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Feature Article

Plan into Action: Vision into Reality Getting things done. That is the single most important key to success. Everyone agrees on this, but few people know how to "get it done." But, if "just staying busy" were enough to ensure success, all overworked teachers would be "post-high-stakes test" heroes.

But we also know that just working hard, or just "working smart and hard" fail to achieve success objectives.

In fact, "working hard" is counter productive in a number of ways. Working hard … Creates stress, and stress breeds mistakes

Provides a model of learning effort that students reject and students have no interest in emulating Students want learning to be easy, captivating, fun, play, creative, spontaneous … like how they learned language as infants and toddlers Builds a consciousness of lack, and a lack of confidence in the teacher This includes a lack of confidence in the teacher's abilities by students, and a lack of confidence by the teacher of students' abilities Creates a sense of struggle, and the struggle to "help" students to learn and perform causes teachers further to doubt the abilities of students Doing "Right Things Right" So if "working hard" is insufficient (even ineffective) in ensuring successful learning, what is effective?

This is where vision comes in.

The key is to execute strategic tasks. But, the teacher has to know what these strategic tasks are.

Here is a lesson in logic. Possible choices that a teacher can make include: Action Category Indicators Remedy Right things done right Proper execution Rest easy, enjoy life, no need to worry Right things done wrong Improper execution, improve delivery and execution skills Figure out how to be successful by observing, conferring and interacting with students. Assess your strategies and methods as you go Wrong things done right Take credit for skillfully not producing any valuable student outcomes Find strategic activities and methods that pay off, then execute them with the skill that you already demonstrate Wrong things done wrong Little chance that any positive outcomes will result in any useful student outcomes. Teaching may not be for you. Become a politician … or a spokesperson for The NCLB Ordinary Measures: Extraordinary Results Results from our action come from our taking ordinary actions.

Outstanding results come from doing the right things in a streamlined and effective manner.

The paradox is that simple procedures, learned and repeated, produce outstanding results, while complex superstructures of actions sag and crash from their own dead weight. The Cruel Hoax of Procrastination Procrastination is a silly excuse for our failures. We pretend that some mysterious force, some evil and insidious quality, is working behind the scenes in our lives to sabotage the benefits and scuttle the outcomes of our desires.

But, procrastination is not a "real thing," in the same way that "cold" is not a real thing. Sidebar

In science, the concept of cold is used to describe a relative phenomenon; but in reality, there are only atoms and molecules spinning and dancing at different speeds. What we call "cold" is only the absence of heat. And when heat is absent, the atoms and molecules move more slowly.

So, there is only heat or the absence of heat, but no "thing" such as cold exists, except in our experience.

In the same way, as there is no thing as "cold," there is no thing that is "procrastination." What we have is the experience of avoiding one task by doing some other task, such as playing, eating, watching television, fishing, playing golf, etc.

What we have is the choice to do something that is either more pleasant, or the choice to do something that is less stressful, or less painful.

Putting off or delaying a task that is aversive, painful, stressful, unpleasant, or difficult is really choosing to take care of ourselves in some way. Unfortunately, we don't complete the "taking care of our self" job in an efficient or effective manner when there are negative consequences for not doing what needs doing … or when not doing brings really deplorable consequences if left undone.

On the other hand, putting off something so that we can incubate ideas, or putting off the release of a "creative work" until it is "finished" (as long as we are continually focusing and building it), is a high-payoff strategy.

Here are the reasons that these choices might not be beneficial: We "enjoy" secondary gains (other rewards) for failing to execute For example, our colleague received recognition (and we didn't) so that we allow the project that we both work on to languish … in an effort to punish our colleague in a passive-aggressive way We enjoy temporary pleasures now, and face unpleasant consequences later For example, watching the championship game into the wee night hours, then dragging all the next day, giving your students (and your employer) less of you than they deserve We experience a dynamic interplay of guilt and self-inflicted punishment, possibly learned from people we loved and trusted when we were children

We don't really know what we are doing, so we "fake it"

We know what to do, but the task is complex and daunting. We face the task with "shallow breath, stress, and queasy fears" instead of completing one part of the task at a time

We are trying too hard to "be perfect" and this need for "stellar personal achievement" causes us to freeze. For example, because we are compelled to write the Pulitzer Prize winning novel, not just any ol' novel, we never start writing, we never practice our craft and the best seller that we would have eventually produced remains in "Fantasy Land." Health and Wellness... Nutrition, Exercise and Self-Care. Acting on your vision (AoyV), and executing with elegance (EwE) require that you operate with energy and alert focus. When you are semi-sick, dragging-tired or stressed-out due to inadequate self care; you lack the energy and stamina to succeed.

Be sure to relax and rest well, eat with wellness in mind, and sleep a comfortable and restful sleep.

