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HAPPINESS IS SUBBING EVERYDAY

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BY Dan Moriarty

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"A teacher for one day is like a parent for a lifetime." -An Old Chinese Saying

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Published by
Dan Moriarty Associates
1410 Second Avenue
Newport, Minnesota 55055
(612) 459-1857

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED

After being out of the classroom for 23 years, I decided to try substitute teaching for two reasons: 1) I had accomplished all my writing goals after eight years of retirement, and 2) our family medical needs required more funds than our health plans covered.

So, in spite of feelings of apprehension, I signed up in four school districts in Minnesota: Hastings, Inver Grove Heights, South St. Paul, and South Washington County.

I realized, of course, that things would be different, that changes had taken place in student behavior and school procedures. But I really wasn't prepared for what happened on my first assignment, a three-day commitment.

It was bad news! Even the weather was against me. I started out on the three hottest days in September. Crammed into a sweltering classroom were the biggest sophomores I'd ever seen, physically mature boys and girls who yearned for another week of summer vacation.

I spent most of my classroom time trying to negotiate an end to hostilities. It wasn't pretty. I struggled, trying with every ounce of energy to remain calm.

But I was determined to learn the business. And subbing is different from teaching.

Fortunately, my subbing career was "saved" at a later assignment in a different school district. An eighth grade girl stopped after class to say, "Mr. Moriarty, I just want you to know we all like you, but LIGHTEN UP!"

I knew instantly I'd just been told **something very important**. So after talking further and thanking my new friend, I began making notes about possible changes in my approach.

Number one was my introduction. I'd been opening with a brief history of my teaching career and business experience, trying to impress the students. Obviously, "they could have cared less."

By my next assignment I had developed a new routine, and with each additional outing I modified things until, at last, I found a combination that brought smiles and cooperation. After that I began picking up other strategies from teachers, students and other subs.

Soon, I began receiving 3-4 sub calls each morning. Then the calls started coming the night before, then a day or two early, and, finally, a month ahead...as teachers began making early appointments, realizing that I was being "booked" by others in the 11 school buildings I worked.

At the end of my first year, 1990-91, I had worked 119 days; in 1991-92, 151 days; and in 1992-93, 159 days. I did two long-term assignments, something I'll never do again. I found it too difficult being a full-time teacher.

But one thing became clear: I loved the daily challenge. Subbing had become the most exciting "game in town" for me.

During my three years of subbing, I have handled almost every subject from sixth grade (middle school) through 12th...and that includes an Alternative Learning Center and the P.L.A.C.E., a court-ordered school for boys under age 16, who were coming off of rape, robbery and drug treatment programs.

As a result of these last three years, I am a renewed person! I've lost weight, am more enthusiastic, and I can't wait to get back to my kids each day!

In the following pages, I'll share what I've learned, hoping you'll find something of value to make your subbing/teaching/administrating more successful.

Happy reading!

SOME STRATEGIES

#1 - Be Joyful

When my new eighth grade friend told me to Lighten Up!, I asked her, "Why is that so important?"

She said, "Because if you look grim, the kids will make life miserable for you, but if you look cool, you're really in." Such wisdom! A teacher put it another way: "If you wear a sour face all the time, students don't see any difference when you're concerned or upset. But if you keep a happy face, they know instantly."

So, I decided I was going to enjoy myself on the job, which meant going to school with the right attitude. As the ol' saying goes, "Attitude is the mind's paint brush: it can color any situation."

From that day forward I put on a happy face...and smiled a lot at the students.

In addition, I put together a new opening that had some fun in it and gave the students a role. I knew I had to get the students "on my side," so I mixed in a little nutty stuff with some educational stuff, remembering that the Greek word for fun, paidia, was only one letter different from the Greek word for education, paideia: the upbringing of a child. I knew I was on to something revolutionary, for I had grown up with the philosophy of "no pain, no gain."

But that philosophy, I discovered, was for the Industrial Era, not the current Information Age. In addition, changes in culture had also taken place. I grew up in the **Duty Culture** period when **punishment** was "in"; now in the **Sensing Culture**, **reward** is "in."

You'll see how this all fits together in the **SUMMING UP** section of this book. Please hold on until you see the complete picture. Thanks!

