

Behind with the Marking and Plagued by Nits

*Life coaching strategies
for busy teachers*



Lynette Allen

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Introduction

Teaching is one of the oldest professions there is. Teachers create the foundations of society and, apart from our parents, they are our first real contact with grown-ups. Ask anyone, of any age, who their favourite teacher was, and, whatever their experience at school, you're guaranteed to hear about one very special individual who stood out above the rest. Most of us have one exceptional person we remember as trusting in our ability when everyone else thought us lazy, inarticulate or disruptive!

Etched deep in our memory, there will be one teacher we remember really connecting with, one person who helped us achieve our potential, the person who explained algebra in a language we actually understood and made chemistry seem impossibly easy. Those were the teachers who made such an impression on us that they stay with us, even in adulthood. They were the teachers we remember spending time with us, giving us extra attention when we needed it or just going that extra mile to make sure we actually 'got' whatever it was we were trying to get. Maybe school was difficult; maybe every day was a struggle; maybe you were labelled 'idle' or 'uncooperative' in the

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staffroom. But somehow you'd pull out all the stops to impress just that one particular teacher with whom you'd made a connection. We don't forget their advice and we don't forget the environment they worked so hard to create for us so that we could learn and develop in a safe place.

Most teachers become teachers because of their passionate desire to pass on knowledge and understanding to a brand new generation, because they love the thought of working with children and maybe even because of happy memories of their own primary school teacher.

Maybe you became a teacher because you wanted to play a vital part in the development of young minds and watch children grow into capable, self-confident teenagers and adults, making reliable decisions about their talents and future. In the twenty-first century, though, it now seems that school can be one of the toughest places to be, and carrying out all of those dreams you had before you felt the pressure of teaching gets harder and harder to do. The pressure on teachers is relentless; the demand on their time and energy is just unimaginable. Oh, if only marking and nits were the sole plague of your lives now!

We all yearn for the days when the most pressing thing on our childish mind was whether we were going to be milk monitor that day or make prefect next week! Sadly, though,

there's more to deal with now than ever before, both from a teacher's point of view and from a child's perspective. There is the bullying, self-harming, eating disorders, targets, SATs – and that's just for the children! Where's the innocence gone?

If you're a teacher, you may have many of these issues to deal with at school, as well as family life, which, has its own set of complications. You may have children of your own and you'll have their education to worry about, on top of the never-ending list of chores involved in running a home. Maybe you feel as though your children aren't getting the attention from teachers you know they deserve. Yet at the same time you understand the problems completely and know that, frustratingly, you can't do a thing about it. Perhaps it's your child who's missing out on their mum because you're so busy marking and preparing lessons for other people's children.

If, by the time you're finished in the evenings and feel just about ready to spend time with them, you realise that it's bedtime and, once again, you've neglected the family mealtime, bedtime stories, bonding bathtime and, oh yes, quality time with your partner, then you'll be facing the question, 'How long can I carry on doing this?' Some of the ex-teachers I've spoken to while writing this book ended up

Monkey magic for teachers

Feeling overwhelmed by everything you need to do? Do you have a million things on your to-do list and no time or energy to even think about prioritising? Well, you too could get some of those monkeys off your back!

We've already seen how monkeys can help the kids, but have you considered how they may be able to help you as well? Moira used this exercise to great effect to identify what was worrying her. It's an easy way to see what's going on in your life. It's not a to-do list, more of a 'things that are on your mind' list, things that are taking up vital energy space in your head, things that you're worried about and perhaps are putting off doing or don't quite know how to tackle.

Use your monkeys exactly like you taught your class to, in 'Monkey magic' and list five of the most pressing things on your mind at the moment.

Monkey Magic











Monkey magic for teachers

These don't have to be things associated with work: you might choose to include family issues, relationship or money concerns or just worries about how you're coping at the moment.

Once you've identified your monkeys, use this exercise to take each problem in turn and put a mini-plan together by answering these questions:

If you could do one thing about your monkey to feel better about it today, what would you do?

If you thought about your monkey in a different way, how could you choose to think about it?

Imagine this problem is already solved and ask yourself, 'What action did I take that turned the problem around?'

