

# Smart Systems to Make You Smile

Efficiency

How is your workload going? The end of the first term is looming already and it's time to assess whether you and your systems have been working effectively... or if you've only just been keeping your head above water, perhaps you're ready to begin establishing some new systems!

Systems can actually make us happier. When you start working towards a goal, you get an initial burst of energy that motivates you to act. It is this that drives you to wake up earlier each day, get to the gym regularly or finish your marking each weekend... for a few days or weeks, anyway. Unfortunately, this energy is limited and is reduced every time you exert effort towards your goal. It actually works in inverse proportion – the harder you work, the less motivation remains!

Developing a system that supports you with your goal helps you strategise, plan for challenges and develop a schedule that keeps you on track even when your motivation and energy are low. This means that time invested in developing effective systems is time invested in your wellbeing. This should not translate to making more work for you – focus on increasing productivity, not increasing time on tasks.

Tips to help you develop new or tweak your existing systems successfully:

- Handle items once – always put everything in the right place, right away.
- Learn and honour your daily energy rhythms – if you're a morning person, use this time for the big decisions then designate the afternoon period, when you're 'flatter' for carrying out smaller tasks.
- 'Park' important ideas/tasks – document these and come back to them
- Schedule time to process important tasks in bulk – don't try and deal with them all as they come in.
- Uni-task as much as possible – at best, only 2% of the population is capable of multi-tasking. Valuable time (up to 20 minutes) is lost on your brain's attempt to refocus when you attempt to switch between tasks.

**A good system shortens the road to the goal.**

**Orison Swett Marden**

- Employ technology to get more organised eg. apps like Wunderlist and Evernote; smart device reminders; digital calendars that sync with colleagues or family; and work sharing hubs such as OneDrive. If you aren't aware of these, ask colleagues.
- Build in time (5-10min) at the end of each work day to plan the next day – review your task list, reprioritise as necessary and schedule time in your plan for the following day to do the most important work.
- Draw on digital platforms such as Pinterest and Facebook for specific tips relevant to your role in the school. There is a plethora of advice available to help make your work life run smoother (*their very existence gives substance to the argument for systems – most of these are by teachers and school staff who are currently working and obviously they have freed the extra time it takes to post them!*).
- Use only one calendar or diary for all personal and work commitments (colour-code different categories if possible) to avoid clashes.
- Use in-trays for papers – keep student work separate from the rest.
- Set up email folders and rules to avoid inbox overwhelm
- Delegate wherever possible – hand over operational responsibility after you have set up and explained a system to support staff, parent helpers and especially, to students themselves.

Efficient people aren't smarter, they just spend time on developing quality systems. When you're busy, forget big changes – start with micro habits and remember it takes at least 21 days to create a new habit.

## Key points

Handle items once

Honour your daily rhythms

Uni-task, don't multi-task

Use technology effectively... and intentionally

Plan each day at the end of the previous one

Don't reinvent the wheel – draw on others' ideas for organisation and systems

Keep it simple – don't double-up on diaries or apps

Set up email folders and rules

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