

Life After Teaching

5 Real-Life Interviews from Former Teachers



Hello!

Thank you so much for downloading this free report from www.LifeAfterTeaching.com!

Whether you've given your notice and won't be returning for the next school year, or you haven't quite decided to leave yet, this peek into Life After Teaching will be helpful in encouraging you to see all the options that are ahead of you and make a choice that is best for you -- not a choice boxed in by fear or doubt about your ability to find a job outside the classroom.

This short guide kicks it off with some hope: five things you can say goodbye to when you leave the classroom. In between these reflections you'll find five real-life interviews with former teachers just like you! People who loved the classroom (or didn't enjoy it much) and who used their teaching skills to find alternate careers in project management, writing and editing, technology, sales, and more!

Thank you so much for bringing me along on your journey! Whether this is our only time together, or you purchase the [Life After Teaching eBook](#) to dig deep into your transition, I'm so grateful to be a part of your personal and professional growth!

So, kick back, read on, and dream about what Life After Teaching might look like for you! And thank you again for letting me be a part of your journey.

Warmly,

Sarah Greesonbach



What You Can Say Goodbye To

You know what's crazy? The level of stress, pressure, and accountability within the classroom often climb so high that they rival the notoriously-dangerous stress levels of doctors, military personnel, and police officers.

What a surprise for incoming teachers expecting a traditional, respectable role as a classroom instructor!

This is just one of many reasons that some teachers decide to pursue a job outside of the classroom. Are you ready for a few more reasons? Here's what you can say goodbye to when you decide to transition into a new career:



Goodbye #1: Fighting the System to Do Your Job

It's hard enough to get your teaching license and to create a meaningful and enriching curriculum for your students. Yet, in addition to instructional pressures, teachers deal with long-term pressures of constant behavior management, curriculum restrictions, and the ever-shifting political culture that seeps into the classroom.

As if this weren't enough, you can add to that the daily stressors: profound respect and behavior problems, inappropriate responsibilities that weren't in the original job description, and a chronic sense of competing with simple things like cell phones and misguided behaviors.

Within the classroom, students simply don't know how to (or don't want to) say no to distractions during school hours. And even if they could say no, who would? In many schools, students can play with smartphones during the school day or blatantly ignore teachers and assignments and often face little or no immediate consequence.


And that's just the simple things – the rest of the day is spent fighting hormones, poor work ethic, and the overwhelming mental and emotional health challenges of students.

The list doesn't end there. On top of all this we can add those standardized test pressures, new responsibilities and curriculums to cover as a teacher, and at the end of the day many news outlets still report failing grades to be due to inadequate teachers.

I know that's a lot to throw out there -- but that's the point! Teachers are now expected to cope with everything listed above (and more) in addition to the structure and guidance of whichever subject they have been charged to teach. It's just too much.

There are bad teachers out there, yes. But there are also good teachers being treated badly.

*"I have such little support from
parents & administration.
There's an overall philosophy
that students should never fail....
and if they, do it is my fault."
- A Modern Classroom Teacher*



As a teacher, you probably explored new levels of patience, kindness, and flexibility on a daily basis. But no one should be put in disrespectful, dangerous, and overwhelming situations in order to do their public service!

The good news? In the professional world, there are difficult situations, patience-trying clients, and stressful days, but often these situations are temporary or within the context of a reasonable workload; even more rarely do these situations result in physical intimidation or violence.

The modern workplace is designed to remove as many obstacles to doing your job as possible. The result is often a working environment that is conducive to getting your work done -- not an environment where you have to fight the system or hide at your desk just to do your job.

Marla's Real Story: From Math Teacher to Project Manager

Ready for the first real life interview? First we'll hear from Marla Sarris, the blogger behind Paleo Porn and the project manager at the branding and web design company SPYR.

Please describe your teaching experience and educational background.


I graduated from Elmhurst College where I majored in Mathematics, received a minor in Psychology and earned my Secondary Education Certificate to teach Middle & High School.

During college, all my professors would mention the same school as an example of best practices and principles of student-centered learning. I thought it might have been a coincidence at the time or that they all used the same fictitious school.

Immediately after graduation when I was deciding where to apply the first school I searched for was the one that all of my professors mentioned: Adlai E. Stevenson High School.

Stevenson was the only school I applied to. I wanted to be teaching in a place where all the best practices were implemented. After going through the interview process I accepted a position working in the Mathematics department at





Stevenson, one of the top ranked schools for mathematics. I taught students of all levels from Pre-Algebra through Calc II. In the classroom I taught several levels of Algebra I & II.


My experience was exciting, stressful, encouraging, and draining all at the same time. My first year you could find me at school from 6am until 9pm nearly every day, not to mention the time I spent working from home on the weekends. Understanding the daily expectations, the school climate, writing lessons and figuring the best way to deliver content to students, grading and providing feedback, and making myself available to as many students as possible completely consumed my life.

My second year was a little easier and, over time, I gradually gained back more of my life. By my sixth year teaching I was completely comfortable in the classroom. At times I still had trouble keeping up with grading and classroom management was still an issue I struggled with, but I always loved the one-on-one moments. The best time with my students happened before & after school and in the Learning Center.

Keeping the attention of around 30 students for an hour, 5 periods a day, and making sure every single one of them understood the days concept was a huge priority for me. (In retrospect also an unrealistic goal.)

