

INSTRUCTIONAL
LEADERSHIP
ASSOCIATION

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Leadership
Show

Episode #82

Preventing Teacher Burnout With Parkinson's Law



Our Essential Question



How can we use insights from
Parkinson's Law to help
teachers set boundaries and
prevent burnout?

From the Roadmap



PRODUCTIVITY Get Current!

I have well-optimized systems to keep me organized so I can confidently get into classrooms every day, without worrying about my other work



WALKTHROUGHS Get Into Classrooms!

I visit every classroom every two weeks, and rotate my visits so I see each teacher at different times of day



CONVERSATIONS Get Into Feedback Conversations!

I differentiate my feedback conversations using the boss (directive), coach (reflective), or leader (reflexive) roles depending on each teacher's needs, always sharing my written evidence immediately



FRAMEWORK Get Aligned & Specific!

I gather evidence of teacher practice using the language of our instructional framework, and have discipline-specific conversations with each teacher



500 CLASSROOMS Get Consistent & Impactful!

Teachers and students expect to see me in classrooms, and I can see the impact it's having on students and on teacher practice in specific areas of our instructional framework



HIGH-PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP™ Get Strategic!

I have a clear sense of each teacher's level of performance in specific areas of our instructional framework and how it relates to our school's goals and strategic plan, so I can identify our biggest opportunities for school improvement



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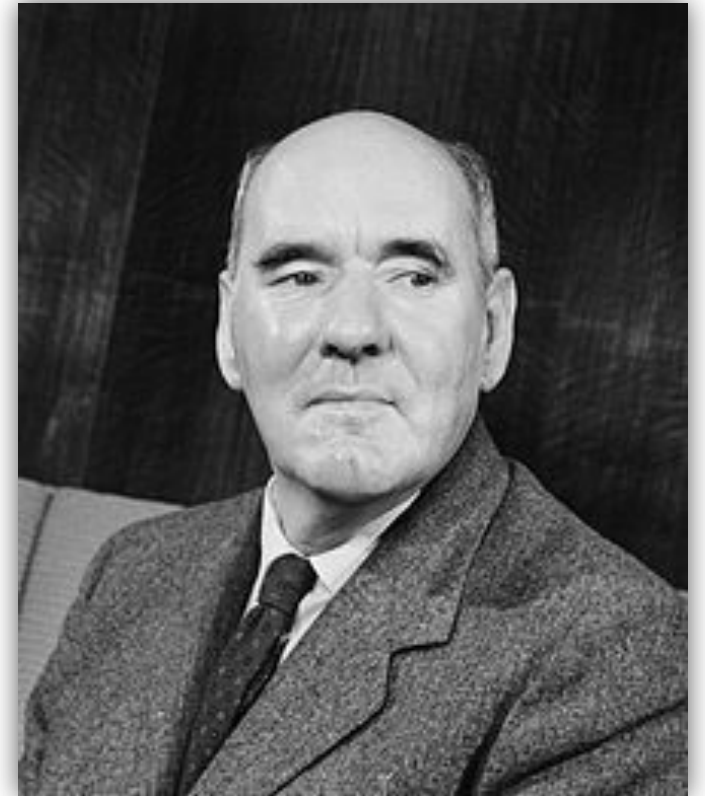
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Cyril Northcote Parkinson, 1909-1993

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- Naval officer, historian, & civil servant
- Observer & satirist of bureaucracy
- Noted that people tend to *create* work for reasons other than its necessity for a given purpose



Parkinson's Law

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“Work expands to fill the time available for its completion.”



Corollaries to Parkinson's Law

- Work complicates to fill the available time
- If you wait until the last minute, it only takes a minute to do
- Work contracts to fit in the time we give it
- In ten hours a day you have time to fall twice as far behind your commitments as in five hours a day
- Data expands to fill the space available for storage

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parkinson%27s_law

An Alarming General Tendency

“The demand upon a resource tends to expand to match the supply of the resource (if the price is zero)...but the reverse is not true.”

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Teacher Time

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Teacher time is not free.

Diminishing Returns to Longer Hours



Exhaustion →
Reduced quality &
efficiency of work

Diminishing Returns to Longer Hours

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Lack of “finish line” →
Poorer prioritization decisions

Diminishing Returns to Longer Hours

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Fewer hours in the day for self →
Resentment & bitterness

Diminishing Returns to Longer Hours

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Cynical acceptance of overwork →
Loss of self-efficacy

The Martyr Complex

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“My sacrifice, not my impact”

Our Essential Question



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Setting Healthy Work Boundaries with Parkinson's Law

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1. Set a quitting time for the day/week

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2. Make a list of what needs to get done

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3. Prioritize your list

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4. Do the most important thing first

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5. Adjust your effort & re-prioritize

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6. Stop when you're out of time

Setting Healthy Work Boundaries with Parkinson's Law

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The Extreme Case: A Thought Experiment

Imagine you could work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- What problems would this solve?
- What problems would remain unsolved, no matter how much you worked?

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Guilt Over Unsolvable Problems

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Often, we over-work from a sense of guilt about problems that we can't really solve.

Unsolvable Problems

- Right now, there are many barriers to creating ideal learning environment for all students
- Focus on what we can control or influence
- Avoid overwork induced by guilt about unsolvable problems
- Focus on creative solutions

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Creative Solutions

How could we get students to read, even if they're stuck at home with no WiFi or transportation?

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