

## **Afterword: The self-talk of an awakened teacher**

How does all this advice fit together? What does it look like when applied to daily life in the classroom? Here are some examples of how you can use the *Awakened* principles to help you construct positive, resilient self-talk during various setbacks throughout the day:

### **5:30 am: Dreading having to get up and go to work**

*If I'm feeling a sense of dread, then I must have been thinking some negative thoughts about work. I don't have to pay attention to those thoughts or feelings! Today I'm going to act rather than react, have flexible expectations, and practice keeping a positive attitude. I'm setting my intent: I accept whatever comes my way and trust that I can handle it. Any challenges are just a chance to practice healthy mental and emotional habits. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to make a difference with my students. Every day is different, and I'm excited to see what things I can teach—and learn—today.*

**7:35: A colleague called in sick and there's no sub; eight of her students will be placed in your class**

*Hmm, okay. That throws a wrench in my plans, but at least the office told me before school started so I could have materials ready for them. I can choose to repeat my expectation that this should not be happening, or I can accept it and deal with it.*

**7:45: Parent calls and complains about something minor**

*The most important thing I can do is communicate to this parent that I care about her child's progress. This parent needs reassurance that I'm doing everything I can to support her child. I'm going to choose a compassionate tone of voice and be patient with her. I'm believing the best about her intentions. That's how I'd want my child's teacher to treat me.*

**8:00: Students burst into the classroom yelling and pushing**

*This is not the way I've trained students to treat each other or our learning environment. Rather than start my day by getting angry, I'm going to take a deep breath, and calmly ask them to go back out and come back in the way we've practiced. I'm not taking this as a personal affront; they were just wound up from the bus ride. My goal is not to punish, but to support them in learning appropriate behaviors. I can handle this calmly, and then smile and thank them for doing it the right way. This incident is not going to set the wrong tone for the day.*

**8:25: Seven students have not completed their homework**

*This is disappointing, but not unbelievable. It's irrational to think that all students should complete all their work 100% of the time. I can't even meet that standard myself—I watched T.V. last night instead of doing my lesson plans! So I'm not going to let this get me discouraged or irritated, and I won't make judgments about the kids' motives or anticipate problems with this in the future. I'm going to handle it and move on.*

**9:07: Classroom phone and intercom have buzzed six times during important test prep**

*Ugh, so annoying! Better not waste any MORE time by thinking about how much I hate interruptions. Otherwise I'll be terse with the next person who calls, and that's not fair to them. Back to the lesson!*

**9:45: Discover that a colleague has borrowed materials without permission**

*This is the third time she's done this. My choice is to be bitter about it or forgive her so I can have some peace of mind. I'll ask her not to do that again, but I won't rehearse or replay the conversation over and over. And I won't harbor any resentment or treat her differently, no matter how she responds. Why should I waste time trying to figure out why she acts the way she does, or complain about it to other teachers? The sooner I stop thinking about it, the sooner these feelings of irritation will go away.*

**10:15: Someone from the district does a surprise walk-through**

*I wasn't expecting that, and I would have liked the observer to arrive five minutes earlier when we were doing a hands-on activity with tech integration. Oh well, it's done now! I'm not going to panic and worry about what he thought. I know I'm doing my job to the best of my ability, and I'm proud of my efforts. My self-confidence doesn't come from what some guy in a suit says after spending two minutes in my classroom.*

**10:38: Student refuses to do any work, interrupts your instruction constantly, and gets an attitude when you correct him—AGAIN**

*I refuse to let this child's poor choices cause me to hate my job or assume my whole day is ruined. I'm not giving him that power. This is his reality as a result of his choices—I don't have to see that as a personal problem for me. I can choose to respond in calm, compassionate ways that help him exercise more self-control in the future. It won't be easy or fun, but I CAN, and I will! I have this kid for ten months out of my lifetime. I can deal with anything for ten months.*

**11:04: Paraprofessional is late to teach her small group**

*Since this happens a lot, I'm going to adjust and not let it throw my schedule off. I'm going to get the kids settled in their activity and train the group who's waiting for the para to read books together quietly until she arrives. Not worth getting upset or offended. I'm certainly not on time for everything, either.*

