



**VIRTUAL**

INSTRUCTIONAL  
**LEADERSHIP**  
CHALLENGE

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TRANSCRIPT

MODULE 5

# What Does Bandwidth For Instructional Leadership Mean?

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Welcome to module five of the virtual instructional leadership challenge. I'm Justin Bader and in this module, we're going to explore how to create bandwidth for instructional leadership. We're never going to simply find the time or energy that we need for instructional leadership just lying around unused. We're going to have to be very intentional about allocating and even creating that bandwidth.

So we're going to start now thinking about the place that instructional leadership occupies in terms of our priorities. And you've probably seen the Eisenhower Matrix here and there. You might also have seen it referred to as the Covey quadrant and there's this idea that some tasks are important some are not important. Some are urgent and some are not urgent. And I think instructional leadership often falls in that most difficult quadrant. The important but not urgent quadrant.

And it's easy to do things that are important and urgent. It's tempting to get pulled into things that are urgent, but not important. And hopefully you have good systems in place for delegating and ignoring those distractions that are not important but when it comes to doing that important but not urgent work of instructional leadership, we really have to be intentional. We really have to decide to build that into our practice on a daily basis because it's not going to happen by default. There are always going to be things that are more urgent that demand our attention. And we have to be the ones as leaders who say, "You know what, this is important. This matters. I am going to be the one to set aside time for instructional leadership."

But it's not just time. We talk about bandwidth rather than just time, because there's a second component that matters a great deal and that is mental energy. So we're going to explore both of these throughout this module, and we'll spend most of the remainder of this module talking about time, but right now we're going to dive in deep on this idea of mental energy.

A lot of my awareness and knowledge of the idea of mental energy or the idea of willpower comes from Roy Baumeister and John Tierney's 2011 book, "Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength." And in this book, Baumeister describes many of the experiments that he did as a psychology researcher to discover this idea of willpower or what we might think of as mental energy. And he's an experimental psychologist. And many of his experiments involve tests that ask people to exhibit emotional self-regulation or decision-making or ask people to do some sort of cognitive task while they're also doing something else that's challenging such as sticking their hand in a bowl of ice water. And he has different ways of quantifying this idea of mental energy or willpower.

For example, how many seconds can you keep your hand in a bowl of ice water? Or how well can you perform on a certain cognitive test after being asked to do something that is say emotionally demanding. Like perhaps watching a sad video about animals and not showing any emotion on your face. He had lots of ingenious and perhaps slightly mean experiments that have been very valuable in helping us discover how mental energy really works.

And this is a concept that we use informally. This is a concept that we use casually. We say, "Oh,

I'm really just drained." Or "I'm just zapped" or "I'm just brain dead." Well, Baumeister actually got very experimental about that and got very quantitative in terms of understanding how this works and how we can measure it.

And what he found through this long series of experiments over a period of many years, was that there are a number of factors that drain our mental energy in measurable ways. And these are all going to be fairly intuitive when you see the list here. Things like having to exert self-control. The more you have to kinda keep it together, be professional, have a pleasant look on your face no matter what you're thinking that's going to drain your mental energy. Having to suppress any kind of emotions and stay calm, avoid getting upset when you feel upset. Any kind of demanding cognitive work. If you have to do some heavy duty writing or thinking or planning. For students when they have to take a test and of course any type of physical work can drain us mentally as well. If you've been out working in the yard or cleaning up, you know that right after that may not be the best time to do demanding cognitive work because you're already drained.

And surprisingly, one of the things that Baumeister found that really drains our mental energy is decision-making even for very tiny and unimportant decisions. And that will have implications for us in just a moment. But the overall idea here is that our brains kind of work like a battery. We have mental energy that gets recharged every night when we sleep, just like you plug in your phone and it charges overnight, your brain gets recharged metaphorically speaking overnight and it regains its capacity to do work throughout the day.

And of course over the course of the day just as your phone battery drains from being used, your mental energy gets drained from the work that you do from the self-regulation that you exhibit from the decision-making that you do. And as your battery gets more and more drained, your brain gets less and less good at doing what it most needs to do. We can, of course still do the basics. We can keep ourselves alive, you can drive home no matter how tired you are from a tough day but we know there are certain things that we're not going to be as good at when our batteries start to get drained.

So specifically Baumeister found that when we enter that ego depleted state. He calls this the state of having drained batteries, ego depletion. And when we enter that state, he calls it decision fatigue. When our mental energy is low, we have decision fatigue. We've made so many decisions throughout the course of the day. And as a result, our brains are tired and they are ready to take shortcuts. We mentally start to take the easy way out and rather than work on something, we put it off, we ignore it, we pick it up and put it down again and say, "I'll get to that later." So we procrastinate. We take the easy route, we go with the default option. We don't think carefully about what we need to do.

