

THE EMPOWERED TEACHER TOOLKIT

Proven Strategies to Take Control of
Your Time, Your Energy, & Your
Passion for Teaching



GRACE STEVENS

Companion Workbook



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Red Lotus Books

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DISCLAIMER:

This workbook offers information for educational purposes only. Nothing should be construed as medical or therapeutic advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Notes from the book:

Use these first few pages to take notes as you read the book.

Reflection questions to consider in each section:

1. What resonated with me most in this section?
2. How much of this do I feel applies to me?
3. What action steps should I consider after reading this section?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

ECHO Framework for Educator Empowerment

ENERGY

Your Energy Teaches More Than Your Lesson Plans

CONTROL

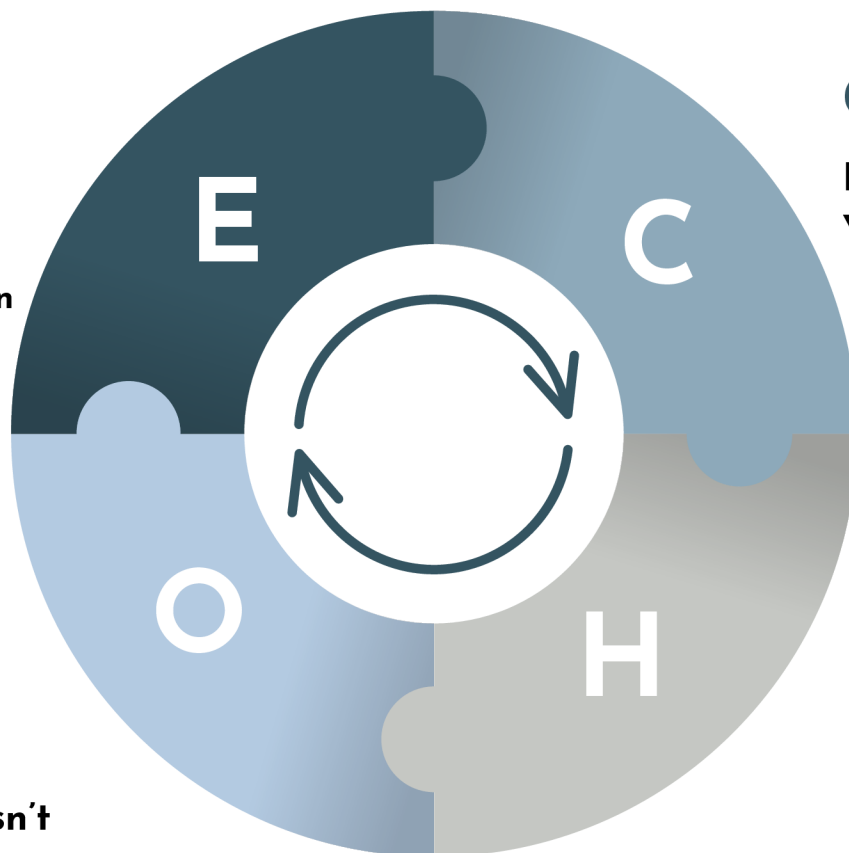
Focus on What You Can Control

OTHER PEOPLE

Other People's Experience Doesn't Need to Be Your Experience

HAPPINESS

Happiness Can Be Synthesized



Essential Tools Summary

Follow Your North Star

In an educational environment where things constantly change, so much external static competes for our attention and pulls our focus away from our students and what they truly need from us. Defining our North Star and who we want to be as teachers helps us prioritize tasks and feel empowered to let some tasks go. Defining our North Star can also help us clarify our values and guide us when we are overwhelmed or feeling lost.

Separate Your Worth from Your Work

Teaching is a verb; it's not an identity. It's what we do; it's not who we are. Equating our worth to our work not only leads to a life out of balance but also sets us up to feel constantly inadequate, as so many aspects of student outcomes are beyond our control. It can also lead to an identity crisis when we finally leave the profession. We must recognize that our worth in this world is intrinsic and independent of our contributions to education.

Focus on What You Can Control

If we want to have a more positive, peaceful, and proactive experience in our classrooms, we need to learn to differentiate the things we have control over from the things we don't and focus our emotional energy on only the former.

