

Tips for First Year Teachers...and for Veteran Teachers, too



Before you unlock the door.... By Marian Brovero

First-Year teachers come in all sizes and ages. Some arrive by the traditional route; others have merged from the business lane. Many attended college later in life. What really matters is not the prior route, but the road ahead. As teachers, we are only too aware of the effort that is required daily—any previous life experiences can only enhance our efforts in the classroom.

The knowledge you need. A new teacher is placed under the stressful lens of the administrative microscope. Once the school year is in gear, it's often difficult to discover the answers to the little things that make anyone's day easier. Having a mentor should be a national requirement. For success, support of the entire staff is a necessity; being knowledgeable makes success attainable. Here's a list of things which I wish I'd known before unlocking the classroom door for the first time.

1. **Keep a photo diary.** This is your most important year. You'll want this year's class picture...and all the ones that follow.
2. **You may have to purchase** your own supplementary materials. Doing so simplifies life. Keep all your receipts—some things are deductible on your income tax.
3. **Throw away nothing.** Organization of materials is a continual effort. Scan your stuff monthly for discoveries.
4. **Be in the know** with the latest songs, TV shows, movies, toys, and styles. The kids will know them and you'll have to be able to keep up.
5. **Listen**—to your students, to other teachers, to the community.
6. **Watch your conversation** in the faculty room. Define your position as a defender of children.
7. **Find out the rules** of cups, coffee, milk, and sugar. Be generous. Do not freeload. Thank people that bring in community treats. Bring them occasionally yourself.
8. **Learn to use** the school machines (copiers, scanners, computers) on your own time. Get the manuals and go.
9. **How will you handle report cards?** Be ever prepared to document and explain the reasoning behind each mark.
10. **Parent conferences** are vitally valuable and important. Prepare in advance. Be mindful of what to say during spontaneous chats.
11. **Eat healthfully.** Maintain an exercise program. Think about taking vitamins. Your health really does determine the quality of your teaching.
12. **Never, ever leave your class alone.** Find a way to handle emergencies with proper coverage.
13. **Check to see what courses** will soon be available. Find out what magazines the school receives. As a professional, it's necessary you remain constantly informed.
14. **Try not to run to the principal** for every little thing. Ask other teachers on your grade level the procedure for solving problems.
15. **Where you see the need for change**, write it in your daily journal. Find the right opportunity for discussing it. Always check the curriculum and school policies before setting your own requirements.
16. **If you live in the town** where you teach, dress casually, but neatly on the weekends. If you live elsewhere, visit on the weekend for games and shows.
17. **Be upbeat.** If something fails to work, use it as a learning situation.

What's it all about? You'll survive the first year. Hopefully, you'll be asked back. With budgets and many problems today, anything is possible. Examine the information and experience you have accumulated. That's what summer vacation is for. You close the classroom door on one year and one group of students, but in September there's a whole new chance to do it better.

Schools are loaded with people you'll always remember. And you will be a part of some child's memory forever. Teaching is a magnificent profession. As a teacher, you're a hero, a stand-up comedian, a spare parent, and the dealer of dreams and opportunities. Guard it all with great care and concern. The nation is counting on your success.