

Tending Our 'Fire': A Professional Responsibility

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer

“*I survived because the fire inside me burned brighter than the fire around me.*” ~ Joshua Graham



In a recent issue of the *Wall Street Journal*, Ann Marie Chaker writes, 'Forget about January. This is the start of the real New Year - September marks a time of change in how we live, what we buy and what goals we set.

Families put routines back in place, enforce bedtimes and pack lunches. People clear clutter and vow to cook healthy meals.'

Thinking about September as the 'new' New Year caused my mind to wander to resolutions and renewal. Over my career, I have often wished I could bottle the energy and excitement I felt in September and 'uncork' it mid-November or February (aka report card time) when weariness and exhaustion would be more apt descriptors.

The reality of our work as teachers is that the work truly never ends - there is always 'more' that could be done. More preparation, more feedback, more communication, more planning, more organizing, more volunteering for wonderful opportunities and more professional learning. There is no question, the professional demands are high - our own expectations can often be higher. If we aren't careful, 'work' begins to dominate the majority of our waking hours.

In her book, *'168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think'*, Laura Vanderkam (after interviewing dozens of successful, happy people) suggests that they allocate their time differently than most of us. She recommends planning our weekly allotment of 168 hours in the following order: Sleep goes in the schedule first (56 hours), then Exercise (6 hours), next schedule a couple of activities per week that 'fill your energy reserves up' and you do for pure personal enjoyment (minimum 6 hours). Once those personal essentials are in place, the remaining hours (approximately 100) can be planned for work and other important responsibilities. Unfortunately, Vanderkam notes that most of us tend to prioritize time in reverse.

Since May, I have been taking an Executive Coaching Course online through Royal Roads University. The course has several requirements - one is to create a professional learning plan based on the ICF Coaching Standards that map out how I will continue to professionally learn and develop as a coach over time. Interestingly, of **equal** value is my 'personal groundwork' plan - essentially, my strategy for managing my personal wellness and energy. The program's message is clear - as a professional executive coach (a helping profession), it is my **professional responsibility** to be at my best so that I can serve others to be their best. (Hmm...when I check the definition of 'helping professions' teacher is also listed...)

This summer while attending our annual CONTACT conference, I attended a session titled, 'Healthy Teachers = Healthy Learners' and shared aloud my Royal Roads learning experience. A teacher from Nova Scotia came up to me after the session and said, "I wish someone had told me 20 years ago that it was my professional responsibility as a teacher to look after myself so that I could better help others – I think I would have made it more of a priority."

As we begin this 'new' New Year, I challenge each of us to consider that as members of a helping profession, we can't possibly expect to fill others up if our own tanks are empty. Tending your own personal 'fire' throughout the school year must become an essential professional responsibility. So...what's your plan?

Best wishes for a wonderful school year!



P.S. During that same CONTACT session, one of my colleagues from NLTA shared the poem "FIRE" by Judy Brown. It spoke to me, and so I share it with you...

May I Recommend?

Managing Change – Before It Drives You Out of Teaching, is a brilliant article written by David B. Cohen and it appears in the Summer Digital issue of Educational Leadership magazine on Pages 34-38. It is also available online at: <http://www.educationalleadership-digital.com/educationalleadership/2017summerfree?pg=37#pg37>

The Summer Issue of Education Canada includes an article titled 'Queer and Trans at School: Where Do I Fit In?' by Adam William, John Davies and J Wallace Skelton. This article highlights how teachers can create safe and inclusive classrooms for all as well as exploring the topic of 'homonormativity'. (Available online at: <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/queer-trans-school/>)

FIRE

*What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.
So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.
When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way
we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel
together, that make fire possible
We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire
grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings
in which the flame
that knows just how it wants to burn can find its way.*

Book Give-Away!

This month's draw is for Building Equity: Policies and Practices to Empower All Learners by Dominique Smith, Nancy E. Frey, Ian Pumpian and Douglas E. Fisher (July 2017). Sound interesting? Send me an email with the subject line 'Book Draw' before October 13th.