Investing our time and energy in things we can influence will be more resourceful and helpful and, ultimately, make us feel better than wasting energy worrying, talking about, or complaining about things over which we have no influence.

Redefine Balance

Teachers have an overwhelming number of responsibilities and tasks that are required of them. It is a myth to think there is a magic strategy or tool to "get it all done." We need to be intentional about which tasks we choose not to do. A helpful analogy is to classify the balls we need to juggle as either glass (must do) or rubber (let them drop for now or roll away). To avoid burnout and resentment, it is also important to ensure balance in everything we are juggling. Two practical tools to help accomplish this are a Decision Matrix and the Wheel of School/Life Balance.

Perfect The Art of Saying "No"

Teachers work too many hours. We need to get comfortable declining requests to protect our energy and avoid burnout. The secret to doing so professionally is to state a student-focused reason. Taking inventory of all the additional duties we have taken on and evaluating them based on our passion for them is an excellent habit. Many additional responsibilities may technically be considered "part of our job," in which case we need to be proactive about setting limitations on our involvement and advocating for accommodations to make the duties less burdensome.

Be Intentional About Your Narrative

Our teaching experience doesn't need to be the same as other people's; we get to create our own. It's essential to recognize what "music station" is playing in our head and to redirect our thoughts and focus accordingly.

Once we become aware of our limiting beliefs about a person or a situation, we can train ourselves to move beyond our cognitive biases and reframe those thoughts into a more positive and empowering narrative.

Proactively Protect Your Peace

To protect our mental and emotional well-being, we need to be proactive about limiting our exposure to toxically negative people, even if we need to work with them daily. Validating people's experiences and being empathetic is important. Still, we need to learn strategies and scripts to avoid getting dragged into a negative spiral and participating in a cycle of "competitive misery" about whose situation is worse. Structured meetings and positive routines can help. Additionally, maintaining a balanced "mental diet" by reducing exposure to negative media and consuming positive content is crucial to ensuring our nervous system isn't living in a constant state of high alert.

Define Your Teaching North Star

Taking time to define what we know in our hearts and experience to be true about what students need and what teachers should provide is a powerful exercise. Our “truths” act as a North Star to guide us on our way when things seem overly complicated and we are overwhelmed.

I invite you to define your truths for yourself, and use them as a compass to help you navigate the challenges ahead in teaching.

Don't cheat yourself out of this exercise if you are new to teaching and think you don't have enough experience to define this yet.

Let your instinct guide you.

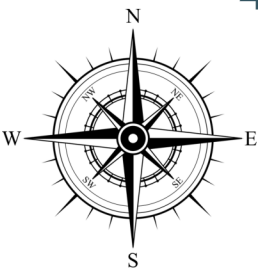
Here are my “truths” about what students need to feel in order to learn:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____



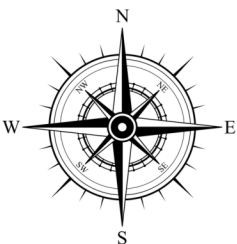
Define Your Teaching North Star

Here are my “truths” about teaching:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Reflection

How can I use these “truths” to form a compass to guide me when I am pulled in too many directions?



