

Pounding the Pavement to Become a Better Principal

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

I've been a school administrator for the past seven years. I'm also a wife and mother of two teenage boys. My work and personal schedules are very busy. While I wouldn't have it any other way, I'd like to find more balance in my life. During these seven years time, I've gained about thirty pounds due to the time I spend working and not taking care of myself. While I love my job, I don't love the toll I've allowed it to take on my health. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to prioritize time for my mental and physical health.

Statement of Your Wondering:

Can taking time to focus on my own health and wellness support my mental clarity and work effectiveness?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I created a running plan, recruited friends to run with me, found a running devotional and of course purchased a good pair of running shoes. Creating a running plan was pretty easy. There are hundreds online, but none of those fit me quite right. I decided to keep it simple was the best route for me. I scheduled three runs each week. Two of these runs were short 30-45 minute long jogs. The final run was my longer mileage run. Each week, I increased my distance by one mile.

Two of my best friends took on the running challenge with me. I thought having the peer accountability would make me stick to my plan. My two best friends have also dealt with fluctuating weights and busy families and careers. We've all allowed the people and responsibilities in our lives to take priority over taking care of ourselves.

The purpose of the devotional was to help me find a higher purpose for my running rather than it being all about me. I searched on-line for a devotional that was geared toward a runner and a daily Bible reading. In order to track my running I sent a selfie photo to my friends each day and filled out my running plan spreadsheet. The selfie was the accountability piece with my running partners since we couldn't run together, very often. The spreadsheet was to keep me on track for correct mileage.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, I learned that keeping up with my workouts was extremely difficult during the weekdays. Having accountability partners are wonderful, but you can't make them stay motivated. Lastly, having a devotional and reading it regularly kept me going. It was the daily or weekly reminder of why I should run and how it is having a positive impact on my body, which the Bible calls our "temple." Often times, I could only squeeze in one of my required runs during the week, but "caught up" on the weekends. First, I was diligent in filling out my spreadsheet after each run. For 17 weeks I made my running goal, but at a minimal level. The three required runs and one of them being a long run was complete. However, it was my

intention to run 3-5 times a week. I only ran the 5 times on 3 of the weeks. My accountability partners always encouraged me and pushed me to keep going. However, after week six neither of them continued to record workouts on the spreadsheet. While they still were working out, they weren't as committed and lacked the accountability of a "project" as I had due to IPLI. My running devotional was another the key to keeping me motivated. I was able to inspire myself daily and keep my commitment.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

My action research journey has allowed me to prioritize myself. I had to purposefully schedule my runs throughout the week. I had to tell other people to wait due to my need to run. For the past several years, I have not made myself a priority. I've allowed everything else to take precedence. While I still feel like I allowed many things to take over my life, I still managed to fit in time for myself. I learned that I can balance my needs along with the needs of my husband, children, and school responsibilities. My staff knew of my goal and would regularly ask how it was going. They would offer encouraging words and they never once mentioned that I wasn't keeping up at school. In fact, I think I was more focused while at school because I knew I would have a little less time while at home in the evenings. From this project, I've learned that I can juggle just about anything, but I do have to stay organized, create schedules, and find ways to stay motivated. My accountability with friends and the daily devotional were key to my success. The tracking spreadsheet was important as a plan of action, but wasn't enough to keep me motivated. I knew I could "fudge" a workout on there if I wanted to, but a selfie photo to my friends was my daily/weekly accountability. The devotional was my way to stay connected and the words read and reflected upon repeated in my head throughout the week.

References:

Niesluchowski, D., & Veerman, D. (2011). *The runners devotional: inspiration and motivation for life's journey--on and off the road*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House .