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- Maya Angelou (1999)
  - “I want to be in the good guy’s camp. And if I’m just one good guy, and there are 5 billion bad guys, I still want to have the courage to be the good guy.”
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# CONNECTING, RESPECTING, CARING: RECLAIMING THE SOUL OF EDUCATION

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# WHERE TO BEGIN?

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- Life's lonely at the top, and it's lonely at the bottom too. Teachers work in isolation from other adults, and work in a fish bowl. Personal needs are subsumed to accommodate to student needs, and life in the education system can easily suck the life out of you.
  - Students come to school traumatized, disconnected, and unprepared to learn.
  - How to create conditions that reduce fear, rejection, and hostility so our schools will experience less violence and other issues that lead to liability.
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# CONNECTING, RESPECTING, CARING

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I saw the other day a remarkable documentary called The Transformation of Allen School. Allen School is an inner-city school in Dayton, Ohio. It was for many years at the bottom of the list in that city by all measures. There were fifth graders who had parole officers. The dropout rate was incredible and saddening. The failure of those students in every aspect of their lives sickened the heart.

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And along came a new principal, a principal who—it's relevant to note—came from the Philippines, a culture which has an inherent respect for things spiritual in a way American culture does not. And he brought the teachers together and said to them, in substance, as his very first proclamation as principal, that:

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We have to start to understand that the young people we are working with have nothing of external substance or support. They have dangerous neighborhoods. They have poor places to live. They have little food to eat. They have parents who are on the ropes and barely able to pay attention to them. The externals with which American education is obsessed will not work in this situation.

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But these students have one thing that no one can take away from them. They have their souls. And from this day forth in this school, we are going to lift those souls up. We are going to make those souls visible to the young people themselves and to their parents and to the community. We are going to celebrate their souls, and we are going to reground their lives in the power of their souls. And that will require this faculty recovering the power of their own souls, remembering that we, too, are soul-driven, soul-animated creatures.

And in a five-year period, that school, the Allen School in Dayton, Ohio, rose to the top of every dimension on which it had been at the bottom, through hard work, through disciplined work, and through attentiveness to the inward factors that we are here to explore. This is not romanticism. This is the real world. And this is what is desperately needed in so many sectors of American education.

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# WHAT CAN WE DO? SOME THOUGHTS . . .

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- Lesson One: Connected People Are More Motivated People
    - Predictor variables for not completing high school are predominantly centered on personal/social issues, not the quality of teaching
    - According to Abraham Maslow, after food, shelter, and clothing, the next need is love and belonging
  - TACWACA
    - We all want to feel connected and that we are a part of something great (when the football team wins, applications increase)
    - *Remember: Motivated people are better learners, teachers, staff, and parents*
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# LESSON TWO: KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