Separate Your Identity (who you are) from What You Do

Examples of Roles

Educator

Parent

Son/Daughter

Brother/Sister

Coach

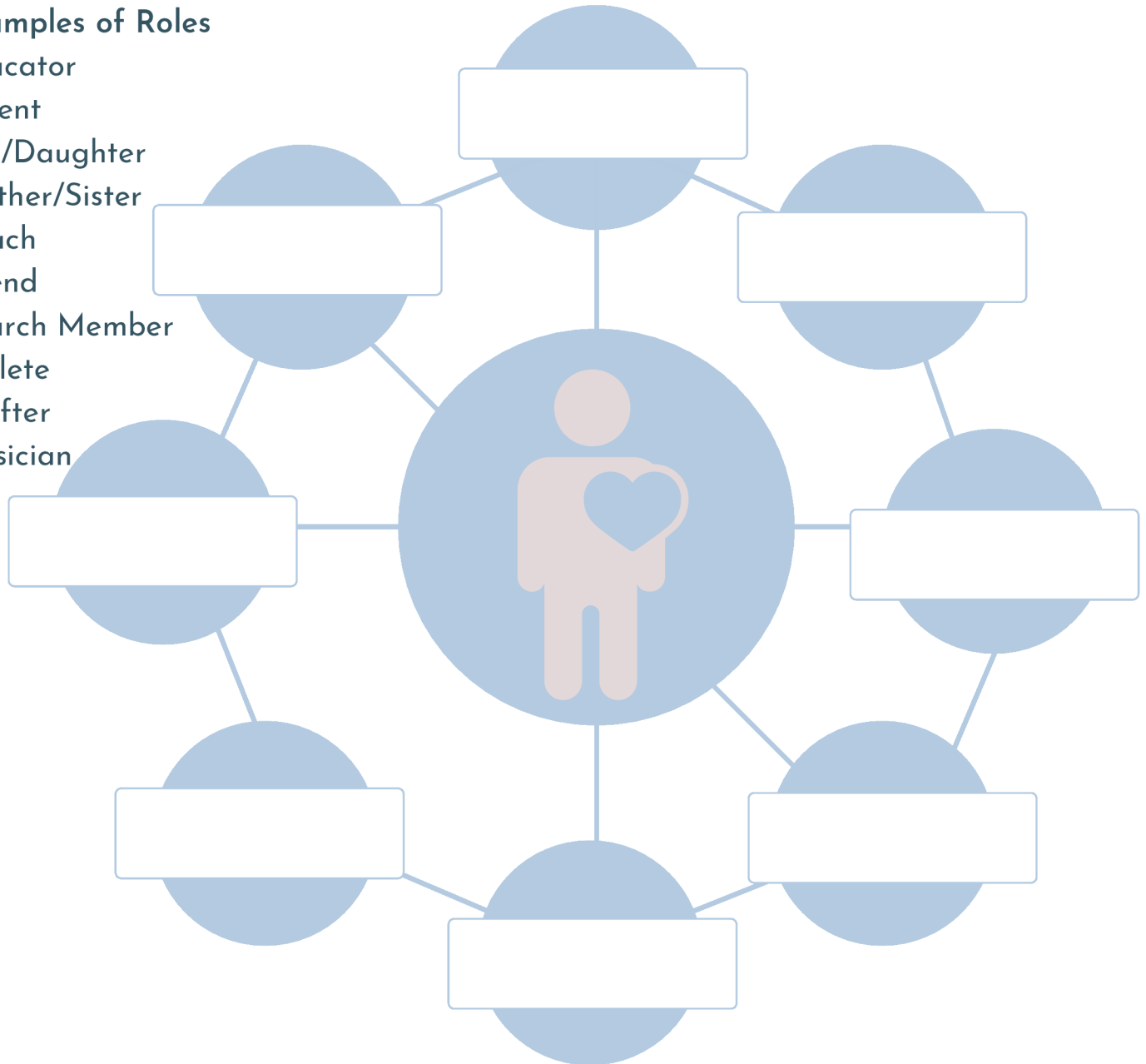
Friend

Church Member

Athlete

Crafter

Musician



Apply The
Strategy

Circle of

Circle of
Influence

Concern

Things I'm Worried About

List them here

Where do they belong?