In some cases this is based on studies of judges and seeing the sentences that they gave out at different times of day. And if the judge was hungry, if it had been a long time since lunch and the afternoon was wearing on, the sentences would get harsher and they would do a poor job of taking into consideration the unique factors of each case. So this has very real consequences in a lot of areas of life. And for us as leaders, we of course have to think about discipline. We have to think about how we respond to staff members and parents and of course the quality of our work. And in all cases, that work is going to be lower in quality when we're not as fully charged in terms of our mental energy.

So, when it comes to maximizing our productivity one of the things this tells us is that our ability to do endless amounts of high quality work is not there. It's not infinite. We can not simply work longer and longer and longer and expect to sustain the same level of quality. Which we probably know intuitively but this was actually a finding that was challenged by none other than Carol Dweck. And Dweck's critique of Baumeister's work is actually pretty interesting. This appeared in the New York Times. There's a little bit of back and forth between Baumeister and Dweck and their colleagues.

And Carol Dweck found that if you are aware of this idea of willpower or of mental energy and the fact that it can be depleted, sometimes simply the awareness of that can make you give up sooner than you probably should. And she found that simply having the mindset that you can press on, that you can do a little bit more that you can push yourself did give people the ability to push themselves a bit further. And Baumeister pushed back and said, "Okay, yes "you can push a little bit further. "You can motivate yourself to do maybe a few more things "but still you're gonna run out of steam at some point." And I think that's an important kind of balance for us to keep in mind. So a couple of Dweck's takeaways from her work and her critique of Baumeister's work on willpower. When we believe our mental energy is fixed and limited, we give up sooner. But when we believe we can keep going a little bit further we can and we shouldn't allow the very real limits that exist on our mental energy to become excuses for giving up too soon. At the same time, we are going to hit a limit at some point and we've gotta be aware of that when it comes to planning our day and being realistic about what we think we can actually get done in a single work day.

Now, there is one shortcut. One kind of magic wand trick here that Baumeister talks about in his willpower book that I think can be incredibly useful to us as educational leaders. And that is habit. The idea of habit is a one because we already rely on habits for much of what we do. But there's a hidden advantage to habits that Baumeister uncovers for us. He says that anything we do by habit that doesn't involve actually making a decision in the moment is not going to drain our batteries. It's not going to deplete our mental energy the way it would if we were stopping and thinking and making a decision about that particular thing at that particular moment. And we've all experienced this over the course of our careers as educators.

As a first year teacher, for example everything is a new decision. Students come up to you, "Where do I put my paper? "How do I write my name on the paper?" And in the moment you have to make hundreds and hundreds of decisions all throughout the day. And by the end of the day, you're zonked. You're totally zapped and depleted because you've made so many decisions throughout the day. And over time, you start to get consistent. You already know what questions are gonna be asked. It's not really a decision to answer that same question from a student on the first day of your 10th year of teaching the way it is in your first year. Because it's a habitual response. You know what you're going to say, you don't really even have to think about it and that can serve that mental energy.

So one thing that means for us is the better we can build habits into our day that get us the results we want. And the less we can have to decide what to do throughout the day, the more energy we're going to have for the work that needs it most. And this can apply to little things like what we eat for lunch, or what we wear, perhaps you have a Monday outfit or perhaps you have a first Monday of the month outfit that you always wear. There's certainly opportunities to kind of simplify your decision making about what you wear and what you eat.

There was one year when I was a teacher, when I pretty much ate trail mix the entire year. And that worked for me, it gave me lots of energy. It was exactly what I needed and I'm not saying you have to eat trail mix for lunch, do what works for you but things like meal prep. Making all of your meals on Sunday, or just having some sort of default choice that's healthy, that works for you, that saves you having to make that decision every morning. Because as Baumeister's research has shown us, we do not have an infinite ability to simply make decision after decision after decision all day long and still be fresh for the work that we really need to get done as instructional leaders.

Now, a couple of other sequencing things and scheduling things that we can keep in mind here as implications of this research. First, we've gotta put first things first. Back to the Stephen Covey idea of putting in the big rocks in your calendar. What really needs to get done for the day needs to be prioritized sequentially not just in terms of mentally I think this is important, but ordinarily sequencing wise, I need to do this first. Because I'm going to be the freshest earliest in the day. So that cognitively demanding work if I'm gonna need to do some writing or make a very important decision, I don't wanna put that off till the end of the day. Sequencing wise, I wanna do it early and by the same token anything that's going to involve unimportant but high volume decisions like dealing with emails. Where do I file this email? How do I process this email? How do I reply to this? All those little decisions should be pushed off to the end of the day, so they're not consuming that mental energy that you need for your most important work. So let's apply this right now.

Go ahead and get out your journal and in your module five journal, you'll find space to answer these two reflection questions. First, what high volume low importance work could I shift to later in the day? Maybe you're checking your email first thing in the morning and spending 45 minutes on that before everyone else gets to work. Well, that could be something that you shift to the end of the day, so that all of those unimportant emails can wait until you've done your most important work.

And second, other than getting into classrooms, what other important work should I shift earlier in the day when my mental energy is the highest. So that you can devote your best thinking to that most important instructional leadership work. When you've answered those two questions in your journal, you're ready to move on to the next section.