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- We live in a distracting world with so many of everything that it is hard to know what is important
  - Music is a good example (<https://nyti.ms/2DYdW8T>)
  - “By “too loud,” I don’t mean you can’t crank the Eagles, if that’s your thing. I’m talking about loudness as a measure of sound within a particular recording. Our ears perceive loudness in an environment by reflexively noting the dynamic range — the difference between the softest and loudest sounds (in this case, the environment is the recording itself, not the room you are playing it in). A blaring television commercial may make us turn down the volume of our sets, but its sonic peaks are no higher than the regular programming preceding it. The commercial just hits those peaks more often. A radio station playing classical music may be broadcasting a signal with the same maximum strength as one playing hip-hop, but the classical station broadcast will hit that peak perhaps once every few minutes, while the hip-hop station’s signal may peak several times per second.”
  - *Translated: Too many peaks, all the time = fatigue, inability to discriminate between what is and isn’t important, lack of tolerance for differences, inability to connect in meaningful ways, overlooking small, yet important things*
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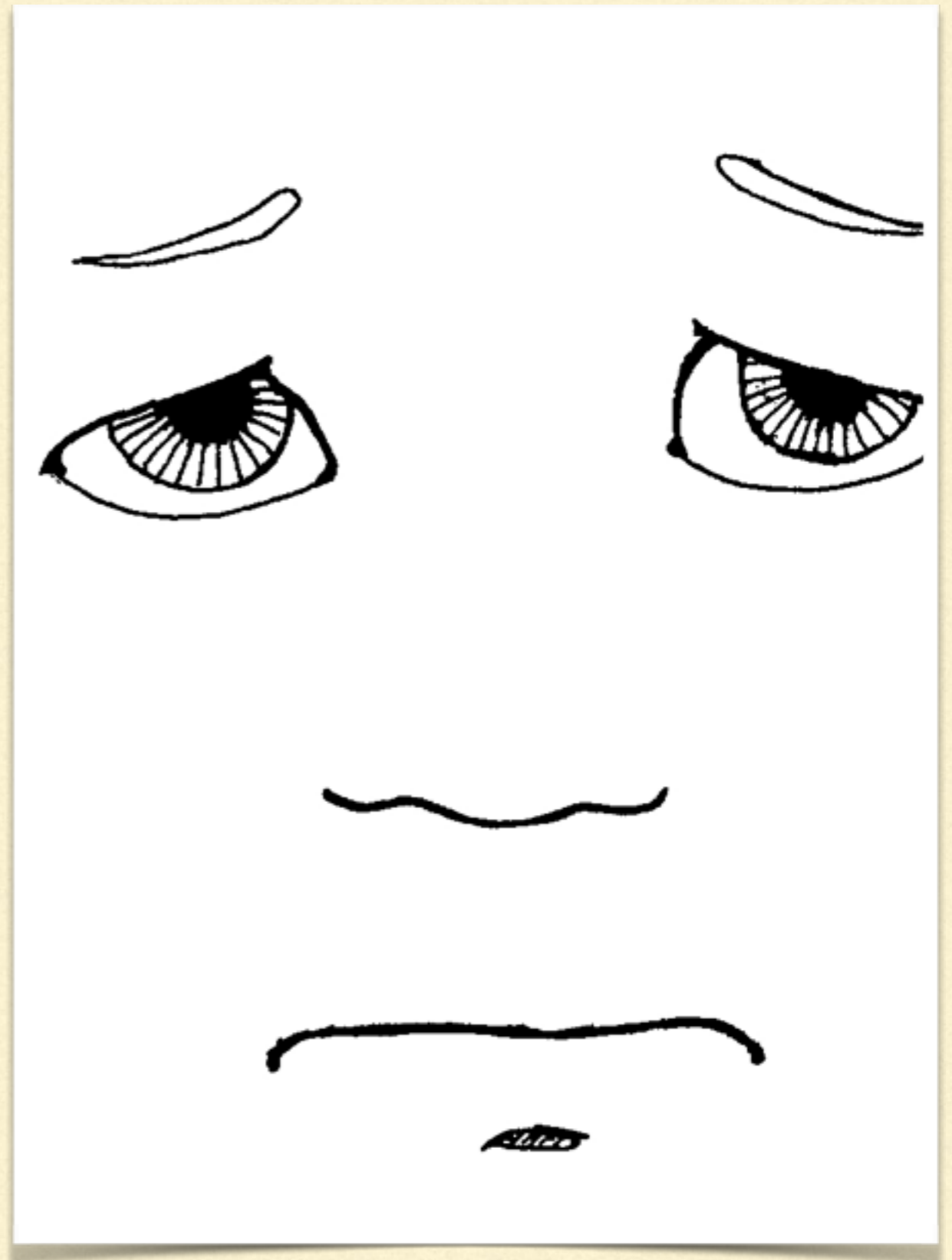
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LESSON TWO: KEEP YOUR EYES ON  
THE PRIZE

“THE GERANIUM  
ON THE WINDOW  
SILL JUST DIED, BUT  
TEACHER YOU  
WENT RIGHT ON”

Book by Albert Cullum

“NO ONE CARES  
ABOUT ME”



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# LESSON THREE: CONFRONTING AND CHALLENGING ARE NOT CURSE WORDS

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- “What you tolerate, you help promote”
  - Confronting and Challenging = Being Genuine and Honest
  - Confronting and Challenging = nothing more than sharing our observations which can then open dialogue for connecting and changing
  - Keep your eyes on the prize
  - *Remember: It is not about winning, it is about raising issues and changing*
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# LESSON FOUR: UNDERSTANDING, NOT AGREEMENT

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- Listen for understanding, not agreement
  - You are entitled to your vision, as are others their vision
  - Connecting and respecting require a good listener and a respect for differences
  - Listening and understanding don't take much time and don't impact the budget
  - *Remember: Understanding often results in a new respect, validation, new learning, and can be a way to move things forward in a satisfactory way*
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# LESSON FIVE: CLEAR VISION

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- Differences between top schools and bottom schools:
  - Top = Clear vision, understood and supported by most
  - Bottom = Unclear vision, not understood, supported by few
  - Innovation Responsiveness Kontinuum (IRK)
    - Red Hots
    - Unfreezables
    - Cryogenics
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# LESSON SIX: REMEMBER RULE NUMBER SIX

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- “Don’t Take Yourself So Seriously”
  - This doesn’t mean telling others to not take themselves so seriously
  - It means to “lighten up, which may well light up those around you”
  - It means to use humor and genuineness to recognize our imperfections, confusions, mistakes, miscommunications, etc.
  - Dear Ben p. 80; Cookies at the Conference; Aw S\*\*t Moments
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# THE POWER OF LIGHTENING UP

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- Rule Six reduces competition
  - Rule Six levels the playing field
  - Rule Six recognizes and celebrates our humanness
  - Rule Six increases cooperation
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# LESSON SEVEN: TWO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

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- What is here now?    What else is here now?
  - It means embracing “both/and” rather than “either/or”
  - It means being present without resistance and asking “What do we want to do from here?”
  - The capacity to be present, without resistance, creates possibility
  - *Remember: Possibility gets you unstuck and moving again*
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# LESSON EIGHT: COMPASSION FATIGUE - TEACHERS ARE PEOPLE TOO

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Dad,

Was going to send a text, but it became a novel. You prefer emails anyways, so this makes the most sense.

