YOUR PERSONAL LEARNING GUIDE FOR

# STARTING STRONG

in the First 60 Days of the School Year

By Robert L. DeBruyn

Author of the Master Teacher Weekly Pd Program

### VOLUME



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DeBruyn is a powerful speaker who has worked extensively with students, teachers, and administrators through workshops and seminars, and as a keynote speaker in the areas of discipline, motivation, leadership and management. His messages reveal a deep commitment to children and a great respect for the work of teachers and administrators.

DeBruyn is a senior editor to *The Board*, a semimonthly training program for school board members. He is one of the creators of *Northstar for Principals*, a monthly publication for principals, and *Galileo for Superintendents*, a monthly publication for superintendents.

He has authored and co-authored numerous books, such as four prominent books on student behavior including *You Can Handle Them All*, two influential books on educational leadership including *Causing Others to Want Your Leadership... for Teachers;* and a leading book on the most successful teacher characteristics and beliefs: *Voices from the Field: What Is a Master Teacher?* 

His contribution to education has been honored by induction into the Kansas Teacher Hall of Fame.

#### Other titles authored or co-authored:

Personal Learning Guides:

Assessment

Creating the Environment to Maximize Student Learning THE MASTER TEACHER'S Secrets for Deepening Learning for All Students Starting Strong in the First 60 Days of the School Year Keeping the Momentum Strong in the Critical Middle of the School Year Finishing Strong: the Last 60 Days of the School Year

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#### Introduction

A superb beginning can make the difference between a good year and a disappointing year for you and students. One thing is certain: Getting off to a good start can help you do the thing you want most to do—teach. And a bad beginning can keep you from doing so.

This book focuses on a four-step learning process designed to enhance and further your professional growth: Learning/Planning, Action/Application, Reflection/Assessment, and Change/Adjustment. Reading each lesson and practicing the four-step learning process will help you grow professionally. Every step is important.

To actually acquire and remember knowledge, it's important to write what you learned as well as what you already knew. Likewise, it's essential to know what worked and didn't work—and to reflect on the learning process and make adjustments. When reflection is followed by adjustments, that is, what you will do differently as well as when you will do it, you will learn and grow from your professional experiences.

The lessons in this book are aligned with the domains and components of Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model, and the Five Core Propositions for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. As you use the personal journal, you will find that it not only serves you during your first year in education, but can become your guidepost for the beginning of every school year throughout your career. Simply write your journal entry after reading each message, and apply what you've learned in the classroom.

As educators, we know our careers must center on lifelong learning as well as reflect the distinguishing characteristics of lifelong learners. Lifelong learners continue to learn, take action and apply what they have learned, review and reflect on the results of that application, and make adjustments that contribute to their professional improvement and growth. This book will help you achieve these goals.

You have my best wishes for a great start and a great career.

Sincerely,

Robert L. DeBruvn

Author of the Master Teacher Weekly Pd Program

#### CHAPTER 1

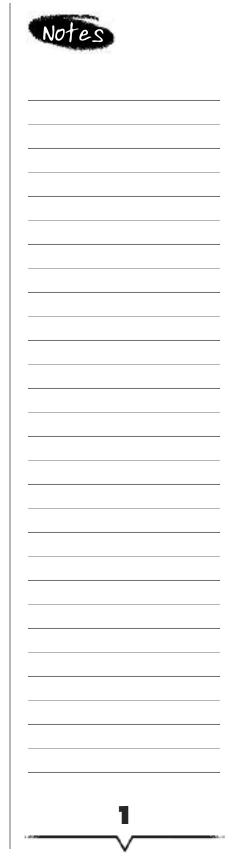
### An Eight-Step Plan For The First Day

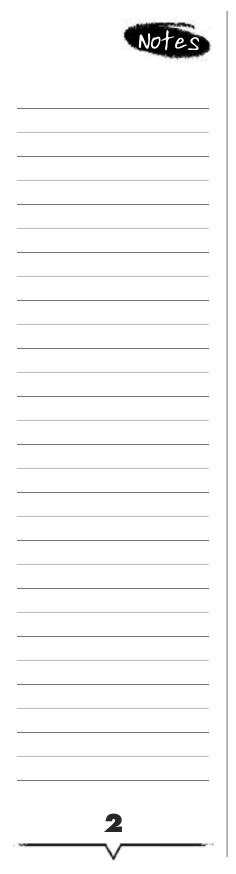
Students are apt to walk into our classrooms on the first day of school with some positive and negative conclusions about the coming school year. This is one reason that we need to have a solid plan for the first day—and follow it. Whether we're on a shortened or a full-day schedule, we might consider doing at least eight things during our first contact with students if we intend to get off to a good start.

We should promise students the biggest benefit of our course.