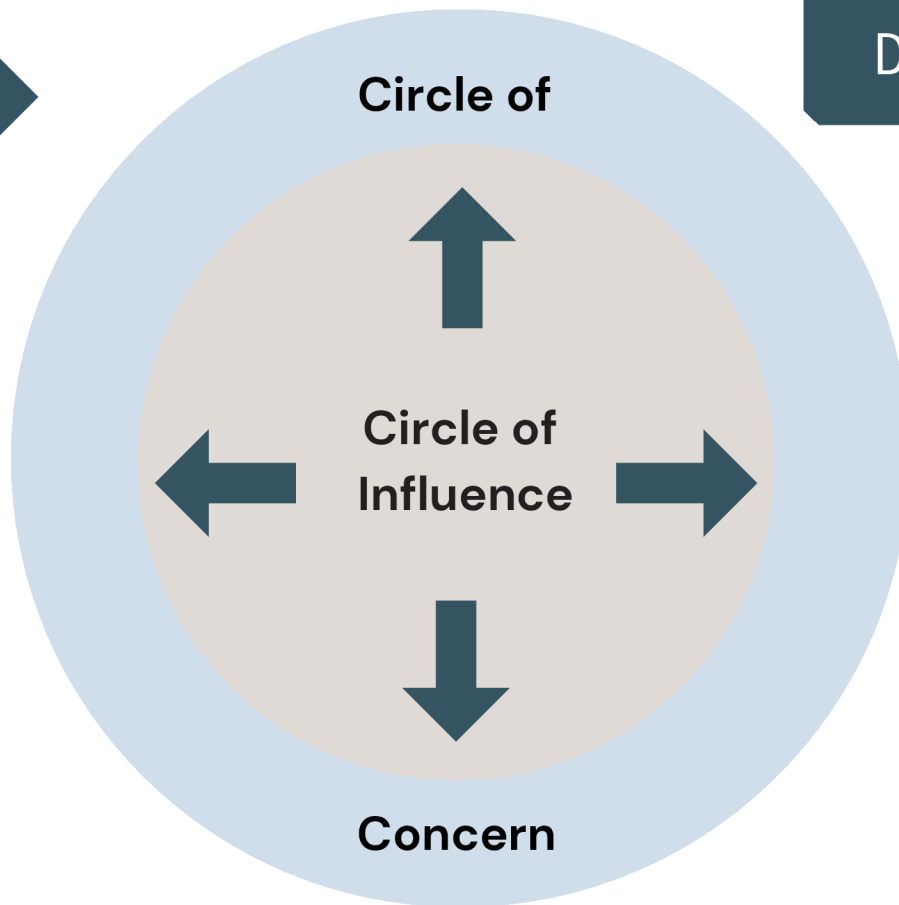
Things I Have Control Over

List them here

Concept Development

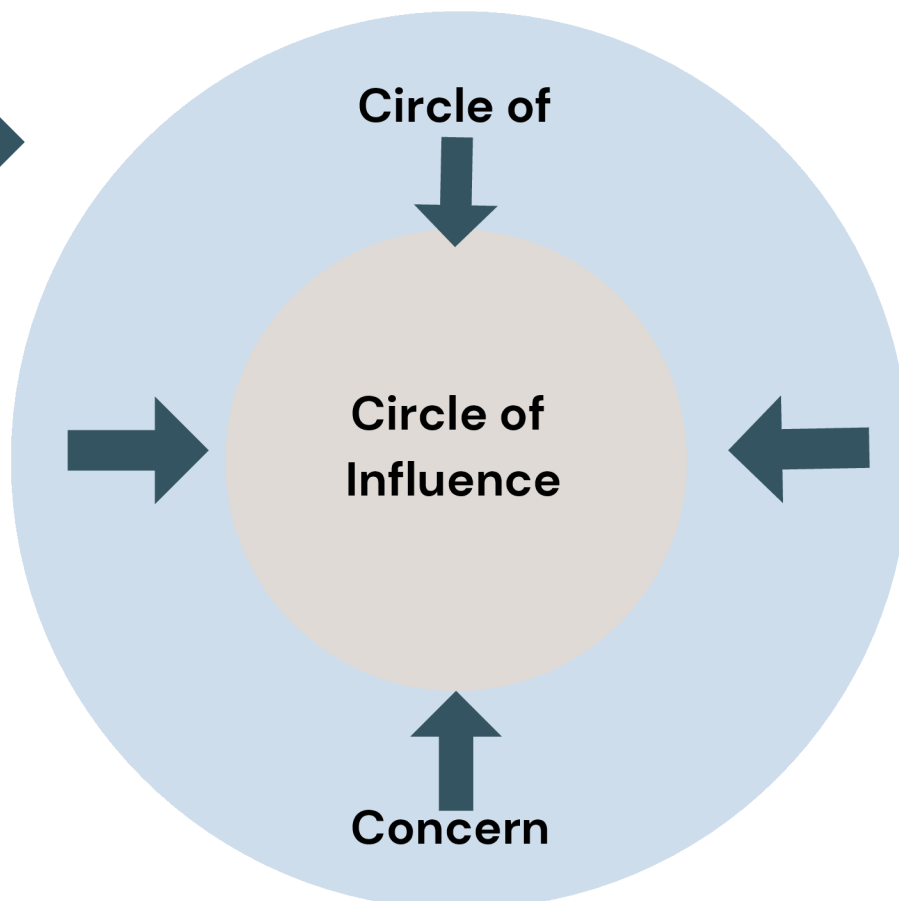
Proactive Teachers

The more you focus on what you CAN control, the greater your effectiveness and influence. You feel more EMPOWERED.