Math is cumulative. It builds. So if you're lost on day one and we're building the next day on the previous day's concept, you're already behind. It's one of the reasons I made myself completely available to my students (before school, during my prep and lunch periods and after school). I wanted to ensure they could always seek my help. I wanted all of my students to succeed and strived to make that a reality.

When did you realize teaching was no longer right for you? Was there a specific moment or did it dawn on you slowly?




There is no specific moment that I can pinpoint. It was a slow build emotionally to a moment where I felt completely broken, with no possible way to fix the situation other than by walking away. The stress built up over time and eventually, during my sixth year of teaching, everything just came to a head.

During that year I would come home crying at least one night a week. I felt like I wasn't making a difference in my students' lives. I no longer felt like all the material I was teaching my students was necessary. And I saw no way that I could contribute to fixing the biggest problems with the education system at large. I no longer wanted to be part of the system. I felt like a pawn in a game whose main role was to corral students.

There were other things calling to me. I wanted to be healthier, mentally and physically. I have always been very interested in health and wellness. In 2009 my husband, Jeff, read *The Primal Blueprint* and *The Four Hour Workweek* and he suggested I read them as well. I read *The Primal Blueprint* first and it completely changed my outlook on diet and fitness. At that time we changed our diet and fitness regimen and started looking at everything differently. Questioning everything instead of simply accepting what we're told.

I wanted to delve more into the minimalist movement and continue to simplify our lives. I had more energy since we transitioned to the Paleo lifestyle but I wasn't able to get enough sleep or reduce my stress due to the position I was in. And I wanted to travel more and learn about this world we all share.

So I started questioning what I was doing as a teacher and my place in the education system. Even though I had chosen Stevenson because they were different from all the rest of the high schools, they were still part of the system that was implemented when education was first introduced.



The system itself is flawed and needs to change. Thoughts like this are what would creep into my head as I was teaching a lesson on graphing quadratic functions and a student would ask the inevitable question “when are we going to use this in our lives?” I always had an answer for those students, that wasn’t the problem, but I was starting to disagree with other parts of the system and was asking my own not so dissimilar questions that I could not answer.

I really loved teaching and really loved my students but I wanted to do and experience more. I didn’t want to be pigeonholed for the rest of my life into a single career that I was already doubting. In the end I left teaching after six years. Quitting isn’t something I normally do. And for that reason, I like to say that I retired from teaching. :)


What position do you have now?

My husband & I like to joke that we don’t have hobbies, we have businesses. When I “retired” from Stevenson I didn’t know what I wanted to do so I made a list (because I’m really good at list making) of all the skills I have and all the things I enjoy doing. I was looking for the intersection of those things.

To answer the question, “what position do you have now?” I have to give a little background on how I got here.

Months before my last month teaching, I started an online business selling artificial floral arrangement. I called my business Infinite Floral (infinite, math, get it?). I prepared floral arrangements for a few client weddings but after a few months I decided to move on.

For a little while after I “retired”, I did some virtual assistant work for companies that were based out of Australia and Canada.



Remember I said one of the things I wanted to do most was travel? At the start of the 2010 school year, instead of starting my 7th year teaching, Jeff & I flew to Europe for the first time together on a three week long backpacking trip through London, Paris, all of northern Italy, and ended in Rome. We took hundreds of photos on our point-and-shoot cameras and shared our experiences on our travel blog.


After traveling and shooting and sharing more photos a friend of ours asked if we could shoot his wedding. He liked the photos we were taking, so he figured we could shoot the biggest day of his life.

We appreciated his confidence, and maybe we were a little naive, but we immediately said yes and had to learn how to shoot real photos. ;)

So Jeff & I went out and bought DSLR cameras, spent countless hours for several months practicing and learning how to make good pictures, and then started a photography business that we called six4eleven photography (Jeff is 6'4" and I'm 4'11").

Since we were working from home I was able to devote more time to taking care of myself. While teaching I gave almost all of my waking (and sleeping) hours to my job and my students. With all my newfound time I started experimenting more in the kitchen and that's when I started creating my own recipes. Then in 2010 I started my paleo recipe blog, Paleo Porn, to share those recipes with friends.

In 2011 Jeff, and our business partner Dave, started their own brand development agency, [SPYR](#). While Dave was designing and Jeff was developing I took my virtual assistant experience and managed all client interaction for SPYR. I was also in charge of all the business finances and anything that would fall under the "other" category.



After a couple years we found some time between client projects to produce my first paleo cookbook, [Pigskin Paleo](#). And five months later we did another self-published cookbook, [Los Paleo](#).

This question started with what position do you have now? That was a lot of build up to say that the path is not always a straight line but a winding, messy road. Here's what we've been up to over the course of the last year.

I'm still Project Manager and all around behind-the-scenes person at SPYR.

We've continued building [Paleo Porn](#) into a popular paleo recipe resource and we're currently working on an online cooking course called One Knife. One Knife is my opportunity to finally merge my love for teaching with my love for cooking, along with a healthy dose of minimalism. Remember, one knife can cut all the things.


We also recently partnered with some of our friends to co-produce a feature-length documentary that will be released in the Spring of 2016. It's called [Minimalism: A Documentary About The Important Things](#).

This past January we released the Second Edition of our paleo cookbook [Pigskin Paleo: Gluten-Free, Grain-Free, Paleo Game Day Recipes to Bring the Sports Bar Home](#). And, finally, we're collaborating with our friends at Ancer to release an all new paleo cookbook filled with [authentic Mexican recipes](#). That book will be released in 2016.

