

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 2

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# About The Author

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Internationally known author and presenter, Robert L. DeBruyn is the founder of THE MASTER TEACHER®. He has written *THE MASTER TEACHER* publication since founding the organization in 1969. Over 1,500 issues and one half-billion copies of his weekly program of staff development have been sold—making him one of the most widely read educational authors in the world. *THE MASTER TEACHER Weekly Pd PROGRAM* has been used by teachers and administrators in all 50 states, every province of Canada, and 25 other countries.

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

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Getting off to a good start—whether it’s your first year of teaching or your 20th year—is *so important* that we’ve had requests to add yet another volume of strategies for the first 60 days of the school year.

This guide delivers **20 more, concise lessons and strategies** that will help you set the stage by developing the best possible learning environment so that you can do the thing you most want to do: **Teach.**

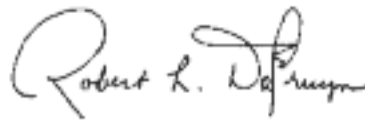
This book focuses on a four-step learning process designed to enhance and further your professional growth. Reading each lesson and practicing the four-step learning process will help you grow professionally. Every step is important. To actually acquire and remember knowledge, it’s important to write 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.

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. DeBruyn

Author of *THE MASTER TEACHER*

Notes

CHAPTER 1

# A Six-Point Prescription For A Great Start... And A Great School Year

We all want to start the year on the right foot, position ourselves with students to have everything fit just right, and create the conditions to make this year a great one. Of course, students are an important part of this equation—and they can't be programmed to behave and achieve exactly as we hope. But we do have a powerful set of strategies at our disposal to jump-start a strong start and a great year. That's because we alone decide how we will approach the class and the year. We organize and select the activities and opportunities to present to students. In so doing, we can have a powerful influence on how our students think and respond. But creating the correct conditions requires careful thought and insightful preparation. Here's a six-point prescription you can follow to get off to a good start and create the conditions you want for a great school year.

We have a powerful set of individual tools at our disposal.

First, begin by *picturing* how you want your classroom to be *before* the first day. How do you want it to feel? Think about the experience you want students to have—in detail. Allow yourself to be immersed in the anticipation, the challenge, and the exhilaration you want students to experience as you develop new relationships and nurture the new learning of students. This initial step should be similar to the visualization that high-performing athletes, professional entertainers, and highly skilled surgeons use to elevate their performance and maximize opportunities for success. It's a very powerful activity.

Second, *plan* your approach. Take time to review your curriculum plan with a fresh look. If you've been teaching for a while, imagine that this is your first time. You may see new options

Lined area for taking notes.

## Notes

and twists to organize instruction, engage students in academic content, or develop innovative ways to monitor and assess student learning. As you plan, think about how you might personalize instruction in response to individual student personalities, abilities, interests, and needs. Also, think about how you will organize the classroom to create interest, interaction, and cooperation. And don't forget to plan displays, select artifacts, and design eye-catching bulletin boards. To capture and keep attention, you must stimulate curiosity and build anticipation for what lies ahead. A "bare" or "cold" classroom won't get the job done.

**Remain focused on the positive—even when things don't go as you planned.**

Third, *prepare* to meet your students and become part of their lives. Learning the names of students is a mandatory first step, but moving to a level of influence requires more. Find out who will need special services, then make advanced arrangements. Learn anything you can from past teachers and student records. If your school collects portfolios of student work, take time to read what students have written and produced. If a personal visit or telephone call before school starts isn't possible, sending an introductory letter telling about yourself and previewing the experiences you've planned for students can make an important difference.

Fourth, remain focused on the *positive*. Resist the temptation to become distracted or preoccupied when things don't go as you planned. No matter how well you've prepared, everything may not go as expected. When it doesn't, focus on teaching what can be learned from surprises—and even disasters. What's important is how you react, and your reaction remains your choice. Remember that your reactions, your attention, and your encouragement send powerful messages to students about your expectations, caring, and respect—and your worthiness to be trusted.

Fifth, take time to *ponder* your experiences with students. When we take time to pause and reflect on what's happened in class or to reflect on how a student behaved, we open the door to new insight and knowledge. When we think about what is happening around us, we're likely to find new alternatives and new strategies we can employ to make experiences for us and students richer and more productive.

Sixth, *pace* yourself and your work, and help students do the same. There never seems to be enough time to do all that we want in our personal lives or in our professional work. Yet, our physical and mental health requires a pace that can be sustained—and a pace that allows for rest and recovery. Students need the same. Our teaching needs to match the rate of learning students can sustain. Little is gained if we rush ahead to cover new material when students haven’t adequately learned what came before. Nor can we expect students to remain focused and to behave appropriately when we’re moving too slowly.

**The Master Teacher knows that great years are not created by accident.**

The Master Teacher knows we are in a great profession. Every year is a new beginning. Whether it’s our first or our fortieth, each year brings new students, new challenges, and new hope—along with new opportunities to apply what we’ve learned to move to the next level of professional performance. But great school years are rarely created by accident. Only by picturing what we want, planning our approach, preparing fully, and adjusting can we create the conditions most likely to lead to a great year.

The Master Teacher understands that when we focus on what is positive, pace ourselves and our work, and ponder what we’re experiencing and learning, we will have the strategies vital to success. Our challenge is to employ these professional strategies in ways that make a crucial difference to our teaching and student learning. When we do, a great school year has the best chance of becoming a probability.

**To Learn More:**

Mims, L. (2013, August 21). You only get one “first day of school.” *Edutopia*. Online: [www.edutopia.org/blog/only-1-first-day-school-lisa-mims](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/only-1-first-day-school-lisa-mims)

**Notes**

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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?

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b. What did I learn that was new?

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## II. Action/Application

a. What did I do that worked?

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b. What did I do that didn't work?

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c. What did I *not do*—and what happened?

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### III. Reflection/Assessment

a. What will I do with what I've learned from my experience?

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b. What do I still need to learn on this subject?

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c. How can I get this information?

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### IV. Change/Adjustment

a. What will I do differently the next time?

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b. When will I use what I've learned? (first day or week of school, before grade cards go out, etc.)

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c. What impact do I think it will have on my students and/or colleagues?

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