#2 - Be Alert

I soon found out that merely getting the class "up and running" was not enough. There were always the "unexpected" moments. In preparation for such happenings, I tried imagining the most difficult occurrences in the classroom. I "programmed" my mind.

My subconscious mind took over from there, responding automatically without "decision-time" needed. But nothing is perfect. One day in class, during a test, a mature 7th grade girl came up to my desk and said quietly, "I've got to go to the office to meet my mother."

My lack of experience with young girls led me to ask, "Why must you see your mother now, during a test?"

She said, even more quietly, "I forgot to put on my bra this morning." I quickly wrote a pass and went back to monitoring the test.

Some moments later, she returned. When she passed in front of my desk toward her seat, the closest boy shouted out, "Did you get hooked up okay?"

The class broke out in laughter. Apparently, this circumstance was one they were familiar with...I wasn't.

Immediately, I called for attention and proceeded to make a learning experience out of the situation, talking about school being a "safe haven," where people cared for one another. Helping to build self-esteem and self-respect is a daily job of a sub. Why is self-esteem so important?

"Overwhelming evidence indicates that self-esteem is the single most important factor determining whether a student will become a successful, loving, happy person or an unhappy, cruel, failing person. - - (Virginia Satir, Peoplemaking, 1975)

#3 Be Firm

In my first year of subbing I had a student in class who gave me a great deal of trouble. He was a big Hispanic youngster who commanded the attention of everyone...and he thought he could do whatever he wanted.

When I closed the door at the bell, he wasn't in his seat and made a big deal out of getting there, playing to his audience. Once there, he put his hands behind his head and rocked back on his chair...making it clear that he had no book, no notebook, and no pencil on the table in front of him.

We never got to "first base." He simply refused to play the "classroom game." So I wrote out a pass and sent him to the office. He snatched it out of my hands and marched triumphantly out of the room.

A week later, he was in another class I was working. As soon as he saw me, he shouted out, "I don't want to be in here with you!"

I said, "Okay, where do you want to be?"

"In the library." So, with a pass, off he went.

This same scene happened once again. Then at our fourth encounter, something different happened. This time when he saw I was subbing, he just stood in the doorway for a moment, then without comment walked towards me, stuck out his right hand for a hand shake, and took his seat.

As luck would have it, it was a Spanish class...and I soon learned that he knew the language well. So, I asked him if he would tutor two girls who were having trouble with the assignment. He moved over and was a perfect student for the rest of the period.

I'd like to say that we've had no trouble since, but I can't, because as fate would have it, we've never been in the same class again. But he does smile at me when we meet in the halls...and he says he's doing fine. I hope so.

#4 - Be Flexible

Another factor that I kept in mind as I retooled my subbing approach was that the new Sensing Culture favors choice over the Duty Culture's obedience. That meant I had to look for opportunities to give students options whenever possible, so they would not only learn to make good choices for themselves but also to live with the consequences of their choices.

Most important, making a choice empowered them. They were instantly motivated, not by fear and reward motivation (motivations controlled by others), but by self motivation, in which they controlled their wants.

Thus, in the classroom, I always look for ways to give the students alternatives...if the regular teacher has allowed me any "wiggle room" with the day's assignment.

For example, if I get "a green light" and it's a class reading assignment for the hour, I usually say, "Class, our task this hour is to read chapter___ from page___to___. Now, we can go about this in at least five different ways: 1) you can read it silently, 2) we can read it together with each person reading a paragraph, 3) with volunteers reading, 4) reading by yourself or with a partner, or 5) I could read it, stopping to discuss as we go along. Okay, let's vote by raising your hands."

Most often, the class opts for #4, which gives them two choices: to read alone or with someone. Whatever choice they make, I remind them that they have now made a choice, with my expectation being that they will do their best during the time available. Most often, they honor my expectation.

I learned that "expectation" tip one day when I was subbing for a math teacher. The students worked the entire period, quietly and productively. At the end I praised the class for its effort and asked why they worked so diligently. I was told, That's what Mrs. expects of us."

#5 - Be Committed

We all know we must believe before we can achieve. I try to remember that each time I walk into a classroom: I must believe I am successful...that I am helping the students...not in the future but now!

