

Calculation review

On the last day of class, I briefly review the math behind the way I calculate grades. Then, everyone should have a fairly clear idea of where they stand, except for the result of the final exam.

For example, students in my classes get 35% for attendance and participation. They get four free absences, with the next four counting 2.5% off their grade. More than eight absences and they don’t pass. So, a student can put a number in the blank next to the attendance grid and get the attendance portion of the overall grade.

We continue with reading quizzes, vocabulary quizzes, the midterm and oral project grade. The student has a very clear idea of what final grade to expect, and how well she needs to do on the final exam.

Also, this puts an end to the question: “How am I doing?” Most important, students see that grades are not the whim of the teacher, and they have some control over how well they do in the course.

Too rigid?

Capturing the grading process in a grid can seem very rigid. For example, I do not always know exactly how many vocabulary quizzes I will be giving.

My solution here is simple: I add more spaces for quizzes than I can possibly give. I explain to students that as we have more vocabulary quizzes, each one is worth less, since altogether they will be 20% of the final grade. But the grid does force me to visualize clearly what I want students to do to get a certain grade. Once I get that vision, I have to stick with it for the semester.

Students take control

Another interesting aspect of the grid is that it allows students to decide if they do NOT want to do something. For example, I have two sets of quizzes over two different readers in my courses. The quizzes are pass/fail (75% passes), with each set of quizzes worth 10% of the final grade. I have students who choose to not take a set of quizzes, knowing that they will lower their grade by a whole letter. I allow this so they can survive my course and still work at the jobs they need to finance their education.

The point of the grid, again, is to encourage students to actively monitor their progress and let them decide what they will do to complete my course on their terms. I set up the rules, but then it is up to them to play however hard they want. Getting a good sense of what it will take to end up where you want to go is almost as important as learning French....
A t our institution, we are teaching more classes than ever as well as serving on an unprecedented number of committees.

This situation has created such a tight grading schedule that some instructors forgo in-depth grading that benefits students. Or they may suffer burn out writing the same comments on papers and assignments over and over.

If you find yourself in a similar bind, try the following idea. It requires devoting one class period to this activity, but the results are worth it.

Before any major written paper or presentation is turned in for a grade, I set aside one class session—this day is specifically mentioned in the syllabus—and devote the day to manuscript editing.

Paper exchange
The students bring a draft of their papers to class and exchange it with another student.

The peer editor then goes through the paper looking for the grammatical items such as ending sentences with prepositions, use of contractions in formal writing, formatting problems, typographical errors, misspellings, comma splicing, and etc. The students then exchange the paper with another student and then another.

Second round
Then, I call for a second edit. Now, students read the draft paper for content to see if the writer's ideas make sense, arguments are well supported, choice of vocabulary words are appropriate, etc. If there is time, the students examine another draft.

At the end of the class session, three to five students will have examined a student's draft. The student then takes the draft and makes those editorial changes before turning the assignment in for a grade.

Outcomes
My students feel better about seeing other drafts and learn how to look for mistakes. They experience how editing others' work makes them stronger editors. It also means higher grades since I'm not seeing as much improper English. In addition students are less likely to argue about grades and this saves time!

For students who still may be experiencing problems with the assignments, I suggest that they visit my office to examine sample copies from former students. Seeing good writing samples is greatly appreciated by our English as second language learners and first generation college students.

The Intro Card Game

In my pocket, I have a stack of index cards. We are going to play the “Intro Game.” When I was in college and graduate school, we often began classes with introductions. We would go around the table, and people would mumble their name and major. It’s different with the “Intro Game.”

Every student picks a partner, preferably not someone they know. They have 15 minutes to interview each other, collecting such facts as name, major, goals, family and pets to put on the card.

Students also ask for their partner’s phone number, so they have a point of contact in the class. Then the fun begins.

Somehow, naming someone else’s pets, or love for the Steelers, or goals seems much easier. Some keep it short, but most seem to enjoy the presentation. The class smiles at the girl with the cat named “Wild Thing,” boys in the back of the room cheer when another says he liked the band “Weezer,” two girls realize that they’re both transferring to the same nursing school next semester. Most have just met one another, yet they show pride and interest in their fellow students’ achievements and aspirations!
Be confident when you teach. But accept that you cannot be in control of every situation.

The timeless Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita urges us to consider the following thoughts concerning work:

You have the right to work, but for the work’s sake only. Desire for the fruits of work must never be your motive for working. Work done with anxiety about results is far inferior to work done without such anxiety, in the calm of self-surrender.

Heady stuff, but we can apply these ideals to teaching. Let’s examine the passages one-by-one and see.

Work
You have the right to work, but for work’s sake only. With rent or mortgage payments, bills to pay, and our general desire for stuff, we must work for money.

Whereas all of us would love to not have to worry about earning money, and many of us would teach for free if we could afford to, the fact of the matter is we must earn our keep.

We simply cannot work for work’s sake only. But the truth and spirit of this passage is found in the next line.

Motive
Desire for the fruits of work must never be your motive for working. Many artists slave away day after day earning little praise and money for their efforts.

