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INTRODUCTION

There's this myth in teaching. This myth says you will struggle in your first few years but that, by your fourth or fifth year, you'll be experienced, things will be easy, and you'll have your act together. The truth is, while some years are better than others, teaching is hard *every* year, and every year, as teachers, we are asked to do more and more.

We live in a time of what some theorists call “accelerating change”—with exponentially faster technological, cultural, social, and environmental change than any other period in the known history of our planet (Kurzweil, 2001). We feel the effects of this firsthand in our schools and in our profession.

Each year, the group of students that enters our classrooms is vastly different from the group a year before. These students come with strong, evolving influences, from the latest technology to the year's newest hit television (or internet) show. Primarily, they come already equipped with new ways of thinking and operating in society.

Yet, as teachers, it is still our responsibility to ensure that they learn the academic content that someone else has deemed they learn, along with noncurricular life skills. It is also our responsibility to work with one another to help these students learn, which means we have to master grown-up communication and collaboration skills. Finally, it's our responsibility to represent our profession—and our schools and districts, and even our nation's educational system—to the wider community (the public) via all of the ever-changing modes of communication available to us.

Being a teacher is a multiskill, multifaceted, multipurpose role, a role that doesn't end when the bell rings, rather one we embody in our classrooms, in our schools, and throughout our communities. Thus, the great, challenging, overwhelming, enlightening, and rewarding responsibility it is to be a modern-day teacher.

Let's *own* this great challenge and responsibility—this great *opportunity* to make a difference.

What This Book Is

Whether this is your first year or your thirty-first year, this is a book that any teacher, of any age or subject, can use to address the many challenges we face each day. Every challenge this book addresses is one that I, and the many colleagues I've worked with over the years, have faced. Every strategy I list is one that I've used, refined, and taught to others.

I mean for this book to help you identify the root causes of many of the challenges we face as educators, give you easy-to-implement strategies for success that work, and ignite the best in yourself and your students. In short, I mean for it to help you be a highly effective teacher who *loves* what you do.

You may notice a running theme permeates this book's chapters, and that is the idea that whether we are talking about students, teachers, or members of the community, people are not fixed. We all have enormous capacity to learn and grow. Carol S. Dweck (2006) refers to this capacity as a *growth mindset*. In this spirit of growth mindsets, if you are a new teacher, then I'm excited for you to try some of these strategies, and I assure you—they are powerful. If you've been teaching for a while, some of these strategies will still be new to you, while others may not be. The reason they're included in this book is because I and other teachers have used them, and *they work*. Even if you already have experiences with many of them, my goal is to give you a fresh perspective on *why* you are using them and how they can help you make an even bigger impact with your students and their learning.

This book is a compilation of columns that I originally wrote for the nonprofit organization Reaching At-Promise Students Association (RAPSA, <https://rapso.org>). The columns became wildly popular among teachers, and for this book, I have thoroughly reviewed and updated them to go even deeper and reflect new changes and ideas that have come along since I first wrote them. Each column is both an exploration of our many roles as teachers and a quick-reference handbook of strategies you can pull out in many of the situations you are likely to find yourself in daily in your classroom, school, and community.

This is a book that will help teachers feel more prepared for our increasingly multifaceted roles, and a book that will inspire teachers—like you—to remember why you entered this greatest profession and what incredibly important work you do every day.

It's a book about *owning it*—stepping up to and embracing our myriad roles as modern teachers and acing each one—for the benefit of our students, our schools, our communities, our profession, and even our nation.