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Quick Tips

Create a Master To-Do Log/ List System

Whether you use a Planner-Diary (such as a Day Timer[®]), a Personal Digital Assistant (such as a Palm Pilot[®]), or a computer-based system such as Microsoft[®] Outlook[®]; you need a Master To-Do Log/ List System. Why?

The reason that you need a Master To-Do Log/ List System is so that activities and tasks don't fall through the cracks. When you keep track of everything that you must do, you decrease the amount of stress that you experience...especially the kind of stress from being reminded by a supervisor that the three or four hour task that you forgot about is due tomorrow morning, first thing!

The second part of the system is the To-Do List, or, better yet, the "Take Action on Priorities" List. Components of the System The Master To-Do Log/ List System must be flexible, and you need to customize this system to how you work. The crucial strategy is to ensure that: Everything that is important is Listed

Highest Priority Items are "Acted Upon" first

Urgent Items don't take over and keep High Priority Items from happening The Master To-Do Log The first part of the System is a Master To-Do Log. This lists all the tasks that you have to do. You write everything that you have to do on this Log form.

This is the list that almost no one uses. The reason, because it gets filled up with recurring tasks. And for a teacher, the amount of work that is required is overwhelming.

The useful Master To-Do list is kept trim and lean.

What this means is that routines, habits, standard methods, scheduled tasks do not get written on this list.

For example, items that a teacher would not bother writing on this list might be: Taking class attendance and entering attendance data in an attendance or grade book

Making breakfast, getting dressed, combing or brushing your hair, driving to work

Picking up your child from After-School Care

Checking E-mail and Postal Mail

Fixing dinner in the microwave oven, pouring milk on a bowl of cereal

You get the idea

On the other hand, it might be useful to add trivial tasks such as:

Return videos to the library (because the fine is \$2.00 per day, each)

Keeping your medical, dental or psychiatric appointment because there is a charge for missed appointments

Showing up in court to contest that traffic or parking ticket, showing up for jury duty

Purchasing gifts and cards for birthdays and anniversaries of significant others

Etc.

The challenge is to list everything without overdoing the list making. You need to take action on items, rather than spending your time just writing and copying lists.

It might help if you categorize the items on the Master To-Do Log. The To-Do List Maintaining the Master To-Do Log is bearable until the list becomes so long that you begin to feel that you will never catch up.

That is the reason for coding the Log items.

Some systems use an "A-B-C 1-2-3" system. This places tasks in the A1 category (Important), down to the C-3 category (Low Priority, Can Put Off until Later).

For teachers, the problem with this approach is that teachers have little discretion over their time. For example, tasks can be Important or Unimportant, Urgent or Not Urgent.

This leads to a situations where teachers must do Unimportant but Urgent tasks, while putting off Important tasks that are not Urgent. (Absolutely the wrong approach.)

A third system is the "Is it worth it" System. With this system, you just take items from the Master To-Do Log if they answer the question, "Is doing this worth it?" The answer must be, "Yes!" And, not a pint-sized, pipsqueak "yes," but a shout-it-out, "YES!" To-Do List Management The To-Do list is not written the day when you want to accomplish things, it is written the day before...sometimes a few days before.

Write out Action Items. Try to identify 20 take-action tasks per day (or less). Taking action on between 15 and 20 items is about all that you will be able to accomplish.

It's easier to start the school day if you already have a written To-Do List. This allows you to start completing your list when you are fresh and when your mental power of concentration is most focused.

Later in the day, after stress and excitement take their toll, your energy level and your ability to concentrate diminish, and your productivity decreases. Save routine tasks (such as grading homework papers) for this time since you don't need high levels of focus or skill to accomplish such trivial tasks. Sidebar Of course, you should avoid assigning trivial

homework, but grading the homework should be easy on the teacher. And, cross the completed item off the To-Do List. You may enjoy the satisfaction in seeing the large number of tasks that you have completed in a week or two.

And, that satisfaction is one reason that paper lists often leave you with a greater feeling of accomplishment than when you use an electronic task tracking device or program.

Crossing off each action item leaves you feeling like you have accomplished something. What about Left-Over Items? So what happens if I have one, two or more left over action items?

Just put them at the top of the list for the next day.

And, if you like the feeling of accomplishment, you can add these tasks to another page. The flip of the page can give you a sense of accomplishment.

Lesson Plans Inadequate?

Teachers often believe that Lesson Plans are enough to drive efficiency, but the lesson plan is a guide to what students are going to do to learn.

The lesson plan document is your communication with your supervisor, and a legal record of your classroom activities.

What the To-Do Log and the To-Do List do is ensure that you keep all the important To-Do items in plain sight and in reach. Your Beliefs about Time Management Master To-Do Logs and To-Do Lists have their place in your time management strategy. However, external factors such as these tools can distract from the internal change strategies that can streamline daily planning tasks.

Two factors that impact your efficiency as much (or more) than Master To-Do Logs and To-Do Lists are: Our Beliefs
Our Intention

Our beliefs either limit or expand our ability to get things done.

And, how we view time has an incredible impact upon how productive we become.

Future Classroom Toolkit articles will explore the impact of belief upon planning and time management.

For now, it is sufficient to explore beliefs that are more useful to have, i.e., beliefs that… Provide flexibility rather than constraints

Expand capacities rather than restrict abilities

Identify opportunities rather than highlight difficulties

Empower our action rather than restrain our behavior

Flex our capabilities rather than handcuff our strengths

Promote our maturity and confidence rather than prop up our child-like dependencies

And, our intentions have a power that brings situations and outcomes to fruition in ways that our plans only hope to achieve.

So, examine your beliefs and your intentions to determine ways to empower your actions.

For example, replace beliefs like…"I have to…" with "I choose to…"

"I wish I could…" with "I intend to…"

"If only…" with "I want to…"

"There is nothing I can do…" with "I can consider these options…"

And consider ideas and belief that you hold, examine ones that fail to achieve what you want, and replace those ideas and beliefs with more functional options.

Easier said than done?

Actually, surprisingly easy if you open your mind as an adult and question the limits and limitations that you learned as a child.

What you have to gain is a brighter, open, freer viewpoint that allows you to manage your Master To-Do and To-Do List with greater flexibility.

And flexibility accomplishes plenty. See for yourself.

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