



New beginnings *For Education Leaders*

Autumn marks the end of a carefree summer and the beginning of another academic year filled with potential and challenge. In the midst of this changeover season it is crucial to recall the successes and disappointments—maybe even lost aspirations—of the past year. Now it is time to initiate pathways to greater success and fewer disappointments for the coming year.

Ask yourself the following questions and then write down your answers for your personal and frequent reflection. This exercise only takes a few minutes but can be very instructive.

- With what aspirations for my school(s) did I begin the past academic year?
 - Were those aspirations fulfilled?
 - If not, what were the barriers to fulfillment?
 - What was the “spark?”
 - What was my level of commitment and follow-through?
 - If they were fulfilled, what caused that outcome?
- What are my personal/professional aspirations for me this year?
- What are my aspirations for my school(s) this year?

Spring assessments and summer planning have begun mapping the route to new levels of excellence, even as fall introductions, schedules, innovations, and expectations threaten chaos. It is possible—maybe even likely—for new or renewed visions to be overshadowed by all the necessary tasks of school start-up and day-to-day operations. When that happens, the vision or aspiration begins to wilt.

Getting started is a critical element for any change. That phenomenon is not unique to human activity or innovation. “Almost all chemical reactions require an input of energy to get started; a concept known as activation energy. Once the required activation energy is provided, many reactions will proceed spontaneously and actually release more energy... We as humans also require activation energy to begin tasks or activities that will be rewarding to us once we are doing them.” – Richard Mavis, toxicologist

Think of the spark that starts a campfire fire. All of the elements may be present but without that spark – that activation energy – nothing will happen. Similarly, the survival of a vision begins first with activation energy.

- As Nike says, “Just Do It.” Begin, activate, Initiate...
- Divide your time between day-to-day maintenance and attendance to continual improvement.
- Hold yourself accountable to progress and timelines.
- Enlist accountability partners that are capable of reigniting your spark and supporting your persistence.

- Be willing to monitor and adjust as you proceed.

At the end of this academic year repeat the exercise above and congratulate yourself and your staff on the specific progress that occurred.

You have the unique opportunity to create the conditions within which that spark can ignite and the vision can be realized. According to Benjamin Franklin, “Energy and persistence conquer all things.”



These materials are provided by
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