

humanworks: Happy New (School) Year

by Darby Barnes

For anyone connected to the education sector in BC, early September feels more like the 'new year' than January 1st does. We may be on the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic, but our public education system, like other public systems, continues to be both *disrupted* and *disruptive* in the shifting times we are collectively experiencing. We are learning to understand the impact of the pandemic, as well as other cultural challenges. Healthcare, housing, mental health, poverty, and climate crises have become the reality that we all face alongside the children and families we serve.

In times of great challenge, the leaders in our systems are the guiding lights: it's essential that you start with yourselves by ensuring that you have what you need to remain strong, well, resilient, and buoyant during the upcoming year.

Teams that Play Together Stay Together

► CONNECT

Too often, I hear from educational leaders about how alone and isolated they feel. It can be easy for us to put our heads down within our schools and 'power through' the days, weeks, months, and school year. We know that sharing our lived experiences, and making community connections is a source of resilience. When we can share experiences, wisdom, successes, and challenges, we can create a constellation of support. This process helps to reduce anxiety, and ensures that we are on the same page with each other while also lifting one another up through challenging times. You may be in separate buildings or communities from your PVP peers, but when you create a consistent check-in process and relational practice with one another, you will be stronger.

Small Shifts Create the Greatest Impact

► GO SMALL, CONSISTENTLY

This counterintuitive idea continues to prove itself true. Overhauling anything – our school plans or our



wellness plans – can often lead to more distress, and a sense of failure when, inevitably, all that change is not sustainable. Choosing small shifts that move you toward your larger goals over a greater period usually leads to greater results. Change one or two things at a time. Approach those small changes consistently over time. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the changes you're making, scale back to a smaller, more bite-sized option. Find ways to make that change work for your real life. Once you've picked one or two changes to focus on, make a plan. Establishing a range for achievement can help you to manage expectations, and be flexible with the changing demands week to week. Pick a change you are certain you can manage 100% of the time without much effort. This is your 'non-negotiable'. Then pick your 'ideal state' which is how much of your new habit you'd like to achieve in the 'ideal' world. Aim for your 'ideal state', but any time you meet your 'non-negotiable', that counts as a win! Focus only on one or two of these changes for a minimum of three months. You will know when the change feels like a part of your life that has been adopted as a habit, and no longer requires a lot of effort – it's now your way of being. Then, move on to a new change. It will take time and energy; small consistent changes over time will help you win the race toward wellness.

Good Enough is Good Enough

► REFRAME SUCCESS

Maintaining our wellness while maintaining our professional practice sometimes requires us to reevaluate our expectations of ourselves. Is our idea of 'success' unrealistic for the realities in which we live and work? Can we reframe our sense of wellness, resilience, capacity, and contributions to embrace who we are in the here and now? Can we practice self-love and acceptance for doing and being

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our best within our circumstances? Part of a robust and resilient wellness plan can include reaching out to our network of support to help protect us from wellness and professional safety risks, and to help us set realistic and clear plans. Determining our personal 'dashboard warning signals' – those signs your wellness vehicle needs some maintenance and fuel – before they start flashing can help us get clear on our strategy for if they turn on. If we are starting the year with a clear sense of wellness as part of our success plan, what else might we need to reframe, adjust, or surrender so that wellness is an integral part of what we understand as 'success?' Work toward an integrated and congruent sense of self in your leadership and your life, so that you can 'walk the talk' of wellbeing, and recognize that it's not a trade-off for success, but a path *toward* your success. If you need some help navigating, reaching out to a BCPVPA representative or accessing the BCPVPA EIP Program can be a great place to start.

When in doubt, reach out.

Wishing you a pathway to wellness and success this school year!

With admiration,

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