**11:45: Co-workers are complaining in the faculty lounge during lunch**

*I'm tuning out and then changing the subject as soon as I can find a good opening. There's no point in reinforcing those negative thoughts that I, too, have about students sometimes—I'll just be impatient with the kids all afternoon if I listen to this. Oh, here comes someone else, I'll start a new conversation with her! Perfect.*

**12:00 pm: Photocopier is jammed**

*Crap, now I won't have the papers I need for this afternoon's lesson! I'm tempted to over-generalize here and get into a rant about how I NEVER have the materials I need and nothing in this building EVER works, but I don't want to carry that stress with me. I can just smirk and shake my head—it's actually kind of comical how fast things break around here! I'm defusing my frustration by finding the humor in the situation, and I'm going to focus my attention on creating an alternate plan of action. Let's see, what can I do instead?*

**12:05: Discover that two students got in a fight during lunch and are down in the office**

*Well, that's disappointing. I'm glad it didn't happen under my watch, though, and the kids are already in the principal's office discussing it. I'll shut down any gossip among the rest of the class and get them focused on the warm-up. After school I'll talk to the principal. Until then, I'm not going to jump to any conclusions about who's at fault or speculate about what happened. I don't have to hold this issue in my mind or interpret it as a problem.*

**1:17: Working with a student who is just not "getting it"**

*I've tried everything I can think of with this kid—this is so frustrating! But if I get upset, then I've got two problems to deal with: his lack of understanding and my emotional reaction. It's unrealistic for me to expect all students to understand these concepts the first time I teach them. This child just needs more time and practice. It doesn't mean there's something wrong with him OR me.*

**2:20: Assistant principal stops by and asks to see you after school**

*No need to jump to conclusions and assume the worst here. She probably wants to fill me in on the fight in the cafeteria at lunch. I'm going to put this out of my head until it's time to deal with it. It's just not helpful or useful for me to expend any mental energy trying to figure out what she wants to talk about. I've got kids to teach! Back to work.*

**3:00: Boring, pointless committee meeting**

*There doesn't seem to be anything I can learn from this meeting. So maybe I can shift my focus to trying to help other people. Is there some advice I can contribute? Is there someone here that looks like they need encouragement? Might as well set my own purpose for the meeting so it's not a total waste!*

**4:00: Need to leave school to get to an appointment, but have so many things left to do**

*As much as I hate to leave now, I accept the fact that I've done everything I can do today. Rather than focus on all the things that I left undone, I'm going to walk out to my car and make a mental list of everything I accomplished: I talked to my assistant principal and everything is fine, I got my grades entered into the computer, I made a great connection with my new student during reading instruction, I helped Mr. Lamont troubleshoot his printer, we finally got started on the solar system project...oh, and I figured out how to help Marcus understand the difference between adjectives and adverbs! This was actually a very productive day! Let me see what other good things I can recall...*

**6:45: Eating dinner; worried about whether a particular student has anything to eat tonight**

*I can't control what's happening at students' homes, and upsetting myself about it only ruins my own meal—it doesn't make things better for the kids. I have alerted the guidance counselor and made sure the family service worker is checking in on the kids regularly. That's my part, and I did it. In this moment, the only thing I need to do is be present with my own family and enjoy the meal we're sharing. That way I won't be worn down and emotionally drained tomorrow when I'm with my students again.*

**8:20: Feeling resentful about having to grade papers**

*I really don't want to be doing this right now. But there's no law of life that guarantees I only get to do fun things in my evenings. Though I don't like it, I accept that teaching is not a 7-3 job. It will be easier to get this grading done if I don't repeat to myself how much I hate it and wish I didn't have to do it. Tomorrow I think I'll grade papers during my prep time and then the work I take home will be the more enjoyable task of testing out our next science experiment.*

**10:45: Tired but not ready to go to bed; worrying about a parent conference in the morning**

*I don't feel like going to bed now, but I'm going to choose not to live by my feelings. The wisest course of action is to get a good night's rest so I'll be fresh in the morning. I don't know how the conference is going to go, but I trust that I'll say and do the right thing when the time comes. I've written down my key points so I can let it go for right now. The only thing I need to do is relax, rest, and eat a healthy breakfast in the morning. I have faith that my inner wisdom will surface when I need it. Whatever happens tomorrow, I know I'll be able to handle it!*