So what's my position? You could say I'm the main character in my own life story.

Why do you think you got this job?

Persistence. I've always enjoyed both the arithmetic and artistic aspects of things. I'm most happy when I'm creating. And I love to help and teach people.



I've continued to expand my skill set, learn new things, and put those skills into practice, trying to spend the bulk of my time doing the things that I enjoy most.

What do you miss about teaching?

I miss creating relationships with my students but I also miss seeing those lightbulb moments when everything clicks.

What do you NOT miss about teaching?

Grading. I do not miss the stacks and stacks of papers that I would deal with every day. Needing to hold students accountable for daily practice, for me, meant having to carry around 150 pieces of paper a day (i.e. their homework) to record in the grade book.


I gave formal assessments (quizzes and tests) on Fridays so I could gather up those even larger mounds of paper to grade over the weekend.

If you come to my house now you'll see very few pieces of paper compared to what I used to surround myself with on a daily basis.

What surprises you most about life after teaching?

Time.

Life for me was always extremely structured. From the moment I entered kindergarten to the moment I quit teaching I learned to compartmentalize and organize my time into blocks. There was always a system in place to follow.



The moment that structure was no longer there, the moment I found myself with unlimited time and an unlimited number of ways to spend it, I had a mini breakdown.

I didn't know what to do with myself or how to use that time efficiently. And efficiency is not always the answer. It took time for me to figure out how to use my newly acquired time and what to do with myself. Understanding that I could spend my time in any way, be it productive or unproductive, I now had to make that decision.

What advice would you give to a teacher who is afraid to leave the familiarity of the classroom for another job?


If you're not enjoying what you're doing in the classroom, if there's something else you'd rather be doing, find a way to make that happen.

I should caveat this with the point that there's a difference between finding a new job and creating your own (becoming an entrepreneur).

Change is hard and it takes a lot of work but if you're willing to put in the time and make a change for the better, if you're devoted to making something a success, then you can and should do it.

Weigh the pros and cons of change and see if or when it's right for you.

Also don't simply take the leap before starting to work on the thing that you're leaping towards. Building a sustainable business takes a long time and a lot of hard work. I was afforded this opportunity because my husband had already started the business that eventually became SPYR. Back then his business looked nothing like it does today, it didn't even have a snazzy 4 letter name, but the groundwork was in place. He had put in the work.



I'd love to say simply take the leap and it'll work out. But honestly it's a lot of hard work and nothing's guaranteed. To tell you anything else would be irresponsible.

Do you think teachers are more talented than they think? Why?

I think many teachers spend a lot of time in their head brainstorming or anticipating solutions to problems their students will have in the classroom. I know I spent a lot of time doing that and reflecting on how my lesson went each day so I could shift and adjust the following day's lessons. I still use many of these same skills today, just in a new setting.

I think a great teacher is a valuable resource. I think there are many talented teachers that exist, some who know they're talented and others who don't realize it because they're in the trenches every day, just doing the best they can to help their students learn.

There are so many responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of a teacher. It's really a hard job that doesn't get the credit it deserves.

Goodbye #2: Rock Bottom Being Normal

When you first start teaching, it takes no time to realize that teaching is a strenuous, rewarding, and unbelievably fulfilling career. However, sometimes it takes a few years to realize it's also an unappreciated, dangerous, and unhealthy one.

My first year of teaching was a tornado of planning, grading, and living and breathing high school students.

I flourished in my lesson planning and printable designs, and I loved planning and executing review activities and test questions. But the rest did not happen smoothly for me.

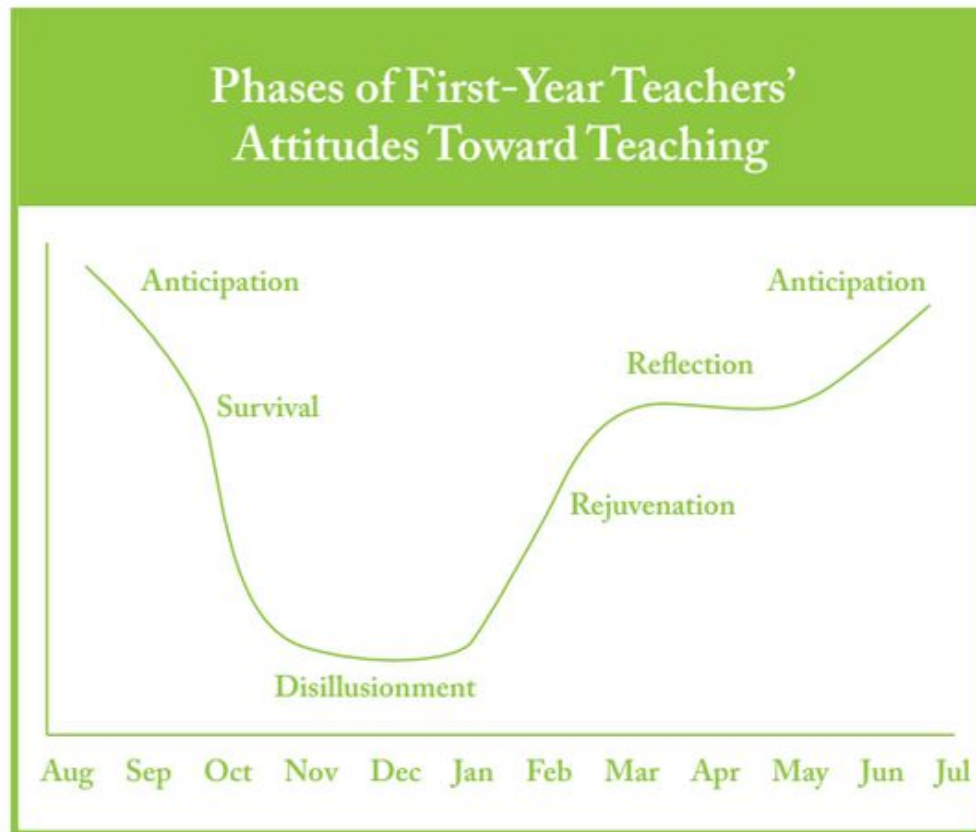
Within a few weeks, I was having stress dreams and disordered eating and exercising just to maintain my high work volume, often with little result as I learned to navigate classroom management and student relationships.