First, we should openly, freely, and empathically promise students the biggest benefit of our class or course. It should be the biggest advantage students can expect to gain during the year. And we should tell students that we intend to work hard to deliver this benefit to each of them.

Second, we need to elaborate upon this benefit in clear and specific ways. In the process, we should bring forth all the other benefits—and be positive, enthusiastic, and inclusive as we do. Remember, different benefits will draw different students to us and our teaching. Negative rules, regulations, requirements, and demands won't. Too often, teachers talk to students the very first day about what they can't do or what they have to do—rather than what they get to do. It's much more motivational if we relate, both in general and in specific ways, what students can expect to learn which will be of benefit to them personally. Do not believe, even for a moment, that these learning benefits are "understood" or "obvious," or that students see how they will benefit from learning





in our classroom. Remember to elaborate in clear and specific ways.

Third, we should back all the statements we make with facts or proof so students will find what we say believable. If we can, we should relate personal stories or stories of other students we have known—without giving names—and use state and national statistics bolstering our claims.

Fourth, we need to reveal the specific ways students will win if they take full advantage of our class or course. Make it clear that their active participation is expected and in return they will not only enjoy the class but gain valuable knowledge.

Fifth, at this point, we ought to quickly sum up what we have said. As we do, we should rephrase all the major benefits revealed. This action is necessary for positive reinforcement.

Sixth, we need to ask students—individually and as a group—to work, study, and learn during the year. If we fail to ask students individually for such a commitment, many will believe that what we have said applies to classmates—but not to them.

Seventh, we need to remind students that they are beginning the new school year with a clean slate and that past incidents have no bearing on the upcoming year.

We should finish the first day by teaching a lesson all students can use.

Eighth, we should end the class with a vital objective: teaching a lesson. Our objective should be to have all students leave the first day having learned something they can use immediately. This step cannot be left out of our first-day plan. Students must leave our first class knowing they have learned something new—and feel they can learn in our class.

In delivering this eight-step plan, we should take care to avoid certain pitfalls. For instance, we must be careful about qualifying our first-day message. We shouldn't indicate that some students will do well and that some won't. Nor should we indicate that we're certain some will take full advantage of the benefits the class offers while others will not—or that we have high expectations for some and no expectations for others. Remember, our expectations as well as our enthusiasm to teach all students must come through loud and clear.

It's a mistake to try to make sure students know who is the boss. Your position tells students you're the teacher in the classroom. How you function will tell them whether you're up to the task. Therefore, avoid the pitfall of telling all students—when you're really only trying to reach one or two—that you're tough and mean business, and that they shouldn't try to fool you or buck you.

Some teachers try to come off as "hard-nosed" on the first day—then they're surprised when students don't want any part of them or what they are teaching. The advice, "Don't smile till Christmas" or "Start tough—you can always let up" is not good advice. It's bad advice. Such a stance only forms bad first impressions. And it's insulting to the vast majority of students who do not deserve to be treated in such a way.

The Master Teacher knows positives will give us and students the best chance for a good year.

The Master Teacher knows that the first day of school is one of the most important days of the year. Students see us for the first time. They size us up as competent or incompetent, nice or mean, fair or unfair, and caring or uncaring. The opinions they form, for good or bad, will be influenced by our actions and can get in the way of our teaching and students' learning.

That's why the Master Teacher knows we need to begin with a positive. And we ought not to switch from being positive to being negative because of one student—or our own fears. We need to stick to the constructive motivation of the positive. This is most easily achieved by giving students benefits for being in our classes. After all, the benefits we provide will help students "buy into" what we have planned for them this year. And by proclaiming the benefits, we have the best chance for a good start and a good year—and so do students.

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#### Personal Learning Journal

This is your personal journal for the first 60 days of the school year. It focuses on a four-step learning process specifically designed to enhance lifetime learning. Every step is important. To actually acquire and remember knowledge, it's important to write what you learned as well as what you already knew. Likewise, it's essential to know what worked and didn't work—and to reflect. When reflection is followed by adjustments, that is, what you will do differently as well as when you will do it, long-term learning and improvement are enhanced.

As you use the personal journal, you will find that it not only serves you during your first year in education, but can become your guidepost for the beginning of every school year throughout your career. Simply write your journal entry after reading each message, and apply what you've learned in the classroom.

## I. Learning/Planning a. What did I already know about this topic? b. What did I learn that was new? II. Action/Application a. What did I do that worked? b. What did I do that didn't work? c. What did I *not do*—and what happened?

III. Reflection/Assessment
a. What will I do with what I've learned from my experience?
b. What do I still need to learn on this subject?
c. How can I get this information?
IV. Change/Adjustment  a. What will I do differently the next time?
b. When will I use what I've learned? (first day or week of school, before grade cards go out, etc.)
c. What impact do I think it will have on my students and/or colleagues?