

PLANNING FOR A BEST DAY

by Monte Selby

Education is hard work. Education is incredibly important. How do we remain ethical, optimistic educators who create an enjoyable and productive teaching, working and learning environment? It is hard not to become overwhelmed by the stress, changing standards, and long-term school improvement plans. Sometimes it is helpful to break down those vast thoughts into something more tangible – just planning for one really good day! Plan for a BEST DAY EVER.

INFLUENCE

Our beliefs are influenced by those around us (and what we read, listen to, etc.) It is helpful if we remember that we should choose to be around those who push us to do our best. Similarly, we remember that our actions and words influence those with whom we work and teach.

Seek out those who inspire you, attend conferences that give you practical ideas, and keep those positive notes from students and parents when they take time to thank you. Keep the notes in a file, and pull them out as a reminder that on your best days, you make a big difference in the lives of students.

Make a play list of songs that get you ready for a great day in the classroom. Whether your songs are energizing or remind you to make each day count, have that CD or iPod ready for the drive to school or during breaks.

Here is an inspiring image of a Best Day - given to me from a Kansas teacher:

You are never too old to have a happy childhood.

I'm 55 and play on the floor with preschoolers
(to balance teaching special education middle-schoolers),
turn summersaults in the grass, dance in the school halls,
hug kids (not just my students)
because they want to laugh & love.

At age 11, I was old, serious, and cautious.

At age 55, I laugh, play and am having a healthy, happy childhood.

Here's another "Best Day" reminder that I read on occasion:

An old Cherokee is telling his grandson about a fight that is going on inside him.

He said it is between 2 wolves.

One is evil:

Anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity,
Guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false, pride, superiority and ego...

The other is good:

Joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness,
Benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith...
The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather,

"Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one I feed."

BEHAVIOR

Create an image of a best day regarding student behavior. If you don't know what it looks like, it won't happen. The best teachers I have ever seen teach, constantly teach the behaviors they want to see. Elementary, middle or high school, these teachers "paint a picture" of what great behavior looks like - including where to turn in homework, when to ask questions, when to line up, how to line up, how to respond to disagreeable ideas, etc. Rather than complaining about what NOT to do, they TEACH what they want students to do.

I used to make highlight videos of student behavior (with a sound track, of course). A highlight video of the lunch room shows happy kids having fun - while using good behavior and manners in the lunch room. I'd show the videos during lunch and whenever a good opportunity presented itself.

Hallway videos showed happy students demonstrating great hallway behavior. If I saw a student helping another with a locker, or picking up trash, or guiding a new student to a classroom, I filmed it and used in the highlight video.

You can create ideal behavior highlight videos for classrooms, sports events, music concerts, drama productions, field trips, etc.

When students know what a best day looks like, they are more likely to produce it!

THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES

New teachers often have days that begin with a rough start with students because the first five minutes of class (or following a transition time) is too chaotic. I recommend that the first five minutes is an opportunity for “auto-pilot” skills.

Consider this image of a “best day” routine for the start of class. As students enter, I start a popular or classical piece of music - three or four minutes in length. Students know that they can visit with a friend while they accomplish our well-rehearsed routine. 1. Put homework in the appropriate basket. 2. Copy assignments into their student agenda. 3. Read over my “crazy and weird quote for the day” board - usually connected to the content we are about to learn. 4. Give a compliment to a person in the room that you have not yet seen today. 5. Be in your seat before the song ends.

More “best day” routine? Students know I stand at the door as they exit. They can address me verbally (“have a good day”), with a handshake, with a hug, with a “high five”, or something we call the “ET beep”. The important part is that no matter how well or poorly the day went with any student, my friendly “exit” routine lets them know that I look forward to seeing them again. As I learned from a MASTER teacher, students who leave class in anger will carry that attitude forward to the next day. If they leave on good terms, they start the next day well.

ENDLESS

Every aspect of school is an opportunity to “paint the picture” of a best day ever. It is helpful to consider a best day of instruction, recess, field trip, staff interaction, IEP meeting, parent phone call, parent teacher conference, or budget planning meeting.

Now, on a personal level, how do *you describe yourself* on a best day ever?

Here’s part of my image of a great day for myself. *I am a high-energy, self-motivated, hardworking person who believes in fun. I endorse a significant body of research suggesting that our laughter helps us learn, supports our immune system, increases our oxygen intake, and helps us bond as humans. Happy people are more productive and miss less work. Fun is seeking and acknowledging student and staff successes. For over twenty years, fun, as a strategy, has allowed me to create focused and driven work environments, where people look forward to returning the next day. For all learners, each day should hold the promise of rigorous learning, practical material, music, movement, questioning, creativity, challenge, and laughter!*

Benefits of Laughter??? Gelotology is from the Greek "gelos" or "laughter" - the scientific study of laughter.

1. Laughter helps individuals and groups bond.

2. Laughter makes the heart beat faster, increases circulation (good oxygen intake), changes hormone and immune elements in the bloodstream, and makes certain muscles active and others relax.
3. Studies of patients who practice laughter report the easing of pain and other symptoms.
4. Research says that even PRETENDING to laugh or act happy produces chemicals in your bloodstream - healthy chemicals.
5. Laughter sets up the brain to be in an optimum state for learning.
6. Laughter is a short, intense workout.
7. Warning – belly laughter may increase the likelihood of passing gas.

And, I believe that laughter helps us remain open to connecting with adults and students who learn and respond very differently from ourselves. It helps us return after some of our toughest days. It helps us remember that the kids who mess up the most may in fact need us the most. Our laughter helps us remain connected.

Ultimately, we create a vision of a BEST DAY EVER because it really does matter. It helps you and the students stay “on course.” Ethical, optimistic educators can have a powerful impact on those who work and learn at school. It matters to the kids and the adults. Create a vision of your best day ever. Put it down in a song, poem, book, cartoon, video, or story. Try to make it happen for one day, knowing it won't be perfect.

Research says that about 21 days of a new routine leads to a new habit.

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