

Managing Your Energy Levels

Working in schools, no two days are ever the same. Schools can be unpredictable places. Unexpected challenges can appear at any stage of the day. We are unlikely to get bored. However, there can be a rhythm or flow to many days.

My energy levels and focus on an average work day has a predictable flow to it. I tend to be far more productive in the mornings. At about two in the afternoon, I hit the wall and am far less productive and struggle to think clearly.

There can also be a pattern to your energy levels during the week. On Mondays I am usually full of energy and focused on the week ahead. The momentum often continues on to Tuesday but begins to fade. On Wednesday I make a mental note that it's hump day and convince myself it's all downhill from here. Thursday tends to be the day when I ask myself what day it is and where did the week go? By Friday I am distracted by the weekend and how I'm going to catch up on the work that I set myself to achieve.

Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.

John Lennon

Wherever possible we should try to become more productive by matching your work to your mental energy. This is far more difficult to achieve with class commitments but some tinkering within the boundaries can be more productive.

Map Your Energy Over the Day

Being aware of your mental energy level is the first step. One method of mapping your level is to reflect at the end of the day how your energy tracked each hour. If you want to get more technical you could use a spreadsheet program to track your energy levels by recording what you were doing and what your energy level was on a scale from 1 to 10, in 15 minute intervals. Doing this for a couple of weeks is likely to reveal a clear pattern.

Use Your Map to Allocate Important Tasks

Wherever possible try to allocate important, high concentration tasks in periods where you are highly productive and place less important, low-concentration tasks in periods where you are not very productive. As a primary teacher that meant timetabling my reading program in prime morning time and scheduling art activities in the afternoon. (*I'm expecting emails from teachers passionate about the Arts but I had to choose something – sorry!*)

You are the best person to determine which of your tasks are the MOST important and require the MOST concentration or mental energy.

Make Appointments for Key Tasks

To ensure important tasks are completed and receive the attention required to do them well, set an appointment to get them done. Try to choose a time when you are likely to be at your best.

Avoid Doing Important Work When Energy and Concentration Levels Are Low

There will be times when you can feel your energy level and focus are poor but you are trying to do a high-concentration task. If at all possible, STOP and resume the task later. You will waste more time grinding your wheels, persisting with the task and producing a poor quality result that is likely to need to be repaired.

WARNING: However, if you are a procrastinator you will need to make and KEEP an appointment to actually get the task done.

Self-awareness and understanding how your body and mind work – at least to a degree – can help you be much more productive. This increases both your level of job satisfaction AND your effectiveness.

Key points

Being aware of the flow of your mental energy levels on a typical day is helpful

Try to undertake high-concentration tasks when your mental energy is high

Make appointments with yourself to undertake important work when you are likely to be at your best

Avoid trying to persist on important work when you are running low in mental energy and focus



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