# Budgeting Mental Energy With The Daily Scorecard

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Let's talk now about how to budget your mental energy with a tool we call the daily scorecard. Now we're all familiar with the idea of budgeting our time, right? You have a calendar, you have a certain number of hours in the day and you plan your day so that you use your time and including using specific blocks of time to get specific work done.

The daily scorecard has a slightly different purpose and it works alongside your calendar to help you allocate your mental energy just as you allocate your time to the work that most needs it. And in fact, in our planner, which we make available to you in the resources section of our member dashboard, you'll see side-by-side a place for your agenda which is your calendar. You can write out hour by hour, what appointments you have, what commitments you've made to other people. And right next to that, you have space for your daily scorecard. Now the daily scorecard is similar to a to-do list but with a little bit of a twist.

The real idea of the daily scorecard is that it's designed to help you budget your mental energy. It is not simply a to-do list though it does serve that function to some extent. It is mainly about allocating your brain power for the day to specific priorities. And here is how it works. I recommend that you give yourself a total of 10 points not because there's anything magical about that number or because there's any science behind that number.

The amount of mental energy that you have in a given day is going to vary quite a bit based on, how much sleep you got and just kind of the habits that you've worked yourself into, how healthy you are at the moment. If you're sick, your mental energy may feel a little bit lower. But for the purposes of budgeting and estimating and planning I think it's helpful to have a reasonable round number like 10 points. You could do a 100 points if you wanted to but for the sake of easy estimation, I recommend that you go with a 10 point scale.

And every day, you can say to yourself well, I have about 10 points of mental energy that I can use for my work today. What do I wanna allocate those to? So you can look over your to-do list. You can look over at your calendar and you may choose to keep those in an electronic format as I do. I keep both my calendar and my to-do list electronically. But for today on a one day basis, every day I'm filling out one page in my planner and making a daily scorecard and agenda so that I make sure that I'm allocating both time and mental energy to the priorities that really need it. And those don't always track directly, right? Sometimes we need to do something that's very, very important, very, very difficult, very, very cognitively demanding, maybe somewhat unpleasant even if it only takes five minutes. So sometimes you'll see your high point value tasks, often are very brief but we can still use the daily scorecard to ensure that we get them done.

So sometimes you will track time and points together. You will say okay, this is a four point task and it's going to take me an hour and a half or two hours to get this done. In other cases, the time is not going to really line up with the point value. And every day you've got those 10 points to allocate to different tasks and projects that you're working on. And you want to strive to achieve all 10 points. Sometimes you may say to yourself, well I'd really need to get this done and I'd like to get these other two things done but I'm not sure if I will. It can be possible to go over 10 points, right. If you work really hard, or if things go better than you think they will, or you get interrupted less than you think you will, you might actually get 12 or 14 points of work done.

And that's totally fine. The goal here is to plan realistically and then strive to do the best that you can. What we don't wanna do is plan unrealistically and give ourselves 30 points of work when a reasonable target is 10, right. And again, everybody's points are gonna have a different meaning, a different value.

The idea here is that you estimate accurately over time what you're able to get done in a given day so that you can plan your day, and plan your week for maximum productivity. So just by way of example, you might fill out your daily scorecard like this and you can see I've given these four tasks a three point value, two points, two points and zero points. So something like writing up an observation report might be a pretty high value task. You might give that three points because there's just a lot of thinking, a lot of high stakes decision making to do, a lot of evidence to review and it matters, right. Writing quality observation reports is important. You might give two points to a parent meeting where perhaps a parent is contesting a discipline decision that you made. So you may need to do some prep for that. Talk with the teacher, review your discipline matrix and of course that may also be an emotionally demanding meeting. You may have to keep a calm, demeanor, even when the parent is angry and trying to get a rise out of you.

So make sure to factor in that idea of self-regulation, right. Am I going to need to do something that is going to take a lot out of me in terms of just keeping my composure and keeping my cool, in addition to the cognitive aspects. You may also wanna give yourself points for your classroom visits or teacher phone calls. In fact, I highly recommend that you do that so that they have some space in your brain as well as in your schedule, right. You're carving out mental energy, you're budgeting your mental energy to that core instructional leadership practice of either getting into classrooms or having one-on-one phone calls with teachers if you're not able to get into their classrooms.

Other items that may appear on your daily to-do list may not need any points at all. So I have a zero point task on here. Supervise JV basketball, talk with the coach about eligibility for some of the players. If there are little things like that that you know you're going to do, that don't really need to be allocated a specific amount of mental energy. You know what you're gonna show up, you're gonna be there, whether you're feeling tired or not, whether you got interrupted or not. Some of those things don't really need points. But you do wanna allocate points to anything that's absolutely critical that you really need to get done.

That's going to demand your best thinking cognitively, if it's going to take up a lot of your horsepower in your brain, you wanna definitely allocate points to that. If it's difficult or unpleasant, if you have to deal with an unpleasant person you may want to like mentally prepare and budget for that unpleasant interaction especially if you have to give some bad news or have a tough conversation with someone. And anything that's not already habit that you're working to build into a habit. For example, if you have gone for a run every morning before work for the last 10 years, you probably don't need to allocate any points to that habit.