The phases I went through each year were painful and timely, and I wasn't alone.

In fact, this is such a phenomenon that there are well-known charts that outline the different feelings and phases that teacher will go through; a toxic loop of anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation that never ends.

"I'm unhappy. I have an excessive amount of take-home work leading to a poor social life. I never have enough planning time, and the pay is always low. I'm drained at the end of every day, and I'm underappreciated by parents.


- A Modern Classroom Teacher



Source: http://www.wecat.org/professional_resources/new_teacher_resources/beg_handbook/phases.aspx

As teachers, we should ask: Why is this chart even a thing? What does it say about teaching (and teachers) that we think it is "normal" for someone to be in a career in which you hit rock bottom (aka survival and disillusionment) over and over again?

Other professions require you to work hard-- studies like law and medicine will require a lot of your time and provide a lot of stress—but find me a lawyer who makes \$30,000-45,000 per year and cries himself to sleep at night. Every night. For the foreseeable future!



In other careers you may work hard for periods of time to establish yourself, but you do not re-live the cycle of the first year over and over again. In the real world, bad days are bad days-- not bad weeks, months, or years. Anything close to that is a sign of depression and should be addressed with a doctor or counselor.



Ayesha's Real Story: From English to Writing

Next up is a real story from [Ayesha J. Gallion](#), an author and freelance writer who taught high school English for 10 years. Ayesha writes about the heavy decision-making process that comes with leaving teaching... and the surprising benefits that came along with it.

After almost 10 years, I resigned from my position as an English teacher at a magnet school for the arts in Newark, NJ. I was offered a senior position as a communications representative for the largest integrated plastics manufacturer in North America.


I was straddling fear and courage; the familiar and the unknown; complacency and unrest. I accepted the position.

Truth

The culture of humility and nobility that once kept me in the classroom no longer exists within the confines of modern urban education. In many ways, teachers are martyrs of sorts. I did not want to be so selfless anymore. All other parts of my life yearned for my return.

The often vacuous attempt to disaggregate data extracted from district-mandated assessments was embarrassing to behold, and I couldn't remain in a space of victimization and frustration. I knew that if I wasn't prepared to usurp the system, I had two options: become apathetic or seek a living outside of education. And since being apathetic is only a temporary coping mechanism, I realized that leaving was more sustainable.

I didn't care about the pension, the "good benefits," or the job security. I did care about the students that I would not be able to greet again in September. However, this is the necessary heartache that any parting teacher must anticipate. Chances are they will respect your decision; for they want you to experience all that you have taught them to attain, which is an authentic life.



There were colleagues I didn't necessarily want to leave either. They had seen me through many phases in my life including pregnancy, divorce, and graduate school. The administration was often in my corner and respected my desire to teach literature and writing. Many of my colleagues were funny, kind, insightful. I wondered: What if my new colleagues were mean, short-tempered, and egotistical? But what if they were content, inspirational, and creative?

The risk to leave was undeniable; meanwhile the option to remain put my own evolution at risk. I was lucky enough to resign after school was out. But the closer my start date neared, the more wildly the pendulum swung, from anxiety and then back to bravery.

Dare


Everything turned out just fine, transcendently joyous, in fact.

From proofing manuals, interviewing manufacturing presidents, editing/writing for the corporate newsletter, and checking the AP Stylebook and Merriam-Webster every chance I get, I am in my element. I have the added bonus of learning all about the engineering processes of the plastics industry along with branding and marketing strategies.

My mind is alight with curiosity and stimulation every single day. My ideas and solutions are encouraged for logical, real world applications versus intangible variables beyond my control.

Work-life balance is no longer an anomaly. Once upon a time, "normal business hours" sans summer vacation scared me. I thought life would be one monotonous roll of toilet paper. But when you love what you do everyday and you are inspired by the innovation of the culture in which you create/work, it is not a burden! Actually, an 8:30 to 5:30 gig that respects my ideas, allows me time to refuel, and uplifts the tenets of compassion and creativity is very beneficial.

I have an uninterrupted, guilt-free lunch where I can down a bowl of soup at Barnes and Noble, take an exercise class, or walk the company's tree-lined grounds. At my desk, I drink water or tea all day and go to the bathroom when I need to as well.



The other parts of me are blossoming. Had I not left the classroom, they may have withered away, never to be fully applied in this robust fashion again.

