

Why Teachers are Complete Psychos

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Ok, other teachers might not be completely psychotic.

But we're all flirting with it.

I, in particular, have noticed a steady decline in my sanity since I've begun teaching. I can't make friends the way I used to in high school or college. People I meet for the first time sometimes frown when I'm talking, or tip their heads to the side politely like my dog does when I talk to her through a cardboard tube. I talk to myself ALL THE TIME-- not just in the car like I used to before I started teaching. I can pretty much cry on command.

Why has this happened? My other friends who have begun their career paths have also reported an increase in stress levels since joining the "real world," but none of them are crazy. My mom raised three children (one being me, who spent my childhood doing things like drawing elaborate scenes on the underside of our couch cushions with Sharpies) and she's normal-- even nice. Barack Obama has a terrible job and he seems to keep it under control.

It's teaching, my friends.

Reason #1: We are tired.

Have you ever had to give a presentation for school or work?

Do you remember the preparation you had to do for the presentation? Creating a Powerpoint, doing research, making graphs, charts, handouts. You had to practice your presentation, think about what you would say, what order you would say it in, etcetera. You put hours of work into something that might take 30 or 45 minutes, tops. After you gave your presentation, how did you feel? Proud, right? But probably exhausted? In need of a stiff, celebratory drink?

Teachers give presentations for 8 hours a day. 5 days a week. And we plan these presentations or grade papers or fill out inane paperwork or answer hundreds of emails or meet with crazy parents for another 10-15 hours on top of that weekly. Yes, it gets easier with time and practice, but it never gets less tiring. In fact, the longer I've been teaching, the better and more elaborate my ideas get, and the more tired I am.

I'm not trying to get you to create a shrine to teachers in your home or feel sorry for us. (We know we're awesome enough on our own without other people's help.) I just want you to think twice before judging me for forgetting to undo my seatbelt before getting out of my car in the parking lot at the bank and almost



strangling myself.

We're tired, and being tired can make people crazy.

Reason #2: We are in complete control for 8 hours a day.

I think this is the main reason I'm psychotic.

After growing out of a frighteningly bossy childhood, I spent the latter part of my teenage years and my time in college being very complacent, warm, and receptive to others' ideas and concerns. You would have described me, for the most part, as "laid back." "Easy going." "Johnny-come-lately."* I was always totally fine with whatever the group wanted to do; more than willing to accommodate those around me.

"Heck yes I'll lend you my favorite shoes!"

"Oh, you're out of bagels? It's cool; I'll have the breakfast tacos. My other fave!"

"Oh, no worries about the loud music last night, neighbor-- I eventually fell asleep after awhile."

I am not "laid back" anymore.

First, you have to understand that I have created an environment, my classroom, in which I have complete control. Over EVERYTHING. Not only do my students behave impeccably this year, but they know how everything works-- from turning in homework (no wide ruled paper, proper heading, no hearts or abbreviations or emoticons) to asking questions ("Fellow classmate Raul, would you mind moving your head for one moment while I copy the notes on the board?" not "UGH I CAN'T SEE"; "I'm having trouble understanding," not "MISS I DON'T GET IT.") We even have a system where they ask to use the restroom silently. Everything operates in the most efficient way possible, which allows us to learn in the best way possible.

Then I leave school and enter the world, where I have no control.

It makes me sad.

What do you mean, 5th red light in a row?

What do you mean, "Sold out?"

What do you mean, sassy drugstore employee?

I am not simply annoyed by these things; I become livid. I find myself saying, "I just don't understand why _____." It's usually something to this effect: "I just don't understand why (I can't have my way)."

I have no idea why I'm still single!

(This reason also explains why teacher professional development days, particularly ones with old teachers present, are a joke. These teachers have been in control for 8 hours a day for YEARS-- God help the man or woman trying to tell them what to do or how to do it. It also explains why first-year teachers cannot

control a classroom. See any post from the 2010-2011 school year for proof.)

Reason #3: Our job is violently important.

(I'm on this kick of using "violently" as an adverb ever since I saw The Pioneer Woman use it to describe the movement of her back fat. That, my friends, is prose.)

Sometimes I think that America forgets that teachers fill young minds with knowledge. And if America does know that, I'm pretty sure they don't really get it.

It would be one thing if we were cranking out burgers or graphic tees or expense reports. We could meet up with our friends or go to concerts on weeknights. We could email our friends from our work computers, or take a long lunch, or maybe only put in 75% one day.

But we can't. We're creating scientists, writers, historians, Nobel Prize winners, moms, dads, farmers, executives, counselors and teachers. We're investing in our students, not as commodities to be shuffled through the conveyor belt, but as individuals with unique visions and gifts. Some of us are putting in 150% to make sure that these people will hopefully leave the world a little better than they found it.

That kind of effort and pressure would make anyone a raging lunatic.

But it's something worth being crazy about.

Love,

Teach

*Gotcha.