

Rest: The Antidote for Discouragement

I slumped down on the park bench outside my classroom, hung my head in my hands, and cried. As a new teacher, at the end of the week, I felt utter defeat. The magnitude of change was overwhelming, the children weren't learning fast enough, the test scores were a disappointment, and I feared that I wouldn't capture some of my little ones at all. My diverse suburban Orange County school might be my last. I didn't know if I could continue.

Just then Susie Cornett, master teacher and fireball of positivity, noticed me on my classroom bench. She sat down and put her arm around my shoulders. While I don't remember any gold nuggets of wisdom, I did vow that I'd learn from teachers who made a career out of this work. I remember thinking, "I want to be just like Susie Cornett!" I studied her life and teachers like her to learn about thriving in this work I love -- because when I thrive, my students benefit from my model!

That vow was about 20 years ago. Since then, I've continued to inquire, "What practices help teachers sustain their sacred work?" I don't consider models who come across as crusty, negative, or cynical. I know the system can beat goodness out of us. I'm more curious about what nurtures goodness, vision, and a few dewdrops of idealism in our profession. How do teachers cultivate affection and dedication for their students? How do we sustain the energy to paint each day, week, and year with a fresh brush?

I know for sure that educators who sustain this work learn how to care for themselves. They practice healthy lifestyles, have boundaries, and aren't apologetic about taking time for themselves.

In the school of hard knocks, I know that I have to show myself compassion and care so that I can bring my best gifts. It isn't the job of my spouse, the union, or my employer. Valuing my work in the classroom means honoring my personal needs with integrity.

3 Good Gifts of Rest

The first good gift that we can give ourselves is rest. It's the antidote to change fatigue and discouragement. It's the first ingredient to creating sustainability. It's a choice.

As a wife, mother of three, principal, author, and humanitarian, my version of resting looks like collapsing. It's not really resting at all. It's go, go, go, and then collapse. I'm pretty sure that no one is getting the best of me at these times. The type of resting that I'm proposing is different. We should give ourselves the gift of quieting, grounding,

creating space, developing healthy routines, practicing deep breathing, or relishing in the beauty around us.

Here are some ideas for your consideration. Hopefully, you'll discover something that you can try this week.

1. Sleep is imperative.

Author Arianna Huffington writes about the importance of sleep in her book [Thrive](#). Fifty-nine percent of women report being sleep deprived, and 50 percent say that they sleep less than six hours per night. Men aren't far behind. She reminds us that when we're sleep deprived, we're prone to illness, stress, traffic accidents, and weight gain. So during the past year, I've overhauled my sleep practices, researching and renewing my commitments to nurturing great sleep habits.

The [National Sleep Foundation](#) reports that most adults need seven to nine hours of sleep each night to feel fully rested. Clinicians suggest improving our sleep patterns by keeping a regular schedule; sleeping in a dark, quiet, well-ventilated space with a comfortable temperature; avoiding stimulating activities within two hours of bedtime; avoiding caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol in the evening; and avoiding going to bed on a full or empty stomach.

2. Create sanctuary.

You can give yourself the gift of creating sanctuary: a moment or experience with spaciousness. Maybe it's on your morning commute, curled up in your favorite armchair, or mindfully indulging in a hot cup of herbal tea. Maybe it's the first five minutes of the day -- just five -- set aside for meditation or journaling. Finding ways to create sanctuary are necessary, restful practices giving us the room to rejuvenate.

This week, I sat with one of my teachers who described checking into a local hotel, indulging in a king-sized bed, ordering yummy and healthy room service, and just enjoying the space to breathe. Her experience reminds me that designing what we need to nourish our sacred work is an important investment.

3. Cultivate gratitude.

Listing my offerings of thanks in my journal is something that I've done for years. For my 40th year, I cultivated a more intentional practice of handwriting a quick thank you note each weekday morning and mailing them all at once on the weekend. It was the discipline of noticing people around me who were contributing, making a difference,

going above and beyond. However you practice gratitude, it requires moments of reflection, focus on the good, and a perspective shift. Practicing gratitude helps us focus on what matters most.

Research shows us that cultivating a gratitude practice is restful and rejuvenating. In the study "[Counting Blessings Versus Burdens](#)" (PDF), Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough describe how, each evening over a seven-day period, participants wrote down what they were grateful for. At the end of that week, participants in the gratitude group reported fewer health complaints and even spent more time exercising than those in the control groups. Other descriptors of the gratitude group include: more joyful, enthusiastic, interested, attentive, energetic, excited, determined, and strong.

Creating a Practice

Today, I'm a school administrator who continues studying successful teachers and mining for transferable truths. From studying the best teachers I know, I realize that each one knows how to practice rest. And when things get tough, they have clear and defined practices of entering into restful places. If I could give every teacher the perfect gift, I would wrap up rest with a bow and leave it on your desk each Friday. I'm wishing you rest this week, too.

Journal Questions

- Describe a time when you felt rested. How did you achieve your restful state? What can you learn from that experience?
- What limiting beliefs do you have about rest? Write down some critical reflections about those limiting beliefs.
- How do you like to "fill your cup?" What creates sanctuary for you? Schedule it today.

Please join me the next two days to discover two more good gifts that we can give ourselves.