



# Teacherality™ Treasures

*Insights to help you nurture and protect your passion for teaching*

## Teacherality: An Antidote to Brain Strain

It starts with a little knot in your stomach. Maybe you cringe when you think about school. You put off writing your lesson plans till the last minute. You let your inbox pile up. When you get home, you collapse on the sofa, comatose in front of the television. Suddenly, things start to slide.

What's happening? Yesterday you loved being a teacher. Today, you're not so sure.

The rising tide of educational reform and the resulting extra-instructional duties means that teachers are working in a pressure-cooker, with less time to focus on teaching than ever

before. Is it any wonder that an alarming number of teachers leave the profession after only a few years in the classroom?

What can you do to avoid the stress and burnout that comes from the overwhelming demands being placed on you today? In other words, how can you sustain your passion for teaching and keep your Teacherality burning bright?

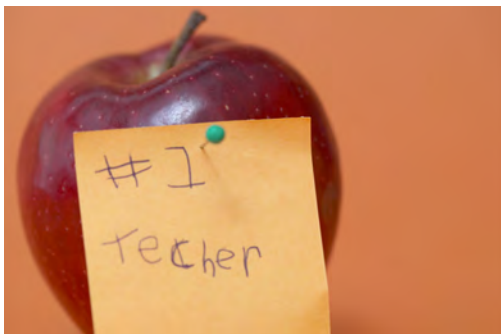
The following five steps can help you get started.

**1. First things first.** Make a list of your tasks and then prioritize them in order of importance. By



attending to the most important things first, you can avoid the errors, regrets and stress that often come from rushing to get everything done all at once.

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## More Than Money

An August 2007 headline in the NY Times seems to say it all: "With Turnover High, Schools Fight for Teachers." With teacher turnover on the rise, a growing number of school districts across the country are offering recruitment bonuses, housing allowances and other incentives as a way to lure educators to their schools.

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### *An Antidote, continued:*

#### **2. Identify your stressors.**

Make a list of events and situations that leave you emotionally drained; then decide on one or two small changes you can make to reduce the stress for each. Keep in mind, it doesn't take much to shift a stressor from being "painful to gainful."

#### **3. Reframe, don't blame.**

How many times has an unfortunate event or a thoughtless comment turned a good day into a bad one? When life deals you a lemon, make lemonade! Learn to reframe the event – in other words, focus on the advantages of a situation and then move on. By making a conscious effort to do something to change your perception you can turn a potentially negative situation into a positive one.

#### **4. Pause before you leap.**

It's easy to get sucked into yet another commitment. Practice saying "no" to requests that are unreasonable or more than you can handle at the time. When you pause before committing to something new, you're giving yourself time to consider the impact of this added obligation on your time and energy.

**5. Let it go!** Unexpressed anger and frustration come with a high price in terms of wasted energy and emotion. Don't keep those negative feelings bottled up. Either talk over your feelings with someone you trust or, if you can't, plan for some physical activity or hobby at the end of your day to help relieve your feelings of tension and restore the balance to your life.

## **Diagnosing Stress**

Burnout is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion caused by excessive or prolonged stress. It can leave you feeling sapped of energy, powerless, cynical and resentful. Symptoms of teacher stress may take many forms. However, researchers report the following as early symptoms that burnout may be on the way.\*

- Feeling like not going to work or actually missing days
- Having difficulty in concentrating on tasks
- Feeling overwhelmed by the workload and having a related sense of inadequacy to the tasks given to them
- Withdrawing from colleagues or engaging in conflictual relationships with co-workers
- Having a general feeling of irritation regarding school
- Experiencing insomnia, digestive disorders, headaches, and heart palpitations
- Incapacitation and an inability to function professionally in severe instances

Because burnout doesn't happen overnight, it's hard to fight once you're in the middle of it. That's why preserving and protecting your Teacherality is one of the most important things you can do to keep stress and burnout at bay.

\* ERIC Digest, Understanding and Preventing Teacher Burnout, January, 2004.

### *More Than Money, continued:*

With the increased focus on testing and the resulting redistribution of time in today's classrooms, it's not surprising that attrition rate among teachers is high and growing. But while low salaries are driving experienced teachers from the field – and keeping promising younger ones from entering it – a recent study conducted by Public Agenda, the nonprofit research organization, suggests that there is more to the problem than simply money.

They found that raising salaries alone won't be enough to solve the problem of staff shortages in the classroom. "What teachers want most is what they believe will make them more effective in their work: smaller classes and much stronger support from administrators and parents." In fact, most would sacrifice higher pay if it meant they could work in schools with well-behaved students, motivated colleagues, and supportive administrators.

"...the majority of new teachers possess at least one extraordinarily appealing quality: Their passion for teaching is striking. It is palpable, vastly underappreciated and a valuable asset that money can't buy." \*

\* *A Sense of Calling: Who Teaches and Why Public Agenda, April 2000*