Reactive Teachers

The more you focus on what you CANNOT control, the less your effectiveness and influence. You feel like a VICTIM of circumstances.



Proactive vs Reactive Language

Being proactive means recognizing that you have choices in how you create and influence situations and outcomes, rather than just responding to situations after the fact. Being proactive means that you prepare yourself and take positive actions before a situation happens. You search for solutions rather than just focusing on identifying and lamenting over problems.

Proactive	Reactive
Challenges How can I positively influence this situation?	Challenges There's nothing I can do
Feelings I have the ability to choose my response	Feelings I can't help feeling this way
Skills This is a skill I can develop	Skills This is too hard. I don't know how to....
Obstacles What can I do to improve this situation?	Obstacles It always happens like this
Education What can I do to ensure that my students and my classroom environment are the most positive and productive they can be?	Education Education is so messed up right now. Everyone is leaving.
Criticism I wonder what part my behavior has in making him/her think that? How can I grow?	Criticism That person is always attacking me!

Wheel of School/Life Balance

This wheel is a modification of an exercise regularly used by professional coaches. It is an effective tool to help you quickly identify areas of your life that are out of balance. It was originally developed by Paul J. Meyer, founder of Success Motivators Institute™. I have adapted it to be most relevant to your work/life balance as a teacher. This exercise takes 10-15 minutes to complete, and I recommend completing it at least three times a year.

We all experience life challenges at certain times that will cause us to shift our priorities temporarily. There will be times when we're in transition with life situations or careers or when we are sick or injured or need to attend to sick or aging family members. At these times we can't be in perfect balance. However, having our lives be in balance most of the time will help us deal more gracefully with challenging times. Having a "road map" will also help us get back in balance sooner once the challenging time is over. So the exercise below is not designed to be done only once. It is a tool that can be completed quickly and easily any time you want to perform a work/life balance checkup.

Here are the eight areas you will be exploring with this wheel:

- Self-Care/Physical Health
- Self-Care/Mental Health
- Fun Factor/Lifestyle
- Social Relations - Outside of School
- Social Relations - Inside School
- Purpose
- Personal Growth
- Financial Health

How to complete the wheel

1. For each question, give a score from 1-10, with 10 being the highest.
2. Think about each question, but also go with your instinct feeling of what number comes to mind.
Remember, this is not an assignment you are going to have to share or get graded on! It is a tool to help you gain an understanding of where your work/life balance currently is, and where opportunities for improvement may be. It is not a tool for you to beat yourself up with. It is a tool to help you gain clarity, and feel empowered to know where you should focus.
3. Once you have completed all 10 questions for a domain, find the average score. Round the scores up or down accordingly.
4. Place the scores on the chart with a dot.
5. Connect the dots.
6. Observe your wheel and analyze the results and action plan.

Wheel of School/Life Balance

I am current with all my health check-ups, including my dentist and eye doctor.	
I am a healthy weight.	
I sleep without interruption 7-8 hours a night.	
I eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.	
I drink at least 6 glasses of water a day.	
I get regular exercise.	
I don't engage in excessive drinking or use of drugs (prescription or recreational).	
I make sure I am not sitting all day.	
I take pride in my appearance.	
I am happy with the way my body looks and feels.	
TOTAL SCORE	

Physical Health

Average Score:

I set a positive intention for my day.	
I catch myself when I am focusing on what I don't want and choose more productive thoughts.	
I surround myself with positive people.	
I am present as much as I can be during the day.	
I write down 3 things I am grateful for every day.	
I practice Brain Breaks or meditate daily.	
I am mindful of my mental diet and watch TV shows/read blogs/ listen to podcasts that fill me up, not deplete me.	
I limit my exposure to TV news and social media.	
I read something inspirational every day, even if just for a few minutes.	
I practice positive mindsets and take responsibility for my own happiness.	
TOTAL SCORE	