To do that I must try to structure success, not wait for it to happen. For example, I try to start with something everyone can do. Only after we have developed some motivational momentum do I move to a greater challenge.

Along with that procedure, I also try to focus on helping at least one student per class. I've learned to use a smile, a name, a "nice-try" comment. I've found that praising the effort is more effective than praising the accomplishment. So I re-enforce the notion that they control only one thing: the amount of effort they put forth...and that is the secret of their success.

The determination to be committed came to me when I was subbing in the P.L.A.C.E., the court-ordered school for "problem" boys under the age 16. I noticed that the boys called the probation officer, "Doc," he always sat in during the class periods.

During one of the class breaks, I asked one of the boys if Mr.____had a doctor's degree from college. He said he didn't think so. Why, then, I asked, do you call him Doc.?

"Because he saves lives," he said.

I've tried to "save lives" ever since that moment. The tactic I use is taking a student with an obviously damaged self concept out in the hall for a moment...or hold for 30 seconds after class.

I tell them all the good things I see they have going for them (good looks, clever mind, articulate speech etc.). Then I say, "But there's one thing I don't understand: why don't you like yourself?"

Usually, the student will say, "I like myself."

"I'm sorry," I say. "It doesn't look that way to me. You see, students who like themselves don't hurt themselves. And you've hurt yourself during this class period. (Long pause). "Okay, let's see if you can treat yourself better from now on."

One time after I'd had such a talk with a husky junior boy, he appeared in one of my classes again, breaking into a smile and walking up close to me. Very quietly he asked, "Would you like to adopt me?"

That touched me, so much that my eyes misted. We both knew it couldn't be done, but I did give him a hug. Then we looked at each other and shared the pain for a moment. There's so much pain out there these days.

#6 - Be Unique

In "marketing" yourself as a sub, I suggest you consider a "gimmick," something the students will remember and want. It's the students who encourage their teachers to ask for a particular substitute, whenever a sub is necessary.

I discovered my gimmick when I finally put my total routine together. I'd noticed that most students "packed it in" about five minutes before the class ended. They closed their books and started talking. That happened in almost every school. It seemed to be an unwritten law.

I thought to myself, "There must be something more educational and motivational that can be done with that time (not realizing at that point in my subbing experience how important talking to one another is for the student).

Suddenly, I had an intuitive flash that the stories I told my six children and 12 grandchildren might do the trick!

So, I worked a Grandpa Story in as a class closer and tied it together with

Grandma's Law: If you don't eat your spinach, you don't get your dessert.

In other words, if the class doesn't produce, it doesn't earn a Grandpa Story as a treat; thus, the treat became motivational as well as educational (learning about life in the 1930-40's).

I'll illustrate how this all works in **SUMMING UP.** In the meantime, begin thinking about what kind of **treat** you could provide...and don't discard storytelling! It's particularly popular with students who don't have both parents or grandparents. They never cease to be interested in hearing stories about when older folks were young.

One alternative might be to tell about moments or people in your life that made a difference.

Another easy alternative is to have the students earn "social time" at the end of class. They earn that by being cooperative and productive. My classes get three strikes, then they're out, just like in baseball. When you put a big strike on the board, watch the peer pressure build in the classroom!

Of course, I try to keep them "in the ball game" particularly until they've heard at least one story. After they hear one, they want more. Then you've got self motivation working for you!

SOME TACTICS

#1 Find the Kleenix Box

I try to arrive at school 30 minutes before the first class: that allows time to prepare properly, improving my odds of having a good day.

The first thing I look for in the teacher's classroom is the tissue box, the most important classroom tool, as far as I'm concerned.

I still remember how miserable a school day was when, as a youngster, I forgot my hankie. I had to go to the lav to blow my nose, or worse if not allowed to leave the room - - having to sneak a wipe on my shirt sleeve.

Unfortunately, some classrooms don't have tissues, so I always bring a supply with me in my sub folder. (It also holds pencils, pens, toast for lunch, tums, cough drops and one sugar-twin for morning coffee.)

I let the students know where the tissue is and invite them to use it.