Leap Into Life

Why simmer in any system that fosters dysfunction or maintains a culture of internal and cyclical sabotage? The educational industry – from its laughable Common Core Standards, that read like Artificial Intelligence penned them, to the removal of key staff members to balance budgets – is in need of major reform.

The other evening I was telling a friend, who also began a new career, about the intriguing aspects of my new job.


She said, “The old Ayesha is back! I can feel it!”

Two weeks before, another friend, who finalized his move cross-country to be more in his natural element, chided me for my fear of being inadequate. “They hired you because you are the perfect person for the job. Now all you have to do is own it and you’ll be fine.”

A familiar person is resurfacing. And I own and believe in my value. I yearned to be whole again, and if this is what getting back to me feels like, then I’m in for the ride of my life – with excellent benefits, vacation, and a pension, mind you.

As a side note, here are Ayesha’s thoughts on the process of actually securing a job outside of teaching:

I found a new job as a communications representative by first identifying the skill set I wanted to capitalize upon and enjoy executing -- namely editorial- or public relations-based. I also knew that the content/industry within which I wanted to work is either residential, commercial, industrial designing, or manufacturing. I cross referenced companies that fell into those design categories and looked for vacancies that aligned with my skill set.



I perused everything from public relations agencies specializing in hospitality design to online retailers — anything with an opening for content production in those markets. I found my current job via a good old job board like Indeed. However, I strongly do not suggest limiting one's search to popular job boards. Learn about the manufacturers, innovators, firms, and other entities — from boutique-sized to conglomerates — in the industry that inspires you and then view the job board on the company's or its affiliates' website.

As for actually getting a new job, it's so important for teachers wanting to transition to take initiative and learn some sort of technical skill. For me, I wanted to get connected with blogging or online content production. The blog that I write for fun (on Chicago Steppin' — an urban ballroom dance — at quirkystepper.wordpress.com) turned out to be one of the factors that got me hired!

First, the company's group president was able to gauge my writing voice and quality. Second, some of the technical work required at my new job also actually entailed working in WordPress (the website platform I used to blog). Since I had already been familiar with using the tool/website, I didn't need training in that area. So, having hobbies or an interest in this area definitely tipped the scale in my favor.

Goodbye #3: Jumping Between Emotional Extremes

Anyone who has ever taught knows that those good days (no matter how infrequent) are the most exhilarating and rejuvenating days in existence.

Let's say the administration and the parents finally leave you alone long enough to teach. Maybe that one kid finally spelled "conundrum" correctly, or you had students actually enjoy taking a test -- or heck, maybe you just spent a few minutes talking with someone who brightened your day or got a few laughs from students during a lecture.

No matter what the ribbon tied on that day, at the end of it, it will be like you slept for 1000 years and have finally woken up.

But the bad days! The bad days. On the bad days, it's hard enough to wake up, let alone dress yourself and leave your apartment or house. Making eye contact is cause for a few tears to well up. And do we need to discuss the gastronomical implications of carrying around that much stress?

Many teachers think they are the exception when it comes to being unhappy in the job, but that's not the case! In my small circle of teacher friends alone, we have all experienced the burden of teaching on our bodies. My husband consistently drops 10-15lbs at the beginning of each school year due to stress and lack of time to eat during the day. Another teacher, while waiting for class to be over to be allowed to go to the restroom, didn't make it and literally wet her pants as she ran down the hall. Both of these teachers have Master's Degrees in Teaching.

This is all simply to say that the amount of physical and mental anguish that accompanies this career should not be acceptable. And in most other professions, it isn't.

"Even if you are working a reasonable amount of hours, you tend to be emotionally exhausted and easily irritated at the end of the day. The amount of things that I do outside of work has decreased significantly, and I often feel like my time outside of work is just spent prepping for the next time period of hard work."

- A Modern Classroom Teacher



Josh's Real Story From History to Technology

This real story interview is near and dear to my heart... the story of my husband Josh's transition out of teaching!

Please describe your teaching experience and educational background. (What degree or certificate did you earn, what level and subject did you teach, how was your overall teaching experience?)

I taught for six years. I hold a Master of Arts in Teaching and Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences. I taught 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12 grade. I taught American History, World History I, World History II, Practical Law, Sociology, Economics, and Personal Finance.

Overall, I had a tumultuous and stressful teaching experience. I frequently felt that teachers in power and the administration were against me.

When did you realize teaching was no longer right for you? Was there a specific moment or did it dawn on you slowly?

I first wanted to leave teaching shortly into my first year. I don't think there was a specific moment, but there may have been a specific class.


That year I taught at a notoriously difficult school (I had no idea what I was signing up for when I took the position; the head principal almost falling asleep in his chair during my interview should have been a red flag, though), and had one class of freshmen.

They were awful, and the administration and my department head seemed to think that it was my fault.

What position do you have now? (If you'd rather not list specifics, just describe a generic title and role you hold and we'll leave out the personal details).

I work in Educational Technology as a Technology Integration Specialist. I split my week between an administrative office and two high schools where I coach teachers about how to use technology in the classroom.

Why do you think you got this job? (Your network, your resume, etc)



I'm pretty sure I got this job because I have the personality traits that align with what's needed in a technology integrator: I'm friendly, energetic, and helpful. I also mentioned random things in the interview that seemed to resonate with the hiring manager, including my experiences at college and my interests in technology outside the classroom (like for my music and blogging for fun).