Mental Health

Average Score:

Wheel of School/Life Balance

I have 3 months of expenses in cash in the event of an emergency.	
I carry Disability Insurance and Life Insurance through my school (if offered).	
I contribute to my retirement above what is automatically deducted for my state retirement plan.	
I know whom to contact when the time comes to start planning my retirement (it's never too early to plan!)	
I am educated on how years of service and supplemental educational units will affect my salary if I change school districts.	
I regularly invest in training and additional credentials that may increase my earning potential.	
I feel my school district pays a competitive wage and that I am fairly compensated compared to other teachers.	
I spend less than I make.	
I have a budget that allows for saving for things that I look forward to such as vacations and fun activities.	
I unsubscribe from paid services I don't use.	
TOTAL SCORE	

Financial Health

Average Score:

I feel I have enough free time to pursue leisure activities.	
I have varied interests and hobbies that have nothing to do with school and students (e.g., coaching sports doesn't count).	
I do at least one thing outside school every day that I enjoy.	
I attend cultural events monthly.	
I have a garden that I tend to or some other way to enjoy nature every day.	
I take time to be playful every day with my students, my children or my pets.	
I have dreams, and I take time to think about them.	
I leave town on vacation at least once a year.	
I have an outlet for my creativity.	
I read for leisure and enjoy it.	
TOTAL SCORE	

Fun/Lifestyle

Average Score:

Wheel of School/Life Balance

I engage with the family members I live with daily.	
My family gets the best of me.	
I talk to my family I don't live with weekly.	
I take responsibility for my relationship with all my family members.	
There is no-one in my family I hold a grudge against.	
My relationships with my family and friends are rewarding and stress-free.	
I meet/talk with my friends at least once a week.	
My friends are a positive influence on my life.	
My social relations leave me filled up, not depleted.	
I trust my family and friends.	
TOTAL SCORE	

Personal Relationships

Average Score:

My relationships with colleagues are rewarding and stress-free.	
I enjoy my colleagues and feel connected to them.	
I engage in positive conversations with colleagues, not gossiping or complaining.	
I feel I can rely on, trust and productively problem solve with my colleagues.	
I enjoy my students and feel connected to them.	
I feel my students respect me.	
I feel my colleagues and administrators respect me and recognize my contributions.	
I feel parents respect me.	
I take responsibility for my relationships at school.	
I respond, not react, to difficult situations adults and children at school.	
TOTAL SCORE	

Professional Relationships

Average Score:

Wheel of School/Life Balance

I feel my role as a teacher has purpose.	
I feel I have a positive impact on my students and my community.	
I believe I play an important role in making the world a better place.	
I feel connected to something greater than myself that gives me peace.	
I practice intentional acts of kindness.	
I strive to positively impact every situation I encounter or interaction I engage in.	
I view teaching more as a calling than a career.	
I take responsibility for my job satisfaction.	
I feel passionate about the work I do.	
I don't need external recognition or validation to feel good about what I do.	
TOTAL SCORE	

Purpose

Average Score:

I have work/life balance.	
I have a mentor who I trust.	
I stretch myself by mentoring someone else.	
I continue to improve my skills so that I can be a better teacher.	
I continue to learn skills that enrich my own life and that have nothing to do with teaching (for example, learn a new language or new hobby, learn to meditate).	
I have goals for my life, and I am pursuing them.	
I strive to be more present and joyful every day.	
I am proactively learning more about myself.	
I read and listen to podcasts/audiobooks for personal development, not just entertainment.	
I make personal growth and increased happiness a priority.	
TOTAL SCORE	

Personal Growth

Average Score:

Wheel of School/Life Balance

Chart your results on this wheel for an easy visual reference to see where your life is out of balance. Chart a dot on the corresponding line number for each item (number 1 is the line closest to the center) and then connect the dots. A balanced wheel will have a nice circle towards the outer rim.