But if it's a new habit that you're trying to build, exercising may need to be a few points in your daily scorecard. So you just kind of decide based on how you need to kind of motivate yourself and prioritize to get that work done.

So a couple of examples here, if you're gonna do it no matter what, again, doesn't probably need a point. If it's pretty basic and straightforward, you might give it a point or two. And of course the

harder and the more unpleasant it gets the more points you probably want to give it. I probably would not allocate more than five points to any one task for the day unless it's taking half or more of the day, right.

For example, if you are spending all day hiring a new assistant principal, well then that very well could be an eight point task. If you'll be meeting with your team and setting expectations for the day and then interviewing eight candidates and then talking about all of those candidates and scoring their answers and reviewing their documents and deciding who gets to move on to the next round. Well, that very well could be a seven or eight point task. But for the most part, you want these to be, two, three, four five points so that you can get multiple things done per day and allocate your total energy for the day across them in a way that makes sense to you. And of course, that is going to vary.

This is a tool that's designed to help you be more accurate and more ambitious with what you get done in the day. If you feel like there's something that maybe it's not all that cognitively demanding, but you really just wanna make sure that you get it done. You might allocate points to something simply because it's not urgent and you want it to be, you can give yourself a sense of urgency for something that's in that important but not urgent quadrant like those classroom visits. If there are several steps you may want to to give yourself a point for maybe just the first step break that down a little bit. Or if there's some preparation that you need to do you may want to articulate that so you don't get to the end of the day and realize that oh, you've missed that prep step and now you can't go ahead with the rest of the task.

So anytime you need some motivation, or if there is a person that you don't wanna speak with, those are great reasons to give a task some extra points and get yourself across the finish line for the day. So again, plan with the idea of accomplishing 10 points of work in a day. If you go beyond that, wonderful and you should always strive to push yourself to get as much done as you can. And you can strive to increase the amount of work that's represented by one point. So as you build new habits, as you get more productive, what a point means is going to grow, right. One point of work now, might not be the same as what one point of work means six months from now when you're really, really proficient with this system. But the idea behind this is realistic planning, right. If we can estimate accurately how much mental energy we'll need, then we can really develop a plan for the day that's going to work out.

If we're not accurate in our budgeting, if we're wildly unrealistic about how long things will take or about how much mental energy they'll need, then we're going to schedule our day in an ineffective way and we're not going to get done what we need to. So we wanna increase the quality of our estimates over time.

One more tool beyond the daily scorecard that I want to share with you that's also available on the resources section of our website is the fortnight sprint plan. And this is how I plan my week before I plan any particular day. The fortnight sprint plan gives you room to write out your priorities for the next two weeks. So you can see on the left-hand page, there's this week and then on the right-hand page, you can look forward to next week, but I redo this every week. So I'm always looking two weeks ahead. And what you can do is simply brainstorm your tasks in the left-hand column. You can break those down into sub tasks as you can see I've got clean garage, and then that has some sub tasks. I've got new presentation and team evals and each of those have sub tasks.



And what you might wanna do is work backwards from the finished product, right. So if my team evaluations are due on Friday, I know I'm not going to do all of that work on Friday. I'm going to have to kind of space that out throughout the week in stages.

And you can estimate how many points for each part of each task need to happen on each day. And again, this can help you plan more realistically. Like often we plan to get everything done on Monday, and then we don't and then we just kind of stretch it out for the rest of the week. It's much more effective to think, okay what is my week going to look like? When does this need to get done? And what are the steps along the way that I can spread out throughout the week? And then vertically, you can look at any particular day and say, am I being realistic here? Can I get this number of points of work done with everything else that's going on? Or do I need to move things around a little bit? Maybe there's a preparation step that I can do on Sunday night when I have been relaxed, I've been rested.

Maybe I took a nap Sunday afternoon for once, and I can put in some good thinking to get a head-start on that. The more realistically you can plan your week, the better. So I highly recommend using the fortnight sprint plan in conjunction with the daily scorecard. And again, you'll find a both of those on our website under the resources section.

Now it's time to pull out your journal and reflect on these two questions. These three questions actually, first what tasks might the daily scorecard help me motivate myself to get done? What are some things that perhaps you've been putting off or finding it difficult to wrap up? Could you use the daily scorecard for those?

Second, what tends to be hard for other people but really is a zero point task for me? What's something that you've made into a habit or maybe a difficult thing that you've just gotten good at stealing yourself and just getting done so that you wouldn't even have to give it any points at all. Give yourself some credit for those things that you've internalized that you can get done even though they're difficult.

And third, what deserves the largest allocation of your mental energy points in the coming week? What is going to be on your mind and consuming that mental energy? When you have reflected on those three questions in your journal, you're ready to move on to the next section.

