



February 23, 2017

Breathe

I tweeted an article from USA Today recently titled “[Five Ways To Cut Stress In A 24/7 World.](#)” One of the suggestions is to “**Breathe. Take a moment and breathe slowly. Start with one minute a day that isn't negotiable. Breathe in to a count of four. Breathe out to the count of six. Experiment to make it your own exercise.**”

I remember when I first engaged with a breathing/relaxing exercise. It was my enrollment in the IASA ISAL coach training. The leaders of the training, Nancy Blair and Sandye Brown would have us partake in breathing exercises to slow down our minds and body and get ready for the instruction of the day. The first few times Nancy led us through this exercise I have to admit I thought it was kind of corny and I was not fully engaged. However, as time went on I realized how beneficial it was for my concentration and attentiveness to the training.

I purchased an Apple Watch last fall and the watch has a “Breathe” reminder as part of the exercise and wellness portion of the watch. This reminder will alert you several times a day to stop and breathe. It has the user breathe in slowly for several breaths then has the user breathe in deeply for about one minute. It is a very relaxing exercise.

The other four ways to cut stress from the above mentioned article are the following:

- *Affirm to anchor. Take a moment. Close your eyes and bring an image of peace into your mind – whether it's a word, symbol, place or face. Repeat silently as you are breathing in, “I am...” Then, breathing out, “Peaceful and Present.”*
- *Practice mindfulness. Be in the present, not the past. Release regrets and sorrow. Don't think to the future and the worries, the “to do” list. Become aware of what is going on with you and around you.*
- *Be positive. Take a moment. Start every meeting with “one good thing that happened within the past 24 hours.” Smile and meet a person's eyes as you walk in. It's contagious.*
- *Express gratitude. Don't wait to say, “Thank You.” Be appreciated and give thanks. Start or finish every day with acknowledging what you are grateful for. The list, she says, should be endless.*

Being “Present” In Everything You Do

As I get older and closer to exiting the education field I have been reflecting quite often when I run in the morning about my career and the possible positive impact I may have had on others.

One of my reflections is the confession that I have not always been “present” in my conversations with others. What I mean about being “present” is that I have not always been a good “listener.” As a matter of fact I admit that often I was not listening to the real message that people were trying to communicate to me.

As I am doing some of the most personally satisfying professional development training in my entire career, actually coaching teacher evaluators in actual classrooms while they are doing the work, I am coaching these evaluators to listen better. They need to listen to what the students are saying and learning, they need to listen to the thoughts and actions of the teachers, and they need to listen to their inner self to make sure they have the best interests of the students as the core of their work.

Recently when I was presenting to a large group of teachers and mentioned that one of the most student engaging sessions I had observed was related to a form of “flipped classroom” instruction, a teacher raised her hand and commented that the use of technology in education was causing more problems than helping. I quickly brushed off the comment in my own mind to the age and negative personality of the teacher making the comment. Upon further reflection I concluded that I did not really listen to this teacher. I am sure she had some very good reasons behind her negative position on the use of technology and I am sure I could have gained insight from a discussion.

As educational leaders we need to listen to others first, then comment. I often reflect on the Covey “Indian Stick” metaphor. Covey teaches that the person speaking holds the Indian Stick and the listener cannot talk until the person speaking decides to give the Indian Stick to the listener. This only happens when the person listening, says to the satisfaction of the speaker, what the speaker is trying to communicate. After receiving the Indian stick the listener is now the speaker and has the same power over the Indian stick. If we had to communicate back to the speaker, to the speaker’s satisfaction, what the speaker is attempting to communicate I believe we would have much better listening skills.

In addition to listening skills your role as a school administrator also demands that you be “present in person” in the buildings and classrooms in your school district. You need to schedule time out of your office on a daily basis to visit schools and classrooms. There is enough work to keep you in your office away from students and teachers but if you fall into this trap you will not be “present” in your school district. Sometimes when I go into classrooms with the teacher evaluator a student will point to the evaluator (not me) and say “who is that person.” You do not want to be pointed at by students or parents in your school district because they do not recognize you.

Be “present” in everything you do, even when listening to your spouse or own children.

8 Things Successful People Do Not Do Every Day

I read this article written by Jeff Haden and thought I would share it with you. I think it contains great advice for educational leaders. You can find the article at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/8-things-successful-people-do-every-day-jeff-haden>.