What advice could you offer to other teachers interested in the HR and corporate training route? (What could they do to start getting that experience now? What would make them most attractive as a candidate for this position?)

I would recommend that they start familiarizing themselves with those industries' standard softwares and doing as much freelancing and/or spec work as possible. It's easier to get into a line of work when you're already acting as though you're in it.

What do you miss about teaching?

I don't miss anything, because my new position lets me do the things I enjoyed about teaching.

What do you NOT miss about teaching?


I don't miss the astronomical, unhealthy levels of stress I experienced trying to manage children's bad behavior. I don't miss being held accountability for students' bad behavior. I also don't miss working in an environment where many seem trapped, unhappy, and jealous/unsupportive of people moving on to positions that may make them happier.

What surprises you most about life after teaching?

I feel like I'm still getting used to interacting with coworkers who seem to genuinely enjoy doing what they do. I'm also getting used to working in an environment where I'm treated like an adult rather than a tall student.

Do you think teachers are more talented than they think? Why?

Absolutely! I have found teachers to be a very capable.



I think the relationship between teachers and the profession of teaching can be abusive. It can give people the sense that they aren't good enough or that they don't have the credentials to do anything else. It can be tempting to give up and accept that you'll always be a teacher.

If you love teaching, great. But if you really don't, don't ever give up on getting out. It took me desperately wanting/trying to get out of teaching off and on for almost seven years to get out. Man, is it worth it!

Goodbye #4: A Constant, Never-Ending Cycle of Sameness

My first year of teaching, I thought the bad days would go away, so I said "Yes" to the stress and the extra hours and the failing health.

My second year, veteran teachers assured me that the stress and insanity was normal and that I would feel better soon, so I said "Yes" again. I was sure I was just around the corner from being bad-day free.

And then my third year, I'd had enough and finally took the hint to look for another career path.

In the real world, when you get better at your job, your job becomes easier. When you have a measurable competency or talent (such as customer relations), managing that customer relationship eventually gets easier over time.

But in teaching, every year is a whole new batch of students with a whole new set of personalities, education needs, and possible dangers. Every year you have to earn respect, gain trust, and prove yourself, and then every year you have to begin worrying about the next year.

Some teachers manage to internalize this rhythm and find a satisfying quality of life. But for most people (according to those Forbes statistics, apparently 46% of people), it is a lot of time, energy, and commitment into a group of people that will matriculate and disappear, leaving only you and your family to pick up the pieces.

"I want to be able to have hobbies, healthy friendships, and a healthy lifestyle. I have gained a significant amount of weight, developed an autoimmune disease, and been generally drained for a long time. I would like to focus on regaining my physical and mental health and have a better sense of being my own person and pursuing the things that I want to pursue.

- A Modern Classroom Teacher



Emily's Real Story

Please enjoy this interview with Emily, a former English teacher who transitioned out into human resources.

Please describe your teaching experience and educational background. (What degree or certificate did you earn, what level and subject did you teach, how was your overall teaching experience?)

I received a Master's in Arts in Teaching Secondary Education English. I taught 7th grade in both VA and MD.


I loved teaching and I found working with kids was a joy. Obviously not all kids brought me the same level of joy, but I believed and still believe that helping people become who they are is one of the most important things any one person can do with another. I even found lesson planning fun.

The paperwork, grading required things that didn't matter, disengaged parents, and endless responsibility for things outside of "teaching" got me down.

I received a great deal of praise and affirmation for my peers as a new teacher, but it wasn't enough to keep me going. Eighty-hour work weeks and mandatory testing/assignments/grading were just unsustainable for me. I wasn't strong enough to say no to giving more time or more energy to help my students or my school.

When did you realize teaching was no longer right for you? Was there a specific moment or did it dawn on you slowly?

I went into my MAT program thinking that teaching wasn't for me, but I didn't have any other ideas of what I would do and I had already taken some of the classes while in undergrad. During student teaching (spring of my MAT year,) I had an incredible placement that helped me decide to follow through on being a teacher.



During my first year, we had a working lunch where we ate in the cafeteria with students. Always needing to use any amount of free time to tutor or to help kids, I would often spend time interacting directly with students during lunch instead of eating with my peers.

One day at lunch, I was carrying a stack of papers or books with my microwaved lunch resting on top back to the front of the cafeteria. It was time to get the students to line up. A student who I didn't know wasn't looking and rammed into me, causing my hot food to push into my chest. The student didn't say anything to me and continued to rush past me. I made it back to my classroom with my students, but when I got there I knew I was going to lose composure. I went across the hall to ask the Special Ed. teacher come over to watch my class. Then I went to the teacher's bathroom to clean myself up and to cry for a few minutes.


After that day, I never fully recovered. The exchange represented everything I was willing to sacrifice for a largely thankless commitment that would never fill my cup as fast as I continued to empty it.

What position do you have now? (If you'd rather not list specifics, just describe a generic title and role you hold and we'll leave out the personal details).

After teaching, I've been a Training Specialist in a manufacturing environment. Currently, I'm the Director of Organizational Development in a healthcare environment.

Why do you think you got this job? (Your network, your resume, etc)

I went back to grad school after I left teaching. I got both the Training Specialist job and the Director job because of the connections I established while participating in the graduate program. I imagine that my network will get me my next job too.