# Parkinson's Law: Getting More Done In Less Time

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Let's talk now about how to get more done in less time with a principle known as Parkinson's Law. Now it's no secret that your calendar is a critical tool for managing your time and getting done what you need to and for budgeting and allocating that time to what needs it the most. But I'm going to guess that there is a problem. Your calendar is almost always already full, right. If there were more time in the day, or if you could simply add time to your calendar then this would be a simple matter, right. But the reality is, that most educational leaders, most instructional leaders are busy all of the time already anyway.

So if we're going to create bandwidth for instructional leadership. If we're going to allocate some additional time and mental energy to instructional leadership, we've gotta find a way to do that and get around that constraint of already being busy all the time. And Parkinson's Law helps us recognize a place of opportunity, right. So if your calendar is already full, I wanna suggest to you that one potential problem with the way you're using your calendar, maybe that there is no end point designated for your work day. That there's no hard stop at the end of your Workday telling you Justin, it is time to go home. It is time to quit. And this is a little bit counterintuitive because, we think well, if I'm flexible about when I go home, then I have the flexibility I need to get my work done.

Or if you're working from home because things are virtual right now, you might think to yourself well, if I'm flexible about how long I continue working, I can get done whatever I need to. That's where the wiggle room is, that's where the opportunity is. But Parkinson's Law suggests to us that that thinking is actually backwards. That by being flexible on how long we work, we may actually be making the problem worse. So here's what Parkinson's Law actually says. Parkinson's Law is an old adage from Cyril Northcote Parkinson that says, "that work expands to fill the time available for its completion." And Parkinson was being a little bit tongue in cheek when he formulated this law, he was kind of a smart alec and liked to say things that resonated but that also were not strictly true.

So this is the kind of concept that we just have to be aware of how it affects us. This is not a universal law and we can actually control how much this influences the way we spend time, if we're thoughtful about it. But you've no doubt experienced this phenomenon of work expanding to fill the available time. How long is a meeting typically in your school? Well, if the meeting starts at the top of the hour and everybody has to go at the top of the next hour, there's a very good chance that that is not going to be a 27 minute meeting, right. It's almost certainly going to be a one hour meeting if you have one hour. Sometimes you might have a more limited amount of time due to strange factors in your schedule, right. If there's going to be an assembly and you have to all leave early, to get ready for that assembly, well then that meeting can happen in a shorter amount of time. But typically we get very good especially in group settings at filling the available time. And if we didn't have quite so much time, we could probably still have the meeting and get everything done in that smaller amount of time.

So Parkinson's Law suggests to us, that metaphorically speaking work is kind of like a gas. It expands to fill the shape of its container. And if the container is open-ended, if there is an open top to that container, then that work you can kind of spill out everywhere and not really be confined to that container like it should be. So I said a moment ago that by not putting an end point, a hard

stop at the end of our workday on the calendar we may actually be making things worse. And to me, Parkinson's Law is kind of the perfect explanation of why that is. So by putting a hard stop at the end of the day and saying you know what, I'm gonna work till 5:15 or 6:30 I don't know what the perfect time for you to end your workday is, and it's probably going to vary based on what's going on in your life and what's going on in your school.

So you decide for any given day, what time you are going to go home. Sometimes it might not even be a whole work day. Sometimes you might have a meeting somewhere else or you might have a doctor's appointment, but you are going to have a particular time when you leave. And it makes much more sense to decide that in advance rather than just kind of work till you feel like you're not getting anything else done and it's time to go home. Set that departure time or that quitting time in advance and you will find that you are far more productive. And if you're not sure if you believe me, think about the extreme case.

Think about if you've never stopped working. What if you just worked all night, just didn't go home just stayed at your desk. Or if you're already working from home if you just stayed up, didn't turn off the laptop, didn't click on the TV, didn't read a book just kept working all night. Would you be productive overnight? Would you get more work done or would you kind of fade off? And where is kind of the point of diminishing returns for that? I think if we really are self-aware when it comes to our mental energy and the quality of the work we're doing, we will realize that that point of diminishing returns happens often much earlier than when we actually quit. Sometimes we keep working far beyond that point when really we should have closed the laptop and gone and done something else. And it shows in the quality of our work.

Conversely, when we do put a hard stop in our day and say you know what, I'm gonna stop working at 5:15 no matter what, or when my kids get home, or when my spouse gets home, I'm gonna stop working put the laptop away and that's gonna be it for the day. Maybe you check in on email later at night or something like that, that's fine. But you've got to put that hard stop in place. Because when you do, you are going to magically start making better prioritization decisions. We know this, we've all experienced this where, you have to leave mid-day for a meeting, and you get incredible amounts of work done because you have that deadline that you're working toward. That deadline forces you to prioritize in ways that you're not forced to prioritize if you leave it open-ended.

If you're willing to stay late you will find that you often need to stay late. But if you hold yourself accountable for leaving when that hard-stop rolls around, you will have made much better decisions all day long. You will have gotten just as much done and as a bonus, you get to quit working earlier.