Your students deserve to relate to the best you that you are. And, the you that you are provides more of a model (more positive impact upon your students' lives) than all the lecturing that a "do as I say, not as I do" bravado accomplishes. Top-Notch Mental Condition (and Conditioning) Energy and focus require that you exercise and eat a moderate amount of food. And the food needs to be the right kind of food. Sugary, grease-laden "treats" sap your strength; and "starches basking-in-grease" carry calories, but the calories in these concoctions refuse to carry you. Sidebar A deep-fried, jelly-injected, hydrogenated or lard-frosting-decorated doughnut carries within itself the demise of your energy and stamina. This improvised destructive device (IDD) (doughnut) operates on your body like the wrong wood thrown onto a campfire. This is the equivalent of wood that emits lots of putrid smoke, burns in a flash; but extinguishes itself before the embers are completely consumed; leaving lifeless coals that harden into a useless blanket over good wood. The Terrorism of Perfectionism One of the insidious internal processes that "masks as procrastination" is the ill-advised, ill-conceived, emotional and stress "illness driver;" "perfectionism." Sidebar "Perfectionism" is the name of a "self-warping" process that you learned, probably early in life. "Perfectionism" is a noun, and the word refers to a process, but not to a "thing."

As a dynamic process (even as a failed learning process), perfectionism is detrimental and often fatal to personal achievement.

Perfectionism is different than the process of genius, where small steps are practiced until the performance is seamless (over learning), and where major portions of the performance are placed on performance autopilot (habit). Examples, riding a bicycle, shaving, driving a car, delivering instruction to your students

"Perfectionism" is a stepping over the line from, "doing your best" to "you have to be the best," and on to "what you do must meet the classical "definition of perfection."

Sidebar within a Sidebar This idea may have originated with the ancient Greeks who reasoned that it was impossible to draw a straight line or a triangle that was perfect, but these figures existed, without blemish in the mental world.

Of course the ancient Greeks should have extended this proposition to several other, more practical concepts, but their search for "ideal beauty" blinded them to practical definitions. For example: "Good enough"

"Good enough for government work"

"Just do your best" "Your best is good enough"

The corollary to this misguided mode of thinking is, "Unless what I do is 'perfect,' what I do is not good enough."

Teachers and parents foist this mental monstrosity upon students (and pre-student children) with a focus upon high grades, perfect scores, making a hundred, and other less-than-useful motivations. Sidebar within a Sidebar One way to create a "stuttering child" is to take a child with "perfectly" normal intelligence and "perfectly" normal language development and place them with a "caregiver" that "corrects" their words "until they get them right."

What this does is cause victim child to hesitate, think about the words before saying them, and worse; to think about how to make the sounds. With normal language learning, children just make lots of trials until they build a habit of producing the correct sounds.

With "on-the-job training" for stutters, normal practice is interrupted in favor of practice within the "acceptable range" (for the caregiver).

Using this model of incapacitation by perfection, much learning in our schools goes awry. And, this focus on "right answers and perfect papers" saps the fun and joy out of learning, and eliminates the reward for great performance.

For example, if the golfer focuses upon nothing less than a "hole in one" on each shot, then almost every shot is a "disappointment." But, when a real "hole in one" accidentally happens, the golfer is such a "living wreck" (from negative reactions to every other shot) that the joy of the "hole in one" is overshadowed by the gloom of the preceding, "inadequate" shots. And, if "just do your best" is good enough for teachers to use to support their students in a stress-free learning environment, if "try it and see what happens" is an elegant strategy for "discovery learning;" then these strategies should be "good enough" for teachers to use on themselves.

Master teachers understand that a stress-free, competition-free environment accelerates learning, so they create "habits of vision into action" that return the "fun, enjoyment, excitement, curiosity, creativity and serendipity" to learning. Habits (and Habit Development) The goal of automating personal habits is to make the attitudes, knowledge and skills of effective teaching available in response to minute-by-minute interaction with your students.

Of course, you must be sure that the habits you develop are in the category of "doing-right-things-right."

But, it takes experience to know which activities and instructional delivery skills these are.

But, the learning process is enhanced and expanded by your trying lots of things and noting the outcomes. It is OK to practice activities and instructional delivery (AnID) that do not pay off. Why? Because, these may just not pay off for your particular group of students, at this time. But, these same activities and instructional deliver skills (AnIDS) could pay off with highly measurable student outcomes... At another time

With another group of students

With only a slight adjustment in strategy, method or procedure

With a bit of fine tuning

For 80% of any group of students

To 80% of the goals that you have for instruction
Students' abilities are so creative, adaptive and extensive that almost any reasonable procedure can be effective with 80% of your students. Of course, different procedures will make sense to, relate to, and reach a different 80% of your students each time you apply one.

It takes the unique skill and perception of a Master Teacher to choose and optimize an instructional approach so that not only do the "easy-eighty" learn, but the "tougher-twenty" learn, too.

The most important thing to figure out about what habits to cultivate is "what the right things are and how to do these right things in the right way."

This is the experience that allows some folks to look like geniuses to their peers and colleagues. In fact, what "genius-level" application and execution involves is building simple habits of doing the high-payoff "right things." Multiple Intelligences/ Learning Styles
There are several issues to consider when you build your vision, and these relate to application of Multiple Intelligences. You must pass your vision through your "sensory filters" as you move toward applying your vision in real life.

