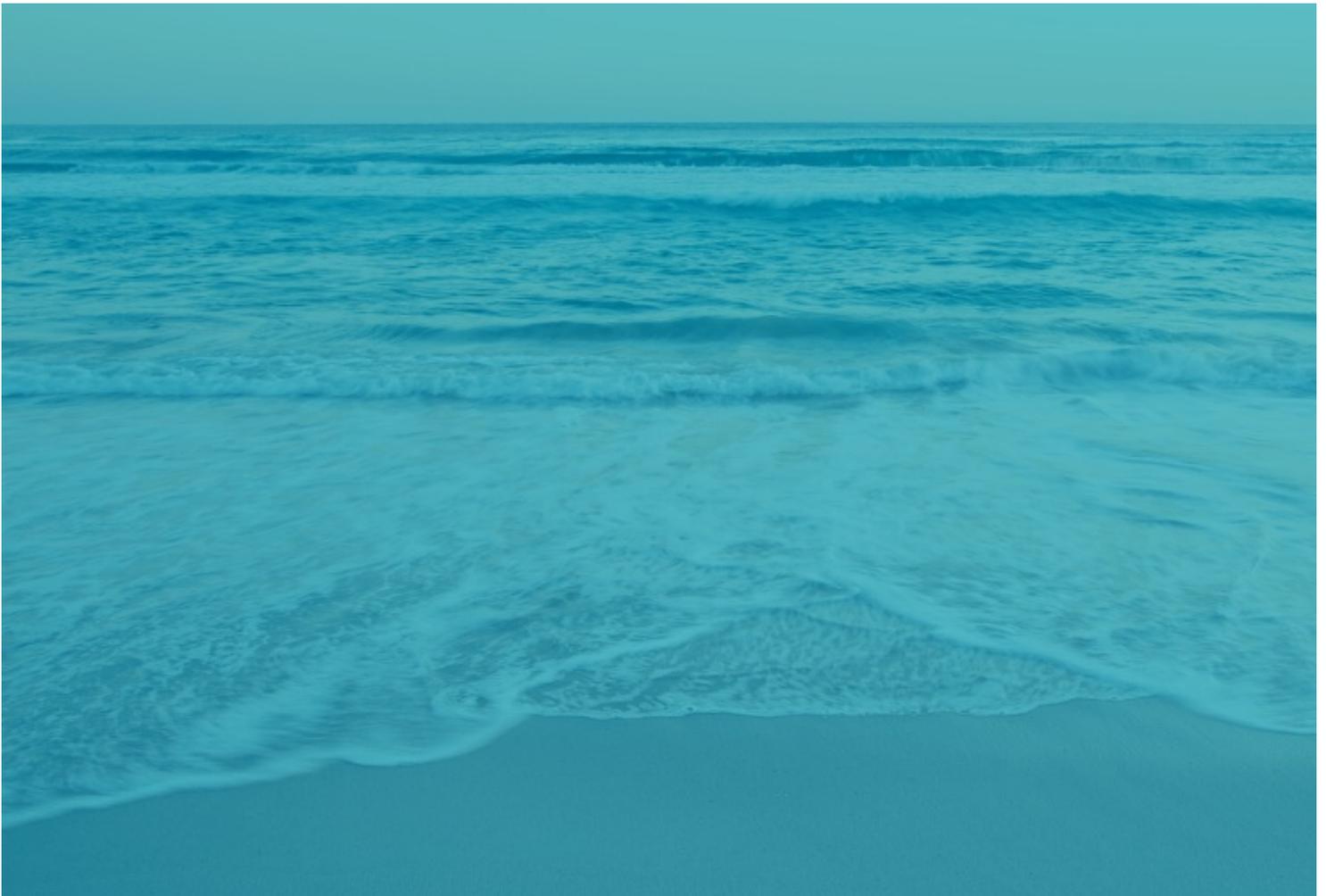


# Teacher Wellness Practice #7: Setting Intention and Letting Go of Results

By Sarah Rosenthal | Categories: Classroom Community, Wellness

The COVID-19 crisis threw our world into radical disarray. In response, each of us worked quickly to establish some semblance of new routines and norms for our teaching and personal lives. But it's hard to get a solid grip or make reliable plans when our lives seem dependent on shifting and conflicting reports, advice, and guidelines. By the time we've more or less acclimated to the remote teaching thing, it will be time to say goodbye to our students. And then summer will arrive. And who knows what that will bring.