So give this a try. I wanna give you a six step action plan for getting more done and not working such long hours. First, you've gotta set that quitting time. You gotta decide when am I going to stop working for the day?

Second, of course you want to review your to-do list and your calendar and make your daily scorecard. So list what you need to get done, prioritize that list, give your points to the things that you need to get done, allocate 10 points of work for the day.

And then do the most important thing first, get those big rocks knocked out first so that you can

build that sense of momentum and have the most mental energy for tackling those big rocks.

Then throughout the day, you're always looking toward that hard stop. You're saying okay, the deadline is coming, I'm running up against this brick wall at the end of the day, I've got to get everything done so that I'm not still trying to clean things up after that point.

You reprioritize throughout the day, you adjust, you don't spend two hours checking email, you don't spend two hours of wordsmithing, something that you're working on to get it just right. You prioritize, you get it done. Good enough is good enough and you move on. And when you're out of time, you stop working. It's as simple as that.

So give it a try, pull out your journal and let's reflect on these two questions in writing in your journal. First, what time of day do you need to leave in order to avoid becoming inefficient or on the other hand of burning out, right? There are some good reasons other than efficiency to leave work or to stop working at a reasonable hour. What time of day works for you? Based on what's going on in your life right now? Second, when have you experienced working without a hard stop? You have no doubt experienced this when you continue working, you continue working. You should have gone home, but you don't. What was hard about that?

And what was helpful when you decided to put in a hard stop? So sometimes you will put in a hard stop or you'll have one that appears in your day, for you if you've have a meeting or a doctor's appointment. What's it like to work with a hard stop? What was difficult? What was helpful? Think about that for just a moment. And then I want you to commit to using a hard stop at the end of your workday. So when you filled out your journal for this section, you're ready to move on to the next section.

# Making Time For Informal Classroom Visits

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Let's talk now about how to make time for informal classroom visits. Now, if your school is currently operating face-to-face and you are able to physically get into classrooms, then in this section the advice that I give you should be applicable right away. If your school is virtual at the moment you may have to use this advice further out in the future. And in the next section, we'll talk about making time for those one-on-one phone calls that are the substitute for those face-to-face classroom observations.

So when you are able to get in the classrooms in person, how can you make time for those visits? How can you make it a consistent reality that you're getting into classrooms three times a day, every day? Everybody wants to do this as an instructional leader. Everybody believes that getting into classrooms matters, but often our conventional wisdom steers us wrong when it comes to how to actually set aside that time.

The conventional wisdom says that if something matters to you, if it's a priority, you should block off time and do first things first And just stick with that big block of time. Ideally, probably first thing in the morning or maybe you have an afternoon block, but most instructional leaders try to block off a huge block of time in the morning for getting into classrooms. And it looks something like this on the calendar, right?

You might say to yourself, okay, middle of the morning every day, I'm just going to get into classrooms. I'm not going to let anything interrupt me. I'm going to be consistent about that. And every day I'm just going to make time for instructional leadership. Well, assuming that that will work, that that will go off without a hitch, is kind of like planning a family road trip and saying, okay, the destination is 19 hours away so that we we can get there in 19 hours. No problem. Well, if you don't build in any time for pit stops and for lunch and for, you know, for all the things that slow you down on the journey to your destination, you're not going to get there when you think you will. And I hear from hundreds and hundreds of instructional leaders who've been trying for years to get into classrooms.

And one of the first problems that is slowing them down is that they're not being realistic about that giant block of time that they're carving out on their calendar. And that calendar block that, that preserved time on the calendar becomes a target for Murphy's Law, right? Murphy's Law is the old adage that says, if anything can go wrong, it will. And chances are, it will go wrong during your block for classroom visits that you've set aside on your calendar. That's when the fire department's gonna come. That's when an angry parents going to show up. That's when a meeting is going to get called and you're going to completely miss that block of time. Not just once in a while, but regularly, almost every day. You will face some sort of interruption to that supposedly sacrosanct block of time for classroom observations.

So we've got to assume that we're going to get interrupted because to plan not to get interrupted is to plan to fail. We have to know what is going to come our way. And if we're going to get into classrooms three times a day, we're going to have to build in some extra time slots to account for those likely interruptions. So we're going to set ourselves up for success in a way that builds in some resilience, right? So that if we do get interrupted, as we know we will, we can still make it into three classrooms a day. And typically that takes five or six different time slots, right? You don't

want just one big chunk of time. And then if anything happens during that time, well, that was your one time for the day, so the rest of the day is ruined when it comes to getting into classrooms, right? We don't want to take that kind of fragile approach. Instead, we want to set aside multiple short time slots. So we want to build in some redundancy so that if we don't make that first time slot, you know, we've got you know, four or five more to allow us to catch up.

And what we want to do as much as possible is we want to make those classroom visit times adjacent to times when we're already out of the office. Right? See, one of the things I don't like about allocating that huge block of uninterrupted time in the morning is if you have a huge block of uninterrupted time you should use that to get work done, right? If you have teacher evaluations to write and people will leave you alone for two hours, well, use that time. Do not interrupt yourself, just to get into classrooms. Instead, you want to take advantage of those natural breaks when you're already getting out of the office.