Wheel of Balance - Brainstorm

Think of some action items to help with the areas where you are out of balance. For example, do you need to cultivate more professional relationships (mentor or mentee)? Do you need to prioritize self-care practices? Do you need to meet with a financial planner? Do you need to start having more fun?

Physical Health	Mental Health
Financial Health	Fun/Lifestyle
Personal Relationships	Professional Relationships
Purpose	Personal Growth

School/Life Balance - Monthly Quick Check

On this worksheet, you can assess your wellbeing across multiple dimensions including, physical, emotional, spiritual, and professional. At the end of this assessment is a little box where you can note down the aspects you'd like to improve upon and how you plan to do it.

I eat healthy foods



I get enough sleep



I exercise regularly



I rest when I'm sick



I take enough time off work



I have cool hobbies



I openly talk about my problems



I spend time with my friends



I spend time with a special someone



I feel very thankful



I'm happy with my work



I work on my professional skills



What would I like to focus on this month and how:

DECISION

matrix

IMPORTANT

URGENT



Do it

Activities with deadlines
and consequences

NOT URGENT



Schedule it

Activities towards goals
with no deadline

NOT IMPORTANT



Delegate it

Activities that don't
need specific skills



Delete it

Activities/distractions
that are not needed

Ask Yourself - is this ball glass or rubber?

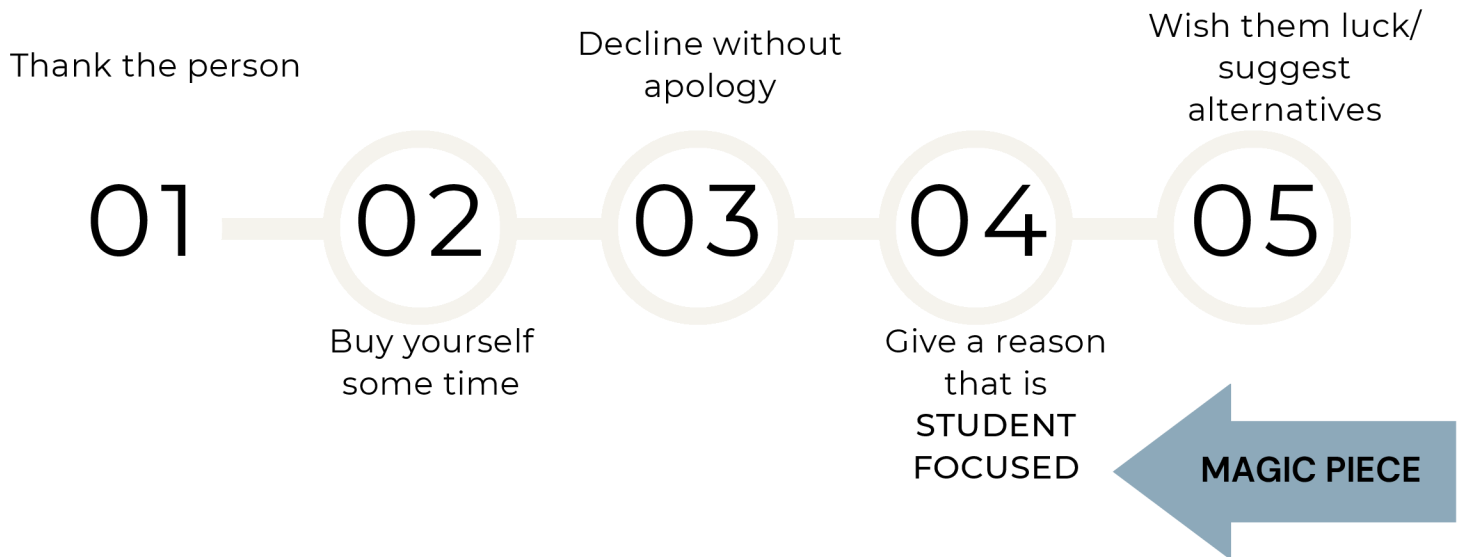
Extra Duties Inventory

Make a list of all of the “extra” duties that you are currently involved in that go above and beyond your contractual obligations. For each one answer the questions. This should give you a “snap shot” of your current commitments.