I'll never forget watching an Asian-American boy recently, as he was taking an important math test. He had a bad cold...but no apparent hankie. He struggled with the cold and the test, not wanting to miss a moment of time. Finally, I walked over and placed a small pile of tissues on his desk. The look of relief on his face was one I'll not forget.

Students know who really cares about them...and they return that care.

#2 - Find the Teacher's Agenda

Always make sure you understand it. I've goofed a couple of times. If it's not clear, try checking with a teacher next door who may teach the same subject.

Next, put the agenda on the board. This makes a helpful preview for the class, plus it cuts down on unnecessary questions from students: all they have to do is look at the board and know what's expected of them. Here's what my class agenda looks like.

GUEST TEACHER: Mr. Moriarty - "Mr. M."

- 1. Assignment
 - 1.1 Read...
 - 1.2 Fill out worksheet #___
 - 1.3 Hand in when finished
 - 1.4 For tomorrow, read p.__to__ and answer questions #1 - 10.

2. Grandpa Story?_____

I picked up the idea of "Guest Teacher" from one of the districts I serve. The district believes that students have a different attitude toward a "guest teacher" than toward a "substitute." Perhaps, as a consequence, I've never had a bad experience in that district, not one.

As for using "Mr. M.," I've found the nickname improves communications. Some students have trouble with Moriarty, so I suggest the easier Mr. M.

Oddly enough, in this age of informality, most students still call me Mr. Moriarty...and pronounce it correctly. They make the choice - - that's the difference!

#3 - Find or Make Student Passes

When I walk into a classroom that has a series of neat, laminated passes already made up, I feel I've learned a lot about that regular teacher. I believe he/she appreciates how precious every classroom minute is...and anticipates as many "time-wasting moments" as possible.

In that regard, the creativity of some teachers in amazing! In addition to laminated passes for lav, locker, fountain, office, nurse, and band, they also use objects, such as meter sticks, stuffed toys, or preserved fish.

Where these passes are put in the room is also interesting. They may hang along the front chalk board; others may hang on hooks or be placed on the side board. Often they are color coded for boys and girls.

However, if no such passes are available, I make up at least one colored sheet of paper for a lav/locker pass. Others, such as "nurse," should be written out.

#4 - Find Helpful Students

Fortunately, more and more teachers are identifying reliable students who can assist a "guest teacher." Their names, by class period, are usually found along with other materials in the "reserve teacher" folder, obtained from the office.

By watching the seating chart, I can usually see one of these students as soon as they come in. They are always happy to be of service by taking the attendance and helping with other tasks.

If no students are identified, I just wait for the first friendly student who says, "Hello!" Those students, too, are pleased to be asked to help.

The idea, of course, is to start the class as soon as the bell/tone sounds. Jumping into a cheerful opening sets the class "tone" immediately.

Naturally, I take a look at both the official attendance sheet that goes to the office and at the teacher's log book, in which the absent/tardy/admitted students are listed by periods.

On the teacher's agenda sheet I note exactly what we covered, along with information the teacher should know. One thing I always do, too, is thank the teacher for the careful preparation of the instructions (if well done) and the great cooperation of the students (as most often happens).

And, if there are serious problems, I explain them carefully.

After a French class in one school, I wrote in detail about the behavior of a particular student who had little desire to be in the class and proceeded to make life miserable for everyone.

The next time I was in the building I visited the French teacher to ask if she had any questions about my observations of the student. She thanked me profusely for my report. She had used it as confirming documentation to recommend the dropping of that student from her class.

I learned the result of that action later. The student was removed from the class and put on "probation" in regard to being re-admitted to a French class. This action had

put on "probation" in regard to being re-admitted to a French class. This action had explosive results at home. Apparently, his mother reprimanded him severely for damaging his possibilities of ever taking French...sending him off into the night. The last word I heard was he was seen roaming the streets of Minneapolis. #5 Use the Resources of the Class Whenever I accept an assignment for a subject I'm not competent to teach, I study the teacher's agenda closely. If the subject is a world language, math or chemistry, for example, I look immediately for ways to use the students in a "teaching role." Almost every class has one or more students who know the material well and can serve as tutors. If the assignment calls for the students to work individually key is available I try to identify students who may be resources for those having trouble.