For example, if you're on your way to lunch duty, you can leave a few minutes early and visit a classroom on the way. If you're on your way back from lunch duty, you can stop by a couple of classrooms and get some observations or some walkthroughs done that way. So take advantage of those times when you're already out of your chair, you're already out of the office, people don't even know where you are, they can't flag you down and you can get some of those observations done very, very easily, much more easily than you would if you had to interrupt yourself while you're sitting at your desk, getting work done.

So build those in throughout the day. Build in more time slots that you need, but don't worry about scheduling individual specific teachers for specific time slots. Like don't go to your calendar and say, okay, at 11:15 I'm going to go see Mrs. Smith. If you do that, it's too much trouble. It's too much work. And what's going to happen is that Mrs. Smith, you know, Murphy's Law, it says that Mrs. Smith is not going to be available at 11:15. She's gonna be, you know in the office giving a test to a student or like there's going to be something that comes up. So don't plan it that tightly so that you have a specific time, you know, Friday morning I'm going to go see Mrs. Johnson, you know, like build in some flexibility for yourself.

So today all you need to know is when are your time slots and who needs to be seen today? And the best way to do that, that I have encountered is to keep track with note cards. So you need some information about when each teacher is available and what they're teaching at different times and you need to have some time set aside and then you can flexibly use two pieces of information to get into classrooms, as you need to.

So every day you take these note cards and these are available from our website or we can send you some if you would like, just let me know. And you want to take those note cards, keep a stack on your desk or have your secretary keep a stack of those note cards. And you want to take the top three cards. And those are the teachers that you were going to visit today.

You do not have to decide in advance what specific time you're going to visit that teacher. Build in some room for serendipity, but you're gonna look at that teacher schedule and say, okay, when is this person free? When can I stop by and see them? And what subjects have I already observed for that teacher? For example, if you're an elementary instructional leader you might have a kind of a minute by minute schedule written out for each teacher. 'Cause you know, you don't have periods. You have different subjects taught at all different odd times. And you want to be specific about,

you know, when that class is in the room and what they're typically doing at that time. And then when you visit you want to write down the date of your visit. So you can see by reading from nine to 10:00 AM. I had visits marked on September 4th and September 16th and I don't want to always visit during reading. So I might pick up that card on October 2nd and say, okay, it's time to visit Ms. Martinez again. And I know Ms. Martinez has lunch from 11:50 to 12:20 'cause that's on my card. I know that her prep time is from 1:30 to 2:10, so I can't go during that time. But I've already been by twice during reading and I've never seen any other subject, so instead of going at nine o'clock today, when I have some time marked off, I'm actually gonna make a point of coming later and seeing social studies. So if you swing by during social studies you can give your feedback, have your conversation and then write the date on the note card, documenting that you were there for social studies on October 2nd.

If you are a secondary instructional leader and you have a period schedule, you'll want to, you know, you don't need to worry about the times probably 'cause you have those memorized, but you'll want to note what the teacher teachers during each period and when their prep period is so that you can kind of rotate your visits in the same way, but you want to be flexible about this. You want to look at those cards in the morning, say, okay, who am I visiting today? What subject do I want to see? What time would work best? And then flexibly look at your time slots that you've allocated, knowing that you're going to get interrupted some of the time, you're not gonna be able to hit a hundred percent of those, but you still want to get around to those three teachers that day. When you do, you document that, you put that on the note card and then those note cards go back on the bottom of the stack. And you repeat the process tomorrow with the three cards on top of the stack.

And by taking cards off the top of the stack every day and putting them on the bottom after you observed those teachers, you will keep that consistent rotation. If you miss someone for whatever reason, maybe they're out sick today, put their card on top of the stack so that you try again tomorrow until you get to them. And then you keep up that same rotation from one cycle to the next. So that is how you can use the note cards to plan your visits flexibly, to build in some resilience and make sure that you get done what you need to every day.

Go ahead and pull out your journal and reflect on these two questions in writing now. First of all, how many time slots do you realistically need to make it in the classrooms three times a day? If you never get interrupted, three times might be enough. Most people need four or five, six time slots to make it into classrooms three times. If you are in very high demand, if people are constantly calling you because they need urgent things, you might need nine time slots. So just plan realistically for your situation.

Second, what are the best specific times for you to get into classrooms? Look at your schedule. Look at when you're already out of the office for duty or when you have a standing meetings, things like that. And actually mark those times for classroom visits on your calendar. When you've done that, you're ready to move on to the next section.

# Making Time For 1:1 Phone Conversations With Staff

Let's talk now about how to make time for one-to-one phone calls with your staff members. Now, of course, if you are in person right now, if you are able to get into classrooms physically if your school is open on campus for in-person learning, then absolutely just do your normal classroom walkthroughs.