If you get decent value from making to-do lists, you'll get huge returns -- in productivity, in improved relationships, and in personal well-being -- from adding these items to your not-to-do list:

Every day, promise yourself you won't:

1. Wait until you're sure you will succeed.

You can never feel sure you will succeed at something new, but you can always feel sure you are committed to giving something your best.

And you can always feel sure you will try again if you fail.

Stop waiting. You have a lot less to lose than you think, and everything to gain.

2. Multitask during a meeting.

The easiest way to be the smartest person in the room is to be the person who pays the most attention to the room.

You'll be amazed by what you can learn, both about the topic of the meeting and about the people in the meeting, if you stop multitasking and start paying close attention. You'll flush out and understand hidden agendas, spot opportunities to build bridges, and find ways to make yourself indispensable to the people who matter.

It's easy, because you'll be the only one trying. And you'll be the only one succeeding -- on multiple levels.

3. Check your phone while you're talking to someone.

You've done it. You've played the, "Is that your phone? Oh, it must be mine," game. You've tried the you-think-sly-but-actually-really-obvious downwards glance. You've done the, "Wait, let me answer this text..." thing.

Maybe you didn't even say, "Wait." You just stopped talking, stopped paying attention, and did it.

Want to stand out? (Especially if you're a boss?) Want to be that person everyone loves because they make you feel, when they're talking to you, like you're the most important person in the world?

Stop checking your phone. It doesn't notice when you aren't paying attention. Other people?

They notice.

And they care.

4. Think about people who don't make any difference in your life.

Trust me: The inhabitants of planet Kardashian are okay without you.

But your family, your friends, your employees -- all the people that really matter to you -- are not. Give them your time and attention.

They are the ones who deserve it.

5. Let yourself be distracted by notifications.

You don't need to know the instant you get an email. Or a text. Or a tweet. Or anything else that pops up on your phone or computer.

If something is important enough for you to do, it's important enough for you to do without interruptions. Focus totally on what you're doing. Then, on a schedule you set -- instead of a schedule you let everyone else set -- play prairie dog and pop your head up to see what's happening.

And then get right back to work. Focusing on what you are doing is a lot more important than focusing on other people might be doing.

They can wait. You, and what is truly important to you, cannot.

6. Let your past dictate your future.

Mistakes are valuable. Learn from them.

Then let them go.

Easier said than done? It all depends on your perspective. When something goes wrong, turn it into an opportunity to learn something you didn't know -- especially about yourself.

When something goes wrong for someone else, turn it into an opportunity to be gracious, forgiving, and understanding.

The past is just training. The past should definitely inform but in no way define you... unless you let it.

7. Talk behind someone's back.

If only because being the focus of gossip sucks. (And so do the people who gossip.)

If you've talked to more than one person about something Joe is doing, wouldn't everyone be better off if you stepped up and actually talked to Joe about it? And if it's "not your place" to talk to Joe, it's probably not your place to talk about Joe.

Spend your time on productive conversations. You'll get a lot more done--and you'll gain a lot more respect.

8. Say "yes" when you really mean "no."

Refusing a request from colleagues, customers, and especially friends is really hard.

Yet you can't do everything. You shouldn't do everything. In fact, success is often based more on what you decide not to do than on what you do.

Besides, rarely will saying no go as badly as you expect. Most people understand (and if they don't should you care too much about what they think?)

When you say no to something you don't want to do, at least you only feel bad for a few moments. When you say yes to something you really don't want to do you can feel bad for a long time -- or at least for as long as it takes you to do what you didn't want to do in the first place.

Now it's your turn. What things are on your NOT to do list?

Tip of the Week

Several years ago, I conducted a podcast interview with Dr. Steve Tozer, UIC Professor and chair of the Illinois School Leader Task Force, on the topic of "Principal Preparation." The task force had just completed its report and Steve pointed out that research suggests that leadership does matter for student achievement.

Effective principals:

- Influence who gets hired to teach and whether they stay;
- Involve teachers in decision-making and make them feel they belong to a professional learning community that concentrates on student learning;
- Hold teachers accountable to high expectations for quality classroom instruction;
- Lead teachers who believe that all students can learn; and
- Make sure school curriculum is coordinated between grade levels and within subjects.

When you are evaluating your principals this year, rate them on the above attributes of effective leadership. How do your principals rate?