For instance, if wealth was Van Gogh’s reason for painting, he would have given art up and taken up another profession. The Dutch master is known to have earned very little money or fame from his artwork during his life. He obviously had another motive for working at his art.

What is your motive for teaching? Is it strictly monetary? Do you work for greater fame and recognition? Is it the energy you experience in the learning process? Or is it the satisfaction of working on your own with a group of students?

For me, teaching is its own reward. Seeing a student go from confusion to clarity on some point you’re teaching them is reward enough—maybe even the greatest reward there is!

What is the fruit of work you are really working for? What is your true motive for being an educator? Chances are you better the students you teach every semester. And in doing so, you better yourself.

Work done with anxiety about results is far inferior to work done without anxiety, in the calm of self-surrender.

The moment
Surrender to the moment. Every now and then, let the moment come; you don’t have to rush headlong through it every time you teach. This is not to say do not prepare for classes or try to do your best.

If you are too worried about success, your worry will come through in the work you do.

Think of your first few dates when you were younger. Remember how nervous you were? You didn’t want to look nervous, but you probably did. You may have stuttered, said and did the wrong things, and overall lacked all manner of cool. Cool is confidence earned by experience.

Confidence
Be confident when you teach. But accept that you cannot be in control of every situation. What if the students go in the one direction you were not ready to cover in class?

When that happens, go with the flow. Surrender yourself to the conversation. Don’t rush them along by forcing them to move into a topic you feel more comfortable covering rather than the one that caught the moment.

Why not let them have some room to explore and let them take you along with them. You might be very pleased by what you discover about the topic, your students, and yourself as a teacher!

It is only by fully surrendering ourselves that we can gain ourselves.

By considering some of the old truths presented in classic works such as The Bhagavad Gita, we can bring new energy and purpose to our teaching. We can teach for success.

In the October issue, I will explore another major passage that helps puts success and failure into perspective.

Source
The initial paraphrased passage can be found in chapter 2, verses 46-51 from the translation available at http://www.asitis.com.
I’m noticing a slightly disturbing trend in the area of phone messages from students. For the second semester in a row, a student has called after my last office hour of the week wanting me to return their call.

Then they left another message the following day saying something like, “...I called and left a message yesterday, but you didn’t return my call... please return my call ASAP.” This does not make me look good.

How and When do you handle phone messages from students?

A I receive and return calls only during my hours on campus (except for special cases).

If there is no answer, I leave a message or just make a record that I returned the call. I see no need for more.

—Anonymous

A My suggestion is to be very clear, from the first day of class, about the manner (and time frame) in which questions will be addressed.

In this situation the student should be firmly and politely told to make an appointment to discuss questions during office hours.

Encourage students to have a student study partner to call first. Remind them that it is the student’s responsibility to make arrangements to have questions and problems addressed.

E-mail is another option that students can use to contact teachers politely with questions.

—Gayle Feng-Checkett, English, Saint Charles Community College, St. Peters, MO

A As a professional educator, your official office hours are posted. It is during those times that calls are received and/or messages are returned.

I merely inform students that calls coming in after hours or when I’m not scheduled to be on campus will be returned during my next scheduled office hour.

It is not to be assumed by the students that instructors are on 24-7 call. Making this fact clear (as to when you are available) on the first day of class (in your course syllabi) generally avoids these types of situations, regardless of the student’s status in your course.

—Anonymous

A You could tell your students verbally on the first day of class and put it on your syllabus that the last time you check your messages at school is during your last office hour of the week. Another solution, the one I use, is to give out your home or cell phone numbers to your students, although I realize many are not comfortable doing this.

—Wanda K. Wyffels, TFS Partner Author, Sociology Department, Northampton Community College, Bethlehem, PA

A I would insert into my telephone answering greeting a phrase such as, “My heavy teaching schedule allows me to check messages only at (time and days) and return calls during (time and days). In most cases, I will return your call within (hours or days).”

Most callers just want to know the situation and hear more than the standard, “Your call is important and I’ll call you just as soon as possible.” Who knows when that might really be?

Or maintain a webpage on which to post assignments and class activities, exam schedules. Then identify the access URL in your phone greeting.

—Jack H. Shrawder, Coeditor, Teaching For Success

September 2002
In my search for ESL/EFL resources on the Internet, I haven’t come across just one site that I think does it all, but I have come across a great site that can act as a home base on the Web for these students.

“The Selected Links for ESL and EFL Students,” which is maintained by The Internet TESL Journal, has collected links and many useful sites for ESL/EFL students. <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/%7Eiteslj/ESL.html>

What I really like about the site is that it has sifted through the enormous amount of Internet resources available for students and chosen just a selection (about 10-15) of truly helpful sites. This keeps students from being overwhelmed by the hundreds of thousands of resources out there.

How is it organized?

The site is organized in a very simple fashion, which I believe is imperative for ESL/EFL students. The six main sections include:

- “A Short List of Good Links.”
- “Dictionaries.”
- “Where to Ask Questions.”
- “Communicating with Others.”
- “On-line Grammar Information.”
- “More Links.”