Get into classrooms in person if you possibly can. But if your school is all virtual right now, if you're not able to get into classrooms physically or if maybe you're working from home for a while or you have teachers who are virtual, rather than try to do some sort of virtual observation or virtual walkthrough where you maybe comment on documents or join a Zoom class or some other type of, kind of drop in virtually, instead of doing that, I recommend that you simply pick up the phone and call teachers. And we're going to talk a little bit more about how to do that today and how to make time.

So again, this is a practice that is designed to substitute for those face-to-face classroom visits. And because it's a substitute, you want to keep the same rotation that you would if you were visiting a classroom in person. So that means if one particular teacher is say, quarantined, if they're at home teaching virtually, and everybody else is on campus including you, well then instead of leaving that teacher out completely because they're out, you simply pick up the phone and call them. And if we have some kind of chaotic changes between now and the end of the school year, then this will keep you in touch with each teacher, whether you're at home, whether they're at home, whether everybody's at home or whether you're all on campus. So simply switch back and forth as you need to between physical classroom walkthroughs and one-on-one phone calls.

Now, the scheduling is a little bit different though, because if you are not trying to drop in when classes are going on but instead trying to catch the teacher when they're free, there are some different scheduling considerations. And just as we said with, that kind of big block in the morning that you might be tempted to carve out. You know you don't want to necessarily interrupt a good work time for you or the teacher, you may want to actually have these phone calls at the end of the day, right? When a lot of the big work for the day is done, the teacher is no longer consumed with their teaching duties, and you may have less energy left at the end of the day for that phone call, but that's okay, right? This is just a time to connect and learn. This is not one of the more cognitively demanding things you need to do. You just need to listen. I do recommend that you still do this from your computer, like don't try to be walking around and running errands and things like that. You want to be able to give the teacher your full attention, so this could be one of the last things you do in the day. So the end of the day, it could be a great time.

Some other specific times, of course, we want to avoid those times when the teacher is teaching a live class. Obviously we don't want to interrupt. We don't want to call during dinner or bedtime or other family times. And we also don't want to impinge on that key at morning prep time. So if the teacher is about to start teaching in 15 minutes, we don't want to call it in because the teacher's going to be very distracted. You want to get people when they're somewhat free and able to speak freely because the goal here is to get information and to sustain relationships through those phone conversations. And you do want to use the phone again as we talked about earlier in this program it's this does not need to be a video call, just to pick up the phone. But we do want to plan very



carefully what we're going to ask about.

So back in module three where we went in depth on these one-on-one phone calls, we talked about having an agenda. And if you look in your module, three journal you'll find a page, you might wanna make several copies of this for planning your phone calls and deciding on the purpose, the information that you might need to convey to the teacher. Any questions you might need to ask to gather information from the teacher, especially around their reaction to things and three specific types of questions that you may wanna play, are connection questions, reaction questions and input questions. So make sure you have an agenda.

Don't just call to chit chat or people are gonna wonder why they're on the phone with you. You want to have a clear purpose and you want to be able to quickly move through your agenda so, you know when the call is over and so that the call accomplishes its goals. So again, substitute these phone calls whenever you can't get into classrooms in person, three a day is all it takes, you can plan them for lower energy times, they can be all at the end of the day, whenever teachers are free. The most important thing is consistency that you do it. You can keep track with those note cards, keep the stack of note cards with you, you know, bring them home if you're working from home and call three people a day. If you can get into classrooms, do but otherwise give them a call, stay connected and keep that pulse on how your staff is doing. That brings us to the end of module five.

So I wanna leave you with a couple of action challenges for this module before we move on. First, I wanna encourage you strongly to start using the daily scorecard tool to budget your mental energy. The daily scorecard is part of our planner which you can download from the resources section of our member dashboard, and that will take you through every single day. You can simply plan 10 points of work for the day and decide how to allocate your scarce mental energy to the work that most needs it and you can do that work first and make sure that you get those key tasks done.

Second, I wanna challenge you to start giving yourself a hard stop for the day. Don't say to yourself, well, I'm working from home, I can work any time or I can stay late, if I need to, I can just do whatever it takes to get it done, you will actually get more and better work done if you give yourself a deadline. So decide on a quitting time each day, say I'm gonna go home at this time or I'm gonna close the laptop at this time, that is my deadline. And you will make better prioritization decisions all day long as a result. And then finally continue visiting classrooms if you're able or making phone calls if you're not able to get into classrooms three times a day. So that over the course of the year, you're having 500 interactions with your staff one-on-one either in their classroom or on the phone.

Then it's time to pull out your journal and answer our final two journal questions for module five. First, do some thinking about your teacher's schedule and your schedule and make some notes about what the best times of day to make phone calls to teachers. And second, make some notes to yourself about what might be on your call agenda in the coming weeks. Now, if you only have to call a few people 'cause most people are in-person, then your agenda might be tailored to those specific people and kind of keeping them in the loop or you may wanna do a whole cycle of calls to your entire staff. And again, see module three for more details on this particular strategy. That's it for module five of the virtual instructional leadership challenge. Thanks so much for being a part of this program. I'm Justin Baeder, and I'll see you in module six.