

# THOUGHTS FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

by Sarah Chelgren

I had time on vacation to read one of my favorite magazines, and one article in particular seemed worthy of mention in this newsletter. In the August 2008 edition of *O Magazine*, Martha Beck wrote an article based on the book *The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action* by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton, where she discusses the disconnect that often occurs between what we *know* we should do and what we actually do—thoughts vs. action. The book is geared towards the corporate world, but the lessons Beck pulled out of it seem very appropriate for those of us in the education world as well.

One of the wonderful things about being an educator is that each fall we get a do-over, a fresh start, a new perspective. As I think ahead to my year, I hope to spend more time *doing* and less time thinking over all of the things that have to be done. It is easy to spend an entire day adding items to a to-do list but never actually checking any of them off. Hopefully you will find some of Beck's "Dos and Don'ts" as inspiring as I did.

1. "Don't substitute talk for action." Never think that talking and discussing, while important, are taking the place of actually *doing* something. Talking is not necessarily *action*.
2. "Do hit your mute button." When you have a to-do item running through your head or coming up over and over in conversation, write it down and stop talking about it. At the end of each day, ask yourself if you did anything that day that *actively* moved you towards accomplishing that goal. Focus on *observable change*.
3. "Don't rely on fantasy transitions." As we are all too well aware, things don't just "happen." Someone, somewhere, *makes* things happen. Make sure you know exactly how to complete your action, or it will end up just being talk.
4. "Do figure out what's standing between you and your goals." Make sure you spend enough time planning your action so you are sure you can accomplish it, but don't spend so much time that you end up obsessing on the details. It is often so much easier to just *think* about all of the things one has to do. Cleaning out the closet, putting pen to paper, making the phone call, or sending out the email, or whatever else we all do countless times on a daily basis, can be *hard*. But, that is where the real satisfaction lies.
5. "Don't scare yourself." Thinking yourself into a frenzy over all of the horrible things that will happen if you don't do something, or you do it in a less-than-perfect way, can be paralyzing. Don't motivate yourself with fear or anxiety.
6. "Do discover the power of calm." Beck refers to the amazing power of telling yourself, "It's okay." "You're all right." "There's no rush." "You can do this." Instead of feeling panic (see #5), calm yourself down with these very simple statements. The release can free you to move from thinking about something to actually *doing* it.
7. "Don't fight yourself." Be true to yourself. Operating under two belief systems can be paralyzing. Are you living and working in a way that you really believe in, or are you somehow compromising who you are? What can you do about that situation?
8. "Do stop the inner arm wrestle." Do you have competing beliefs that are getting in your way? If you don't think a task is important, you are unlikely to accomplish it. Either flip around your thinking to find value in the task, or find a way to change the task itself. We are often confronted with endless projects we would rather not spend time on—paperwork, anyone?? But if we can find ways to place importance on the required-but-not-fun task, it is much more likely to be completed.
9. "Don't track the wrong things." Beck refers to the mistake companies make when they measure hours worked instead of things that really matter, like customer satisfaction. Make sure that you are measuring *your* success in ways that really matter *to you*, and to your program and your students.
10. "Do measure what matters." Whatever you decide it is that you really want, count any movement towards that as success. Once all of the thinking, talking, and discussing is over, it is what is really *done* that ultimately matters.

In the busy times ahead, I hope we can all focus on the *actions* that will help us reach our goals and find more balance in our lives.

Beck, M. (2008, August). One stroke at a time: How to swim the gap between what you know and what you do. *O*, 9, 45-48.

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