If, on the other hand, the teacher allows me to determine what approach will be used to accomplish the objective of the lesson, I prefer to work with the total class or in a cooperative learning setting (see #6 tactic).

In the total class setting, I have the students work on one problem at a time, allowing three minutes for completion of the first problem. Then I ask for a volunteer to go to the board to present his/her work.

Often someone will disagree and come to the board to make changes. This leads to some interesting discussions...and important learnings.

If a problem without a solution results, the class "red flags" that problem for the next day's work with the regular teacher.

Usually at the end of such a class period, I check to see how well we've done as a group. I do a mini-Madeline Hunter "monitor and adjust routine."

By use of one hand on their chests, I ask the students to respond with a fist if they would like the lesson repeated the next day, two fingers if they felt reasonably comfortable with the day's work, and five fingers if they felt good about the results.

When they "flash" their ratings, I do a quick scan and report the results to the regular teacher.

After such a session, I also ask for an evaluation of my work: fist, if I "blew it," two fingers if average, and five fingers if I "hit a home run."

Once while doing that, a student asked if he could use two hands to make a ten. I said, "The more the merrier!" I'll take "good news" whenever I can get it.

#6 Use Cooperative Learning Whenever Possible

Again, if the regular teacher gives me "wiggle room" to achieve the objective, I always look for possible ways to use cooperative learning, putting students into teams of 2 to 4 to work cooperatively on the task.

This structure helps students develop the social skills needed in the team-oriented modern world. "Tomorrow's work site will require employees to frame problems, design their own tasks, plan, construct, evaluate outcomes, and cooperate in finding novel solutions to problems." Peter Drucker, The Frontiers of Management, 1986

Since it's only for one period, it's impossible to structure the team for a major project, such as a unit on the Civil War. For that kind of lengthy task the team might be formed as follows: 1) team leader, 2) information manager (computer whiz), 3) researcher (skilled in the library), 4) editor (writer), 5) public affairs (speaker), and 6) consultant (asks lots of questions).

Frankly, I see little evidence that cooperative teams are used very much, other than pairing up. Traditional/competitive learning still seems to be the most used approach. It may be, of course, that 1) many teachers are not aware that with the coming of the Information Age that the old management pyramid has been turned upside down. See next page.

LEADER - RESPONSIBLE FOLLOWERS - RESPONSIBLE INFORMATION AGE INDUSTRIAL AGE FOLLOWERS - RESPONSIVE LEADER - RESPONSIVE And 2) few teachers, it appears, are familiar with the work of the Johnson brothers at the University of Minnesota. Their Mastery Learning research shows: a) that cooperative learners do better than 75% of traditional learners; and b) that 70% of cooperative learners reach educational levels that only 20% of traditional/competitive learners achieve. #7 - Confront "Disruptive" Students To keep the class momentum going with the least amount of disruption, I use several "levels" of behavior control: 1) eye-contact, hand gestures or facial frowns, 2) use of name, and 3) shortening the distance between the student and myself. Just being close may work. If not, I find two questions effective: 1) "What should you be doing?" (listening, reading etc.); 2) "Can you do that?" (student response). "Fine, let's do that." Sometimes this settles the matter. If not, I give a warning and put the student's name on the board. The next disruption triggers "time out." That system, used in the Inver Grove Heights Middle School, appears to be working better than anything else the teachers and administrators have devised before. Here's how it works. If a student has become so disruptive that the productivity of the class is diminished, the teacher calls the Controlled Learning Center on the classroom phone, informing the CLC supervising teacher that a student (name) is on his/her way. The CLC is a quiet study hall, where students must work on class materials. The "time-out" student, however, stays only long enough to "cool off" and fill out a Time-out Form (below). Name Date______Referring Teacher 1. What was the problem? 2. What behavior did I demonstrate that resulted in time-out? 3. How did my behavior help me or hurt me? 4. Action plan: What can I do next time that will be positive?

When the form is completed, the CLC teacher judges whether the student has made a good-faith effort to examine his/her behavior. If okay, the teacher records on a 3×5 card the name of the student, putting the card in an index file along with the date/time of the time-out.

