



Happy New School Year! Now Breathe

By Amy Cushner, Associate Head of Early Childhood-Sixth Grade

Yes, it is a New Year! To be precise, it's a new school year. Dawning is a flurry of actions. Setting alarms to wake up (not fun), having to think, planning and coordinating all the things: carpool, daily schedules, clothes for school, rushing to get the summer reading project done and spending a lot of money on clothes, supplies and swag.

Now breathe. When the list is long and time is short, we turn to multitasking, and that is not efficient. In *The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload*, Daniel Levitin emphasizes the importance of focusing on one task at a time rather than multitasking. He notes: "To keep information from being lost, the brain has to slow down, which means doing one thing at a time. Every time we switch tasks, we have to reorient ourselves to the new task, and that takes time and energy."

What's the solution? Here are some of my favorites!

1. **Make your sticky notes:** Write one thing on each sticky note that needs to be done — make it easy, break it down into sub-tasks. (Example: talk with kiddo about what time school starts and decide what time to wake up each day.) Once written, line up the notes in order of priority. Next, choose the top three that you seek to accomplish today. You'll find that once the top three are completed, you will feel a sense of momentum and synergy. Maybe you'll choose another sticky note to tackle? Last, throw that sticky note away! Nothing feels better than crumpling it and shouting, "I'm done with you!"
2. **Use the Pomodoro Technique:** This time management method involves working in short, focused bursts (usually 25 minutes) followed by short breaks. This helps maintain energy and attention and prevents burnout. I use this technique all the time, especially on big, long tasks like cleaning my house. I can feel overwhelmed by the details and time involved, leading to procrastination. The [Pomodoro Technique](#) forces me to breathe and shortens the finish line to "just see what you can get done in 10 minutes, 15 minutes or 20 minutes."
3. **Buy in and delegate:** "Teamwork makes the dream work!" Involve others in the process, specifically, the kids. In John Maxwell's *21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, Law 14 notes the value of buy-in and involvement in processes. For the first two suggestions, involve the participants it affects: the kids! Have them work alongside to create the sticky notes and use the Pomodoro Technique. Not only are they seeing how to break down a task and make it accomplishable, but the delegation can come when you ask, "Which one would you like to take?" "How many minutes do you want to give the Pomodoro clock?"

Ah, now, that felt good! A deep, calming breath. The adjective has shifted from overwhelming to accomplishable. Be the tortoise: slow and steady always wins the race! Like the tortoise, you'll be able to breathe, stop for moments to rest and finish a winner.

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