What advice could you offer to other teachers interested in the HR and corporate training route? (What could they do to start getting that experience now? What would make them most attractive as a candidate for this position?)

People are ready to limit teachers, especially those who taught younger students. Honestly, my grad program changed my life. My self-confidence was shot after I left teaching. My program gave me an avenue to reimagine my existing skills and to learn new skills. It also gave me experience with andragogy /teaching adults. There's nothing better than hands-on experience.

Find a way to build a portfolio around adult education through a grad program, volunteering, or even educating parents of k-12 students.

What do you miss about teaching?


I miss kids! They're so funny, goofy, and surprising. The kids I taught my first year are freshman in college now or members of the workforce. I still think of them as "mine."

What do you NOT miss about teaching?

Grading 75 five-paragraph essays at one time. Gosh, that was awful. I also don't miss being held responsible for things that I felt I couldn't impact or control.

What surprises you most about life after teaching? (That is, does work outside the classroom meet the expectations you had for it after teaching, or did some of it surprise you?)

It's been four years since I left. What's surprises me now is different from what surprised me right after I left. Right after, life was really hard. I felt lost and like I had failed. Now, life's great. It's the best decision I could have made for myself in terms of my health, my marriage, and my happiness.



Teaching is right for some people. My husband is a teacher and he's better at work-life balance than I ever was. I'm not surprised by being happy and healthy anymore. I just expect that I should be able to feel that way.

Do you think teachers are more talented than they think? Why?

Yes, of course. I think it's hard to see yourself doing something else. It's scary and takes a lot of courage. Teachers have readily transferable skills that a variety of fields need for success.



Goodbye #5: Teachers Thinking They Can Only Teach

Two and a half years after beginning my teaching career, I took my withered and broken self and started interviewing, trying to convince myself that I was skilled enough to find employment elsewhere.

Yes, that's right, despite holding a Bachelor's of Arts in English and a Master's in Arts in Teaching, simply realigning my talents for another career seemed overwhelming and impossible.

Feeling like I was one of the lucky ones, I was able to find a new position in a company and “escape” to a welcoming and professional environment. It took time to recover from my experience, but I have since been able to relax, redefine my personal and professional life, and flourish. And you can, too.

Herein lies the heart of this guide: Teachers can do so much more than teach! And to feel like you aren't fit for any other career is a tragedy.

For many teachers, it hurts because you wanted to teach for so long. To think that you might not be successful in something you worked so hard for (and paid so much money, maybe, for the opportunity) feels like the lowest of the low. Failure. Quitting.


“I'm worried that I won't find something as fulfilling. I'm worried that I won't find anything at all. I'm worried that I won't be good at anything else.”

- A Modern Classroom Teacher

But, just because you can do something doesn't mean you have to do it.

And just as importantly: Just because you worked hard to get into a certain field doesn't mean your time has been wasted if you choose to move on from that field.

Life—and personal development—is about using your experiences, education, and background to constantly evolve. And that can be one of the many dangers of a career like teaching: you become frozen in a subject, in a school, in a lifestyle, and start to forget about the world outside of teaching.



It is terrifying to realize you might want to leave teaching because it seems like teaching is the only career that can use all of your skills. But I've got great news: teachers can run the world!

On any given day, you manage resources, time, and money like any manager or CEO.

You deal with direct customer service on a variety of levels (think: parents, administrators, and students) and manage expectations and communicate like an executive account manager.

The trick is to figure out what you like, what you're good at, and to catapult that into your dream job.

Read on to be propelled through a number of topics that will gear you up to find a new career. First, with the recovery section, which will help you adjust from an emotional perspective. Then, with a competency evaluation of the skills you have acquired from teaching, and finally putting it all together with a job hunt and resume workshop.



Sarah's Real Story

For the grand finale... here's my story! I had a bad teaching experience and the stress of it triggered my autoimmune disease. Here's how I got there and how I got out!

Please describe your teaching experience and educational background.

I have a Bachelor's in English and a Master's in Arts in Teaching from a large public university. I was fired up to teach 9th grade English in a rural high school, and I got an adrenaline high during my first year that made me feel really good about what I was doing. However, during my second and third years I started to feel the pressure of carrying all of that enthusiasm into a classroom that didn't want it.


Over time, workaholicism and nervousness set in. Until I reached burnout, I would often show up for work around 5am (class started at 7:20am) to get everything set up for the day (print worksheets, arrange desk layout, run through my PowerPoints). Then I would stay past the end of school (3:15pm) until about 6pm to grade everything and plan the next day (design the PowerPoint and worksheets, identify the right desk layout for the lesson). Throughout all of this time I had stomach and bathroom issues from the nervousness, so I would just plan around that every morning.

Once I reached burnout, my enthusiasm and will to make things happen in the classroom faded away. I would show up just on time for class and leave once I got the minimum work done. More often than not, I would cry the entire way home.

I was mostly afraid in the classroom, so I would hand out assignments that took as little interaction with me as possible and hope it worked out. In my third year, I was instructed to change classrooms and was given a low-level, partially computer-led class that focused on literacy. This would be the class that struck my final blow, a total meltdown mid-morning that I never quite recovered from.

When did you realize teaching was no longer right for you? Was there a specific moment or did it dawn on you slowly?

I fought the realization that teaching wasn't right for me for about two years. Each year, veteran teachers told me it would be better the next year, and then it wasn't. Eventually my health problems became more pronounced and it was physically and emotionally impossible for me to carry on.