(student's signature)

After all procedures are completed, the student returns to his/her class, presenting the form (in duplicate) to the classroom teacher (one copy for teacher/other for office).

Three "time-outs" result in one CLC day. After-school detention is used only when students fail to perform their CLC day properly.

SUMMING UP

My Introduction

Good morning! I'm your "Guest Teacher" today...and I'm happy to be with you. You know when I was in the 7th grade I liked school so much I said to myself, "I'd be a happy man if someone paid me to go to school the rest on my life."

Well, guess what? I'm 69, still going to school every day... and I'm a happy man!

My name (pointing to the board agenda) is Mr. Mori...r...t. And since that Irish name is difficult for some people to pronounce, it's okay to call me Mr. M.

And in my classes we follow Grandma's Law. How many know what Grandma's Law is? No! Well, let's take care of that. Please raise your hand and repeat after me: "I will remember...Grandma's Law...until...I forget it." (Laughter)

Here it is: If you don't eat your spinach, you don't get your dessert. Let's all say that together...

What does that saying mean to you? (Keep probing until you get something like "If you don't do the tough/boring things, you don't get the good things.")

And what does that mean, here in my classroom? (Point to agenda. Student response: "If we don't do the assignment, we won't get a Grandpa Story.") Right! So you don't want to strike out! Remember, three strikes and you're out. No story!

Now let's look at our assignment. (Preview the coming events). Everybody ready? Let's go to work!

(Of course, when I'm back with the same class the second time or more, I briefly review my procedures and Grandma's Law. I'm a firm believer in the **Theory of Spaced Repetition**, that people must be "hit" with an idea at least six times before they **absorb** it, apply it, and pass it on to others. This technique, reportedly, is used by teachers of national math winners and coaches like Bill Walsh.

My Close (five minutes)

Grandpa Story #1 (I have 22 stories) took place when I was seven years old in the small town of Enderlin, North Dakota, during the depression and drought. Do you know what those two words mean? (response)

Your task while I tell the story is to figure out what I learned from this experience that has helped me the rest of my life. Ready?

The kids at that time had very little money, usually only a dime a week to attend the Saturday afternoon movie, so we had to make our own fun. Guess what we did? We formed a Railroad Street gang...but gangs were different in those days. We did lots of good things, like build our own skating rink every year. But one hot Sunday afternoon we did something really dumb.

The leader of our gang decided we should go up in the woods on the hill behind our street, pick choke cherries and cook them. But he only had two wooden matches and didn't get the fire going. So he leaned on me, the youngest member of the gang, and told me to go get some matches.

I said I couldn't. My parents wouldn't give me any...they were dangerous. "Yeah, but the Simonet's aren't home...and they don't lock their doors. You know how to get them."

"I can't do that," I said weakly.

"Oh, yes, you can!" he shouted. "Or you're out of the gang!"

I cracked under the pressure...and ran down the hill, crept around the garage, and darted into the Simonet's house. Soon I was in the kitchen, then the cupboard, where I reached up and took a bunch of matches. Then I hurried back to the woods.

The **good news** is we were careful; the **bad news** is a neighbor lady saw me go into Simonet's house and called my mom. When I got home, she wanted to know what I was doing in their house while they were gone.

I told the truth, emphasizing how I was "forced" by the gang to do it. She thanked me for telling the truth, then sent me to my room to prepare my apology when "Uncle Bob" and "Aunt Sophie" came home.

When they did, I walked over with shaking knees and sweaty palms. I had a big lump in my throat and was just able to get out how sorry I was for what I did. Then I closed my eyes and waited.

Guess what "Uncle Bob" did? He opened his arms and gave me a big hug. With that, my hot tears poured out. And as I felt his arms around me, I knew I was going to love that man...for the rest of my life.

Two years ago, when "Uncle Bob" was 100 years old, I told that story to a large crowd in a school gym...and when I finished, guess what I gave "Uncle Bob"? That's right, I gave him back that hug.

Now, what do you think I learned from that experience?

(Lots of good answers...some funny...but finally I'll get something like: "forgive...love is better than punishment.")

Dear Reader: I hope you can now see why I say, "HAPPINESS IS SUBBING EVERYDAY."

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