

# STRESS-BUSTING STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

*How do I manage the  
pressures of teaching?*

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(Dweck, 2006). Challenging work conditions cause emotional responses and those emotions establish a mindset that you bring to work each day. The opposite is equally true. Your mindset can make a difference in how you perceive your conditions. If you go to work filled with bad feelings, your mindset will help to create a negative atmosphere that may contribute to challenging work conditions.

Clearly conditions impact our mindset and our mindset impacts our conditions, and both can cause stress. Here's an example. Your school doesn't meet Adequate Yearly Progress. The superintendent leans on the principal to beef up literacy instruction and the principal mandates a change in literacy pedagogy. In order to demonstrate to the superintendent that gains are being made, teachers are required to collect and send assessment data to the principal each month. The teachers are outraged. They feel that the administration does not respect them as professionals, recognize their hard work, or care about anything other than test scores.

Think about what just happened. The stress of change—forcing the adoption of new pedagogy and the requirement to report assessment data monthly—caused the teachers to react with a negative mindset. The teachers perceived from the change that the administration only values test scores and lacks appreciation for practice. The reciprocal relationship between mindset and conditions cannot be ignored. We can learn to ameliorate that interaction.

How often do you sit in the faculty room and hear comments like these?

- **Where and with whom do I work most effectively?**  
We all have preferences when it comes to getting work done. Some teachers prefer to collaborate on lesson plans and are energized by having colleagues around them. Other teachers find planning together an extremely stressful endeavor because it requires depending on others to do their part, debating ideas, and using strategies that are incompatible with their teaching strengths (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). Also, consider environmental factors. Avoid cluttered work spaces, as they lead to lost time and anxiety from searching for items that you need to get the job done. Know whether you need quiet or background music or noise. Plan where and with whom you can work the best. It's part of your own professional self-advocacy.
- **In what areas do I need support?** Practitioners must be broadly conversant to get the job done. The increasing diversity of demographics demands that we constantly expand our professional toolboxes. Stay abreast of new educational trends to avoid the stress of playing catch up or being compared to colleagues who are more informed. As the job of teacher rapidly evolves, we must acknowledge where we need support. It is not acceptable to do the job the same way as a decade ago. For example, not long ago it was the responsibility of middle school English teachers to teach reading and writing in those grades. Not anymore. The Common Core now requires all teachers to incorporate literacy skills and to teach all

- Social gatherings are less frequent because you would rather stay home and get some rest.
- You have no time to do anything well.

Here are examples of goals to help you get started with ideas that can make a difference in your life.

- **Professional.** I will join a professional organization and read the resources that are part of my membership. From those materials, I will find new research-based ideas to use in my classroom.
- **Professional.** I will reorganize the reading corner so that students find it inviting and useful. Students will be able to easily select books which may increase their overall reading.
- **Professional.** I will reserve 20 minutes each day to communicate with parents. If I am diligent about answering e-mail messages in a timely manner, parents will view me as responsive and caring.
- **Professional.** I will develop a classroom web page to keep parents and students aware of assignments and expectations. A web page will enable parents to support their children and will reduce the number of e-mail messages regarding homework and projects.
- **Personal.** I will self-assess my stress level and identify one relaxation exercise to try at the end of each day.
- **Personal.** I will set up a personal exercise routine that feels manageable.
- **Personal.** I will plan at least three healthy dinners for the week instead of waiting until I get home and



## STRESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

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1. Do you feel productive and have a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day?
2. Do you feel well organized?
3. Do you sleep well?
4. Do you pay attention to the nutritional value of what you eat more than the calories?
5. Do you feel that you are balancing your professional and personal obligations?
6. Do you feel highly competent and successful?
7. Do you enjoy spending time with your colleagues each day?
8. Do you enjoy your job and look forward to going to work?
9. Do you exercise regularly?
10. Do you engage in relaxation exercises for body and mind?

If you answered “no” to more than three of these questions, you need to make an effort to remove stress from your life. Choose two concepts to work on (perhaps one personal and one professional) that address your weakest areas.