Can you send me a list of all the useful books you use in all of your classes? Or some other resources? More and more I am finding myself out of my depth with the students I am surrounded by. I am working with everything from children with divorced parents, to victims of sexual assault, or even homelessness. These things go far beyond test anxiety or boyfriend/girlfriend troubles. I want to make an effort to be better prepared. Short of auditing courses at LSU or actually pursuing a masters in counseling, this is the best I can think of.

My other concern is who takes care of the caretakers? I have teacher friends who are having severe stress because of the amount of trauma amongst our students this year. I am becoming more and more sensitive to movies or discussions that are similar to the situations we have at Woodlawn. I had to have Britt turn off "The Blindside" a couple weeks ago because it was too much for me to handle and reminded me of students I work with every day. How do you separate yourself from the mess emotionally? How do you heal?

Tim

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Dear Teachers and Counselors,

Being teachers and school counselors today is harder than it has ever been. It is now being universally recognized that, “before you can do Bloom, you have to do Maslow.” Many of our students increasingly lack basic human skills, an ability to reach out and care for others, and everyone seem to have tattoos on our foreheads that say “what’s in it for me?” At the college level, we are now offering “adulthood” course to teach freshman basic life skills!

Here are my thoughts that may (or may not) be helpful in managing what we call ‘compassion fatigue.’

The stage model of burnout that I use is this:

**Stage 1 Caring** - we don’t burn out if we are not actively acting in caring ways

**Stage 2 Careless** - the stress it produces causes us to cut corners and become a bit sloppy in our lives and work and relationships

**Stage 3 Callous** - in order to protect ourselves, we grow ‘hardened’ and distance ourselves from the painful reminders (e.g., oncologists are often described as ‘uncaring’ when they are more accurately protecting themselves from the terminal nature of many of their cases)

**Stage 4 Cruel** - this is when the only way we can feel good is by being ugly to others

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Ironically, we had our school counselor site supervisor breakfast in February to say thank you to our hard working site supervisors. My Dean came, as well as two people from the Central Office. I did a presentation thanking them and acknowledging them. For the Central Office people, I talked about how just because you don't see them everyday doesn't mean they aren't working hard for you and advocating for you, etc. I talked about how the Gear Up Teacher Leader Academy is focusing this year on Connecting Hearts and Minds and how our kids are coming to school traumatized and unteachable, etc.

After the breakfast, my Dean asked me to speak to principals and central office folks at the upcoming Law Conference and to seniors in C and I graduating in May. He believes they too need to hear about how to deal with current or future compassion fatigue.

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What I'm saying is that this is happening everywhere right now and we need to address it for sure, but we also need to **1) understand our limitations and lower our expectations, 2) know our personal limits and create boundaries, and 3) support and nurture one another.** For #1 and 2, what I mean is that we need to remember what Maslow taught us and meet students where they are, not where we want them to be. They are often at the love and belonging stage and just need to know that someone cares about them. It's amazing what happens when you **remember a child's name or give them a smile.**

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We must also remember to identify what we can and can't do. It could be helpful to draw a circle on a piece of paper and put everything within your control inside the circle and everything you can't or don't control outside the circle. You can then accept what is within your abilities and focus on those things you can impact.

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For #3, it is important to remember that **it always feels good when others acknowledge our efforts.** We don't do this often enough. We're all in this together. It doesn't take a lot of time or any money, we just need to be intentional about caring for each other. One of my school counselor interns started yoga at her school for students, teachers, and families which has been well supported. She also got a grant to redo the teacher's lounge, stock it with healthy snacks and make it a place that is calming and pleasant to go to.

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# CONNECTING, RESPECTING, CARING

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- In conclusion, let's revisit the concepts of connecting, respecting, and caring. It all really boils down to the essential ingredients in all meaningful human interaction: **genuineness, respect, unconditional positive regard.**
  - It's really not so hard to do, but we must be aware of them, embrace their importance in all that we do, and be intentional in doing them.
  - If we are successful, we will have students, teachers, parents, and administrators who all feel like they matter, feel good about what they do and how they do it, and want to do better. It's a simple formula actually.
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# FINALE

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So I leave you with the idea that with caring comes risk; the risk of burnout, of being manipulated, of being frustrated, etc. But it also runs the risk of impacting the lives of those around us in positive and sometimes in ways we will never know. It runs the risk of reclaiming the soul of education and the souls of students, parents, teachers, staff, etc.

Here is a quote from Leo Buscaglia, who impacted many lives, including mine:

*“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”*

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# GRAND FINALE

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- Do your best to connect with someone before you leave today
  - Connect with someone at your school tomorrow in a small, yet meaningful way
  - Make a difference today
  - Make a difference tomorrow
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