The first issue is that each person will only frame the vision in their preferred mental representational system. The second issue is that describing your vision to someone else, especially someone who has built a very different representational system than you have, is very difficult.

The third issue is that, under stress, you revert to a less favored, less effective representational system; so you have to be sure that you frame your vision in that mode, too.

Here are some examples of the same vision, represented by different Intelligences.
Hands-On, Tactile, Kinesthetic, Proprioceptive do the right things in an efficient and effective manner, bringing learning activities to students, and touching their lives with warmth, feeling and the love of life-long learning
Visual, Spatial, Pattern, Imagination

I show my students enlightened patterns of knowing in a clear and focused way; picturing learning outcomes to students, illuminating their lives with bright and sparkling motivation and projecting and imprinting the delightful vision of life-long learning.
Auditory, Listening, Creating and Recalling Language

I relate to and motivate my students to hear and remember the words that harmonize and resonate with their internal language of learning; and I orchestrate the melody and mood of that knowledge into a symphony that supports life-long learning
Mathematical, Logical, Sequential, Analytical

I postulate learning goals and tasks in a logical and sequential manner, bringing the beauty of problem-solving and decision-making skills; and increasing to a high probability, the chance that life-long learning will continue in the experiences of my students
Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Ethics, Values

I relate my dedication and commitment to learning as I interact in an open and transparent way with my students, and I model the value and benefits of ethical and moral inquiry, especially the addressing of real-world issues. This interactive and project-based learning creates intrinsic interest in personal and interpersonal issues, and prompts the internalizing of attitudes of life-long learning
Smell, Taste

These examples get really silly, so we won't waste your time with them. In reality, vision statements based on smell and taste really "stink and leave a bad taste in your mouth" so we won't sour your experience with tasteless jokes about them. The thing to notice about these restatements of the same vision is that the verbs change to match the sensory modality (sensory intelligence).

The other thing to notice is that if you listen to your students, you can discover what modalities they prefer for their personal learning.

You only have to track a few things about each student in your mind, and even better, it is possible to blend verbs from several modalities into the same sentence because some verbs cover several modalities at the same time.

It is also possible to blend three modalities for just about any vision statement, just don't over do this. For example: As we get in touch with this information, we can see, imagine and picture the learning, and we can listen to the instructions; we may have feelings and sensations, images and impressions, and hear ourselves saying to ourselves, how this information is just as important to us now as it will be in the future
This blending of modes of experiencing was "suggested" by the famous hypnotherapist, Dr. Milton Erickson; and made popular later by Neuro Linguistic Programming practitioners.

Although hypnotic language is beyond the scope of this article, the principle of communication that is inside and outside of our (or our students') conscious awareness is important for teachers.

For example, teachers know that students have difficulty focusing for a long time on what the teacher is saying (short attention span). But, what if a teacher who relates to the world with visual modalities is talking to a class of students where 75% relate to their world with hands-on, tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive modalities? What happens is that the unaware teacher blithely uses good classroom management skills to keep the students behavior under wraps, but most of the teacher's words are wasted because many of the "visual words" are received as suggestions that are outside of the hands-on students' conscious awareness. "Hands-on" students have to translate the "visual words" into meaningful & "feelings and touch" words before the information will have personal meaning for themselves.

The teacher with a high level of visual words either needs to learn to map hands-on words into the active lesson (doing right things right), or the teacher needs to ask the hands-on students to translate for the rest of the class. This is easily

done by asking students to restate what the teacher is saying (a great review technique). Skills for Executing Once a teacher knows what the "right things" are, the skills for taking action and executing are easy to practice. This is because building instructional delivery skills is just the "piecing together" of a series of simple performance steps.

Add another step, practice that step for a few days; then add in another step…

An analogy for this process is learning to play a musical instrument, i.e., first the notes are practiced, then the scales are practiced, and finally melodies are practiced. This process may seem boring, but any other strategy (such as attempting to play melodies without knowing how to reach the notes) is sheer folly and sheer frustration. Standards are Good Enough Teachers can take comfort in knowing that a simple strategy is more effective than an elaborate strategy. And, simple components, ones that students master early in the school year, can be used to build elaborate learning structures.

Teachers who build on a standards-based framework find that the easier and basic the framework, the more outstanding the outcomes.

Results from our action come from our taking ordinary actions, and outstanding results come from doing the right things in a streamlined and effective manner.

So, the Master Teacher applies this paradox as a set of simple procedures that are learned and repeated. This simplicity can produce outstanding results.

Even better, "right activities" can be standardized and modularized so that they are repeated whenever the "doing right things" calls for them to be used. This is an example of the Classroom Toolkit Model. Sidebar For a more elaborate description of the modular approach to learning materials, visit the Classroom Toolkit Website. Here is a link… Classroom Toolkit instructional materials…

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