There were a few “moments” that started me down the path of wanting out. One was during lunch duty when a troubled student threw a rock at my head when I had turned around.

Another was when I found the word “Marbitch” marked onto the workdesk I had brought in from home (My maiden name was Marbach).

Another was when I finally took a student’s phone and turned it into the principal (after so many warnings!) only to have the student’s parent call me 5+ times after school and leave messages cussing at me and demanding I return the phone. This is just a sampling of the worst things, but every day carried some level of fear or sense of danger.

Another was when an emotionally disturbed student was giving me grief a few weeks in a row (screaming at me that nobody liked me and that I should just go away, getting sent out of the classroom for cussing and refusing to participate, etc). Then one day I took a mental health sick day, and when I came back to school the next day I found out had come to school with a knife, was turned in by another student, and was expelled for 365 days. A year later, he appeared in my classroom at the end of the school day just “to come say hello,” and stare at me in a creepy way. Nothing happened, but it scared me deeply.

What position do you have now?


My first job out of the classroom was as a writer and editor for a government contractor. Looking back, I could not have been blessed to land in a more supportive, peaceful, and meaningful job out of teaching.

I later transitioned into digital marketing to cut down on my commute, was laid off after 6 months, and started my own business as a freelance digital marketing writer. I’ve been doing that since 2013, and it’s been yet another amazing blessing (filled with hard work!).

Read more about freelancing and consulting at

[http://www.lifeafterteaching.com/great-jobs-former-teachers-spotlight-freelancing-consulting/!](http://www.lifeafterteaching.com/great-jobs-former-teachers-spotlight-freelancing-consulting/)

Why do you think you got this job? (Your network, your resume, etc)



My network and my degree definitely played a starring role in getting my first job out of the classroom. I was qualified for the position because I had a degree in English and had won an award in college for writing. However, I have no doubt that it helped that the hiring manager had known my parents from their time in the military. I interviewed once by phone, did a virtual writing test, and interviewed once in person before being offered the position right before Christmas break of my third year teaching.

What do you miss about teaching?

Despite the fact that I spent way too much time on lesson plans, crafting and delivering a well-coordinated lesson plan (with matching PowerPoint and worksheet) was really satisfying for me. I loved the way it all came together for a really comprehensive view of whatever I was teaching at the time. I also made some original learning tools that I was proud of.

What do you NOT miss about teaching?

Pretty much everything else! The students would fight me about doing work -- any kind of work -- day in and day out. When they weren't fighting the learning part, they were fighting my boundaries for what they could get away with with their behavior, words, or movement around the classroom.

First it became obvious from my administration that “no news was good news,” and that teachers were expected to handle everything. Then it became obvious from the parents that “no news was good news,” and that teachers were expected to bend over backwards to give their children good grades. It didn't feel like anyone was on the teacher's side (or truly on the kid's side), and it was just too much fighting for me and my health.

What surprises you most about life after teaching?

Like almost everyone else who leaves teaching, I was absolutely shocked the first time I was in the office and needed to go to the bathroom. I was allowed to just get up and go to the bathroom! It's such a small, basic thing, but it felt like I had been released from prison.

I was also surprised by how new and different the world outside of nonprofit/government life was. Your coworkers and leaders are motivated by very different things than your fellow teachers, and it took a while to adjust to a new way of looking at things. There was also a greater sense of personal freedom and support when it came to maintaining a positive worldview or having a life outside of work.



What advice would you give to a teacher who is afraid to leave the familiarity of the classroom for another job?

Sometimes we're not ready to change until we have truly grown out of our current environment. So, if you're not uncomfortable enough to leave your teaching position, it might not be time to leave just yet! However, I really wish I had seen the warning signs in advance and made a plan to leave before I hit rock bottom.

In essence, I think it's important to remember that life outside the classroom is unfamiliar because you haven't familiarized yourself with it yet. Learn all you can. Talk to people who don't work in schools. Read books about interviewing and getting new jobs. The more familiar you become with the idea, the less unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or impossible it will seem. And then you may blink and realize it's been 6 years since you left the classroom (like I did the other day) and it will feel great!

Finally, I think a lot of teachers are passionate about student education and being a force of light and positivity in your student's lives. That's awesome, and a worthy goal, but I wonder if we really understand what we are sacrificing to make that happen. I think that there are ways to be a positive force in people's lives (in your community, even for students at your school) without sacrificing your healthy, your family life, or your ability to be positive and indulge in hobbies the way that teaching asks you to.

Do you think teachers are more talented than they think? Why?

I do! I think teachers take their talents for granted because of how people treat them on the job. Just because your students (or student's parents or administrators) don't acknowledge all of your skills and talents doesn't mean you aren't skilled and talented. Take a good hard look at all you do throughout the day and you'll be surprised at how valuable the skills you use every day really are.



Are you excited? Intimidated? Ready to learn more?

This is just the start of your journey. By downloading this guide, you're automatically included in the monthly Life After Teaching newsletter. You can also join the [Life After Teaching LinkedIn group](#), where you'll meet hundreds of other teachers who have already transitioned out or who are in the process of leaving the classroom.

What's my point here? You're not alone. Whether you make the leap or stay the course, there are thousands of people who understand what you're going through, and we can go through it together.

Until then, I'll see you on LinkedIn!

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