A short list of good content

A few areas in this section are especially noteworthy. The first is “Activities for ESL Students,” a project of The Internet TESL Journal. It includes a collection of more than 1,000 activities and quizzes submitted by many teachers. Another area is the “Virtual Language Centre.”

This site includes a little bit of everything: grammar, reading, games, vocabulary, conversations, pronunciations, free downloads, etc. Check out the RA Jukebox and the Text-to-Speech sections—some really neat stuff! The last site I want to highlight in this section is “Randall’s ESL Cyber Listening Lab.” This is a terrific collection of listening quizzes created by Randall S. Davis. They range in difficulty level, length and subject matter.

Dictionaries

No ESL site would be complete without a dictionary section. This site includes links to two online dictionaries: The Wordsmyth English Dictionary/Thesaurus and the Ultra Lingua’s Web Dictionary.

A great feature of the Ultra Lingua’s Web Dictionary is that a student can search it three different ways: standard, reverse dictionary and phonetic dictionary. This allows students to find a word that they are having difficulty spelling (phonetic look up) or a word that they can’t remember but have an idea of what it means (reverse look up).

Where to ask questions

Let’s suppose a student has a burning language question and is having difficulty finding the answer. What can he do? Well, he could talk to his teacher, or he could just access this section. The first way to get help is through “Ask the Grammarian,” a service of Boston University. Students can send a question and get an answer back through e-mail. The second way to get an answer is to visit “Dave’s ESL Help Center.” Students can post a question to a message board, and then an ESL teacher will respond as quickly as possible.

Communicating with others

This section contains a link to SchMooze University, which is an online real-time chat area created for ESL students to practice English. It also contains links to other ESL sources.

On-line grammar information

The three sources listed under this category are easily the only three sources a student would ever need to find information about any conceivable grammatical term they want to know about. The links direct students to:

- “OWL Purdue’s Help for ESL Students.”
- “An Elementary Grammar” by the English Institute.

More links

When students are ready for more, they can access this section. And boy will they get more than they bargained for! This is a comprehensive listing of ESL Internet links, which is maintained by The Internet TESL Journal. It is divided into two main sections: Students and Teachers and boasts more than 8,000 registered links.

Comprehensiveness

Although this site doesn’t attempt to have it all, it leads students to resources that when taken together do have it all. Teachers who have ESL/EFL students in their classrooms should be sure to tell them about this site.
Clinical reasoning is perhaps one of the most important skills required of the nurse. Therefore, we incorporate an E-mail Project into the curriculum to help students develop critical thinking skills while improving skills with e-mail technology.

By answering questions that require critical thinking, students increased their skill in answering application and analysis questions based on scientific principles.

Using e-mail technology in a learning exercise alerts faculty to weak areas in the students’ learning, increases experience among students who were inexperienced in the use of computers and e-mail technology and gives shy or non-assertive students an active voice with faculty.

Preparatory setup

The students receive a free e-mail account from the university’s learning center. Each student is responsible for notifying the nursing department’s secretary of their e-mail address.

Questions created

The faculty member develops a critical thinking problem, case study, or question based on material from the present week’s content.

Usually two related questions in multiple-choice format are given. The problems are relayed to the nursing department secretary who sends them to the students by Wednesday afternoon.

Students check and respond

Students check their e-mail, form a reply, and send it via e-mail to their clinical instructor by Friday at 5 p.m. To promote critical thinking, the student includes the scientific rationale supporting the correct answer and reason why the other choices were incorrect.

Faculty respond

Faculty then read and evaluate each e-mail response and provide feedback to the student. Students are given credit toward their grade for participating, but are not graded on their individual responses.

Outcomes evaluation questions

Toward the end of the semester, students are given questionnaires to evaluate the project. Three statements are presented with Likert-type responses following each statement.

The first determines the student’s perception on the project’s ability to increase critical thinking.

The second inquires if the questions were challenging.

The third questions the project’s feasibility.

Additionally, two open-ended questions encourage students to comment on how the exercise could be improved.

In general, students appreciate the individual feedback given with each critical thinking question and reason why the other choices were incorrect.

Since learners are required to give a scientific rationale supporting their answer, they are encouraged to review textbook information. In addition, having to explain why an answer was correct or incorrect prompted further critical thinking practice.

Additionally, many students consulted with classmates concerning each problem. This dialogue improved their critical thinking skills in a non-threatening manner. Overall, this was very simple but effective method of helping students improve analytical thinking skills.

One of the fastest ways to improve is to strive to do fewer things and to make sure that the tasks you do are of the highest possible value. What do your students really need from you to maximize their learning? When you can answer that question, you will know unerringly exactly what you should be doing during each class meeting or on-line session.

Editors’ Notebook

Penny Shrawder
Jack H. Shrawder

One of the fastest ways to improve is to strive to do fewer things and to make sure that the tasks you do are of the highest possible value. What do your students really need from you to maximize their learning? When you can answer that question, you will know unerringly exactly what you should be doing during each class meeting or on-line session.