Big-picture stuff – coaching questions for teachers

Do you ever feel as if life is just a merry-go-round of events that you slog yourself into the ground for? Do you ever feel as if you never have time to look up and see the bigger picture? These questions are just fantastic!

Big-picture stuff is important. It's the kind of thing we don't get the chance to think about every day. We're all far too wrapped up in what we need to do for most of the time, that tomorrow just seems to appear before you know it, and you've got to start all over again. The big-picture stuff is important if you're to feel as if you have a plan.

This exercise won't take long but it does require you to be on your own and it does require a little attention. You can use this exercise exactly as you wish. You can either close your eyes and pin the tail on the donkey so to speak and just answer the question that you've pointed to, or you can work through each question and ponder it while in the

Big-picture stuff – coaching questions for teachers

shower. Whichever you choose, do think about it and, if you feel the need, write down a few of your thoughts. You could even keep a bit of a journal if you think it would suit your lifestyle and preference. Ready? As usual take a deep breath and take a look into the future.

- What do you want to have achieved in ten years' time?
- What decisions or problems are you worrying about at the moment and how could you deal with them better?
- What does your most successful day look like?
- What does the future of your dreams contain?
- Which skill do you have that you are most proud of?
- How are you limiting your success?
- How do you love yourself?
- What one thing would make you a happier person?
- What would you regret not doing when you are old?
- Who in your life fills you with optimism and how do they do that?
- What did you learn today?

Marking among the mess!

Are you absolutely focused when you do your marking? Do you spend hours doing a job that should take minutes? There's no doubt that the volume of work you have is great, but are you great at being productive?

It's all very well marking for hours on end and spending days planning lessons, but do you really need to spend that long doing it? And are you making the most of your time? If you think the answer is no, then follow my four-step plan for focusing on your work, and you could find yourself speeding through it at a rate of knots.

Step 1: Tidy up

Step 2: Throw away

Step 3: Keep the focus

Step 4: Prioritise

Step 1: Tidy up

Don't expect to feel productive and happy working in chaos. You won't. Even those clients of mine who hate tidying up with a passion still admit to feeling lighter, happier and calmer in an ordered environment. If you just can't see the wood for the trees on your desk, you need to focus on tidying up. The best way to do this, to avoid unproductive hours of moving things around and looking busy, is to clear it totally before you do anything. Take everything off and put it on the floor. Now get the duster out and give it a good clean, and then put back on your desk only what you want to keep on it.

If you come across things you'd forgotten you had, the chances are you don't need them. If it's a piece of paper relating to a meeting that's been and gone and has been actioned, you probably don't need that, either. Any books that belong to other people, put in a pile next to the door to be returned, and any pieces of paper that are related to jobs that you still need to do, put in a tidy pile to create an in-tray. As for numerous pens and pencils, take just a few pencils and a few pens and give the others away. I've decluttered desks before and found money, old photos, children's toys and even laundry! Those things don't

Behind with the Marking and Plagued by Nits is perfect for stressed out teachers, with tried and tested ideas and strategies for the classroom as well as the woman herself. Life coach Lynette Allen's time-saving tips will make you feel more in control at home and happier and more organised at work.



Lynette Allen is a professional life coach, writer and founder of www.lynetteallen.co.uk, specialising in coaching women. Her work has been featured on the Steve Wright in the Afternoon show on BBC Radio 2, in *Zest*, *Eve* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. She is also the life coaching expert for *Natural Health & Wellbeing* magazine.

"... a delightful read and a must for women teachers wanting to beat the stresses of day-to-day life."

Jo Trigg, Marketing Manager, The Consortium

"Teachers will welcome her tremendous gift of communicating this life-saving, life-enriching information with clarity, humour and good sense."

Garry Burnett, Advanced Skills Teacher and author of Learning to Learn

"Every teacher ... will be able to identify with the scenarios and issues that Lynette has tackled. The tips given are realistic, practical and achievable and they have a fantastic 'feel good factor'."

Clare Smale, Managing Editor, Teaching Expertise

"A reassuring, practical guide offering useful advice, strategies and solutions for coping in the increasingly demanding classroom and achieving a work-life balance. An inspiring and thought-provoking read for all stressed teachers!"

Carolyn Dunnachie, Teacher, Marfleet Primary School, Hull

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