Experiencing the pandemic has been like being tossed into tumultuous waves with a surfboard and little to no instruction or time to learn how to stay afloat, let alone ride the surf with grace and skill. I can practically hear your voices chiming in with all the things you can't make better for yourself, your students, or your loved ones right now, despite your earnest wishes and best efforts.



But as unsettled as reality is right now, it's still ... reality. And one thing about reality is that we're *always* way less in control than we

generally like to tell ourselves.

Reflecting on it, we can see that this was true even pre-COVID-19. Maybe you did your very best with that student all year to help them with their reading and they did better over time ... but still struggled mightily. Maybe you never planned to move away from your parents ... but your partner got a job in a different state. Maybe you found out you were pregnant ... with twins. (Were those tears of joy or overwhelm at the prospect? Maybe a little of both.)

So we control very little about life – now or at any time. Some things work out the way we want, and some things don't. Living in greater alignment with that fact can lift some of the constant internal pressure that we tend to put on ourselves to make things turn out the way we want. It lightens a mental burden that can otherwise be crushing.

This doesn't mean we should stop taking responsibility for ourselves, or that we're simply at the mercy of outside forces. Not at all. Because while we can't control outcomes, we *can* set powerful intentions. And no matter how circumscribed our lives may be right now, we still have that ability.

So an important key to well-being is to set our intentions and then let go of the results. And to patiently do this again and again.

Let's say I set an intention to respond equanimously when a well-intentioned but gossipy family member tries to drag me into some tired old feud. For the first two phone conversations after initially setting this goal, I bite my tongue. Then one day when I've slept poorly and struggled to deliver distance learning to squirrely kids, I join in the squabble. Obviously, if I were completely in control of reality, this wouldn't have happened. Instead of pummeling myself, I can reset my intention ... and let go of the outcome. I might mess up lots more times – but gradually I'll behave more and more in line with my intention, even in this button-pushing scenario.

This approach to reality works with plans of any scale, from wanting to take a walk this afternoon to deciding to learn a new language.

Here's a simple practice you might try for the coming week. If possible, I recommend doing this one with a buddy, for support and accountability. But like all of the practices in this series, a buddy isn't a requirement.

### **Setting Your Intention and Letting Go of the Results**

- Pick one task or project you'd like to take some action on tomorrow. Size it so that it is a slight stretch for you, or a very small step toward a larger goal. (If it seems too modest ambition-wise, you're probably on the right track.)
- Set your clear intention for this task. For example, "I intend to finish my teaching prep before dinner and take the evening off." Stating it to someone else is helpful – there's a surprising power in declaring your intentions.
- Live out that intention with all you've got.
- Afterward, review how it went. If it didn't go as well as you'd hoped, be honest about why, and think about how to remedy that, but don't get bogged down in shaming or blaming. This is the "letting go of the result" part.
- Reset your intention (or pick a new task and set your intention for that).

I recommend checking in with yourself or a buddy during the week to reflect on how it is going, and again at the end of the week to debrief on the experience. An intriguing variant is to apply the practice to a really microscopic activity, like lifting your teacup to your lips and taking one mindful sip. (See this post for support with that approach.) That variant can be a compelling way to build small, refreshing moments into your day.

**Q** *How did it feel to experiment with setting your intention for something you want to do, and then letting go of the results? Turn to your imaginary or real partner!*

**You might be thinking:**

*"This is helping me understand why I've been feeling so defeated lately. I realize I've been taking it personally that my students' current learning conditions are sub-optimal. The idea of 'intention and letting go' helps me remember that I'm doing my best, and that's all I can do."*

*"I don't believe in letting go of the results. I hold myself accountable for success in my goals. I teach my children to do the same thing. I feel like this idea of letting go would just lead to laziness and sloppiness."*

*"I don't think this means 'let go' as in 'whatever happens happens, so don't try.' I think it just means 'stay in reality.'"*

*"I practiced with my intention to wake up half an hour earlier and go for a quick run. I did it the first day, didn't manage it the next two days, but did it again this morning. I'm proud of myself!"*

*"My intention is to spend five minutes a day putting something away to reduce the clutter that's been accruing in my household. My buddy's intention is to read five pages of a professional book a day. We're checking in every evening via text messages; that makes it feel fun and supportive."*

Does this practice intrigue you? You might wish to try it out for one week, with a spirit of curiosity and investigation. Who knows what you might learn!

Next week's post in the Teacher Wellness Blog Series will explore body scanning as a way of reducing stress.