Type of Commitment	Stipend Y/N Amount	Scale 1-10 of your PASSION for this	Committed through the end of the year? Y/N

Take a realistic look at this snapshot. Be honest about whether the committees and activities add joy and satisfaction to your life or leave you feeling depleted and resentful.

Declining "Professionally"



01

"Thank you for thinking of me."

02

"Let me give the matter some thought and get back to you."

03

"I am unable to take on this extra duty/committee at this time."

04

"As this year is a new grade assignment for me, I need to put all of my extra time and energy into understanding the curriculum to best meet the needs of my students."

05

"Best of luck with the committee/event."

Limiting Beliefs About Education

Limiting beliefs are thoughts and opinions we have that we believe to be the truth and reality. They can hold us back professionally and personally. In many cases, the belief is just our PERCEPTION, not reality. Once we identify our limiting beliefs we can retrain ourselves to reframe them in a more productive and positive way.

If you are having a hard time identifying what your limiting beliefs about education are try completing the following sentences:

I think teaching is: _____

I think students are: _____

I think parents are: _____

I think education is: _____

I think my colleagues are: _____

Do I think teaching is sustainable? _____

Limiting Beliefs About Education

For example, you may have a belief that :
"It's harder to keep students engaged because they spend so much time on video games and technology."

A more productive alternative would be, *"Technology is a useful learning tool, but students crave in-person interaction with their teacher and peers."*

Current Belief	Better Alternative

Current Belief	Better Alternative

Current Belief	Better Alternative

Media Consumption



The most important decision we make is whether we believe we live in a friendly or hostile universe.

Albert Einstein

1. Take an inventory of what you are "planting in your mind". List below the media you consume on a regular basis.
2. For each, put a + or - to indicate whether it supports the view of a friendly universe where everyone is doing the best they can with the skills and opportunities they have available to them.
3. For example, true crime podcasts would be a "-", while listening to worship radio would be a "+".

REMEMBER - with awareness comes CHOICE

The goal of this exercise is not to shame or judge anybody for their viewing/reading/listening habits, but to bring AWARENESS so adjustments can be made if one chooses.

The most important part of this exercise will be the REFLECTION piece. Be sure to take time to reflect and to repeat the exercise every few months to see if there is a correlation between the media you are consuming, and how you are feeling.

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Media Inventory

List the last few books you read

+ or -

List the last 5 movies you watched

List podcasts you regularly listen to

Media Inventory

List TV shows you regularly watch

+ or -

List social media accounts/influencers you follow

Media Reflection

Did anything surprise you?

Do you think that making some adjustments might benefit you?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

My Positive Teaching Story

Use these pages to “rewrite the story” of your career in education.

What is going well?

What gives you the most joy during your work day?

Which adults do you enjoy on campus? Why?

Which adults on campus do you respect and appreciate? Why?

What are some things that you like about the school parent community?

List at least five students you know you have positively impacted over the years.

What is something you do with your students that brings you joy?

How can you incorporate more of it into your day and classroom or campus?

List five times your administrator has gone up to bat for you with a parent/ bad student situation or other.



[illegible]

Thank You and a Reminder

I hope you found these supporting documents and exercises helpful on your journey to a more empowered and positive experience. Some of these exercises undoubtedly moved you beyond your comfort zone, and I applaud you for exploring new ways of doing, thinking, and being in the world. I provided the tools and blueprints, but it's up to you to do the work. I know you are capable of doing so because you are a teacher. In general, we are a determined and hardworking group!

I provided this resource **free of charge** because you purchased my book, *The Empowered Teacher Toolkit*. Copying the exercises for other teachers or staff members **violates copyright**. This material **CANNOT** be used to create a course or professional development training without requiring that participants purchase the book. I don't like needing to point that out, but experience has taught me otherwise.

On a more cheerful note, bulk discount orders of my books are available by reaching out to me at grace@gracestevens.com.

For a small fee, I can provide professional development, keynotes, and author question-and-answer sessions via Zoom if you are doing a book study. If you buy a large quantity of books, I will potentially provide a free Zoom session of your choice. Again, just reach out.

One more time (because it's never enough!), I want to thank you for all you do for other people's children and for your commitment to improving their world.

Be well!

Grace xo