

2 A Typical Day in the Neighborhood

“Though this be madness, yet there is method in ‘t.”
– Polonius in *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

If you're a teacher or former teacher, you're about to relive what might be some unpleasant memories. If you're neither of those (in other words, you're reading this so you can get inside teachers' heads because you're dating one, you want to present a workshop to a group of them, or this was the only reading material in the proctologist's waiting room), prepare to find out why teachers' utterances consist of complaints when they're at social events during the school year.

Typical last day of a 6-week grading period at a high school:

- 8:20:00 “Open hallways” bell rings; stand at door for greeting
- 8:20:15 First smiles of the day greeting early birds
- 8:20:30 First student dress code violation
- 8:20:45 First student excuse for the day about dress code
- 8:21:00 First student stomp-off to fix dress code violation
- 8:21:15 First admit slip to sign
- 8:21:30 First grade check sheet to sign
- 8:21:45 First question about all make-up work for the 6 weeks
- 8:22:00 First question of “Are we doing anything good today?”
- 8:22:15 Principal walks by and says, “I need to see you” but doesn't elaborate
- 8:22:16 Fear and paranoia set in; what does principal want?
- 8:22:30 Football coach walks up and says, “How are Johnny's grades?”
- 8:22:45 Morning greetings continue as curt conversation with football coach ensues
- 8:23:00 Student returns and asks again about make-up work
- 8:23:15 Student worker asks for work for On Campus Suspension unit
- 8:23:30 Colleague with first period off stops by to ask when the Special Ed documentation is due
- 8:23:45 You tell the football coach to make an appointment to see you because you're busy (Yeah, he's still there!)
- 8:24:00 Counselor stops by to ask if you can call a third party this morning to schedule a special meeting

- 8:24:01 You stare at counselor thinking, “I don't have a phone in my room, but you walked over from your office-where there's a phone-to ask me to do that? You've got to be kidding!”
- 8:24:02 You tell the counselor, “Sorry, I don't have a phone in my room.”
- 8:24:15 Students come back outside to tell you about the latest gossip in their lives
- 8:24:30 Itinerant Support Teacher drops off paperwork and informs you that you need to go to an ARD during 3rd period, but someone will cover your class for you
- 8:24:45 Student walks in with schedule change slip that needs to be signed
- 8:25:00 ADHD student runs by yelling over his shoulder, “I'm going to the nurse for my meds!”
- 8:25:15 Homebound teacher stops by and asks for work for student at home awaiting the birth of her second child
- 8:25:30 You thank students for sharing their lives with you and ask them to go inside and get ready to exercise their brains
- 8:25:45 Teacher across the hall says, “Damn. I wore the wrong slip today.”
- 8:26:00 You bet the teacher across the hall when that slip will come back to haunt her
- 8:26:15 Colleague stops by and asks if you can talk to the principal about why one of his tables was taken out of his room
- 8:26:30 You politely suggest to colleague that he speak with the principal first, then as his campus advocate offer to follow up in a week if nothing was done
- 8:26:45 Girls basketball team rolls ball carts down the hall to prepare for practice, so you bounce a ball a few times
- 8:27:00 Student asks what we're doing today
- 8:27:05 You stare at same student until he says, “Oh yeah, the agenda is on the board”
- 8:27:15 You look at teacher across the hall and see her slip starting to peek out from underneath her skirt, and you smile knowing that there's going to be a hilarious interruption later that day
- 8:27:30 Colleague walks by fuming, “The frickin' copier is out of toner!”
- 8:27:45 Student with leukemia who lost his leg last year and is back on chemo comes cruising in with a smile
- 8:28:00 You choke back tears because underneath it all, you really do have a heart
- 8:28:15 Student with severe hearing impairment drops off his equipment with you so you can hook it to your blouse
- 8:28:30 A colleague walks by and says, “I hear the principal wants to see you” and the paranoia that you'd forgotten about comes back to haunt you
- 8:28:45 A favorite student (who happens to be in a gang) walks by with a wave and smile so you flash your gang sign to him (“E” for English); he thinks you look like an idiot but knows why you're doing it but he still won't leave the gang
- 8:29:00 You stick your head in the classroom. You don't say anything, but students start moving to their seats because they know they'll be counted tardy if they're not sitting in them
- 8:29:15 ADHD student yells “SEGURA!” while running down the hallway, then slides in through the doorway. Please, please, Lord, let those meds kick in NOW!
- 8:29:30 You remind the teacher across the hall about your bet

8:29:45 You take a deep breath, get your smile on,
and get pumped up as you close the door

8:30:00 School officially begins

Mercy!

Sound familiar?

Based on my time spent monitoring elementary and middle school classrooms, I can tell you that pretty much the same things happen, but the students are shorter and the staff members talk with sweeter “inside voices.”

And from my experience in schools around South Texas, I know that essentially the same things happen whether you’re in a rich or poor school; black, white, or Hispanic population; urban or rural setting.

Is it any wonder why you’re stressed? You get pulled in a thousand different directions a-a-a-a-a-l-l-l-l-l-l-l d-a-a-a-a-a-a-y l-o-n-g.

And then some.

*“If a doctor, lawyer or dentist had 40 people in his office at one time,
all of whom had different needs, and some of whom didn’t want to be there
and were causing trouble, and the doctor, lawyer or dentist, without assistance,
had to treat them all with professional excellence for nine months,
then he might have some conception of the classroom teacher’s job.”*

– Donald D. Quinn

And if you’re not a teacher, does this not explain why teachers are still venting when they arrive at your dinner engagement? The timeline that I just rattled off was only a typical first 10 minutes of the day. Teachers still have the rest of the day, every day, for the entire school year. When they arrive at your event, they’ve been going 100 miles an hour all day long with projectile decisions being thrown at them from all directions. Let them vent for just a few minutes before changing the subject.

If you’re disorganized, your stress will only be compounded. You might not be able to control all of the outside forces that affect your day, but if you gain control of five main areas, your days will run much more smoothly.

But before we talk about organization, we need to talk about mindset.

*Teachers who inspire realize there will always be rocks in the road ahead of us.
They will be stumbling blocks or stepping stones; it all depends on how we use them.*

– Author Unknown