

SERENA PARISER  
EDWARD F. DEROCHE

# REAL TALK

ABOUT TIME MANAGEMENT

35 Best Practices for  
EDUCATORS



# Thank you

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INTEREST IN  
CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Real Talk About Time Management*. This resource will help teachers organize their classroom.

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## Organize and Unclutter

*Teachers refuse to throw anything out because it might be useful in forty-seven years for that one art project.*

*—Jill Jackson, teacher and educational consultant*

[Ed] Serena and I were having coffee with a couple teachers we know, and we mentioned that we were working on Serena's second book on the topic of time management for teachers. We told them we were writing a section on how to unclutter your classroom. One of our friends asked if we had ever watched the Netflix series *Tidying Up With Marie Kondo*. Kondo is also the author of the best-selling book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. "You should start there," our friend told us.

Everybody seems to want to declutter their lives. Let's take a look at decluttering our classrooms. Kondo stresses that a person should consider every item in their home (or, in our case, their classroom). Organize by category. Forget nostalgia. Purge. Sentiment is not practical. Determine what is useful. Kondo's organizing philosophy is so effective that she was listed as one of *Time Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People of 2015. The KonMari method of organizing is based on categories:

- ▶ Clothing
- ▶ Books
- ▶ Papers
- ▶ Komono (miscellaneous items)
- ▶ Sentimental items

In many ways, your classroom is your one-room home with a bunch of kids running around it. We recommend that you use the following categories to organize your classroom:

- ▶ Your desk area: You need this area to be functional because this is where a lot of the magic happens. It is where you keep passes, student information, timers, confidential papers, etc. Start saving boxes to organize loose items inside of drawers. This will create a sense of visual peace when you look for something in your desk.
- ▶ Student desks
- ▶ Books

Photo 9.1



Source: eurobanks/iStock.com

- ▶ Stacks of papers: If your school has a scanner, perhaps you or a student can create an e-file so you have digital files of important papers rather than stacks of hard copies.
- ▶ Miscellaneous: Your students need a classroom that is organized, safe, clean, and easy to get around. Your classroom should be a pleasant and orderly place with uncluttered workspaces—a space that students will care about and take pride in.

[Ed] I remember a seventh-grade teacher, Barbara, whose classroom looked like a zoo. She saved everything. She was a classic hoarder. Near the end of the school year, other teachers would visit Barbara's room and negotiate with her about their supply needs. She sold off her supplies, charging them less than what they would pay in a store. This was the only time she decluttered her classroom each year.

Heather Wolpert-Gawron, author and teacher, wrote in her 2019 article about optimal learning environments that “the classroom environment is vital, and recent reports show that our rooms can have too much of a good thing. Posters, for example, might make a room feel inviting or engaging, but having too many can distract students.” This advice is especially important if you teach cohort classes (classes with a high number of students with individualized education programs, or IEPs).

Here are a few ideas to declutter your classroom:

- ▶ First, take a breath, close your eyes, and ask yourself, “What would I like my classroom to look like?”
- ▶ Then, look around and ask yourself, “Why am I keeping this?” Do this after school, before school, or during your prep. It's best to do it when the students aren't around.
- ▶ Dedicate ten minutes twice a week (e.g., ten minutes every Tuesday and Thursday). Set a timer if you need that scaffold.
- ▶ Start with a section of your classroom.
- ▶ Papers usually account for a lot of classroom clutter.
- ▶ Use boxes to handle students' papers.

- ▶ Use boxes that are labeled (e.g., *units, lesson plans*).
- ▶ Involve students in your decluttering efforts.
- ▶ Spend some time visualizing what you want your classroom to look like.
- ▶ Donate the giveaways. Maybe one person on your teaching team can deliver the donations to a charity once per semester.
- ▶ Don't forget your desk drawers.
- ▶ Create a feedback box.

Here's an idea: Do the 4 × 4 Challenge! Every fourth week of each month, see if you can find items to throw away, recycle, relocate, or donate. Mark it on your calendar or, even better, schedule the activity with another teacher and hold each other accountable!

Allow yourself to have a designated place for clutter, out of student eyesight. This could be a filing cabinet, a closet, and so forth.

[Serena] In my office there's a tall filing cabinet that I just shove things into. It keeps clutter from other areas. People often think it's full of files. Nope—every drawer has stuff in it that doesn't have a home. The stuff ranges from extra sweaters in case I am chilly to a pair of running shoes to safety pins. I know where the stuff is, and it keeps my office looking neat and tidy and keeps me mentally organized. It works for me. The bottom line is that if you create an uncluttered and organized classroom, you will be a better teacher for your students.

We encourage you to ask yourself these questions when going through your things:

- ▶ Is this out of date? No longer of importance? The most recent copy?
- ▶ Do I have time to read/do something with this? How long have I told myself I would do something with it?
- ▶ Is there another resource if I get rid of this and need to revisit it later?
- ▶ What is the worst thing that would happen if I tossed this?
- ▶ Am I keeping this because I spent a lot of money on it? Am I getting any value out of it if it's not being used?

Perhaps you can have a student keep an eye on a part of the room to help you. For example, Skylar knows to straighten out the textbooks if they are a bit off, or Aiko knows to fix the poster if it comes down again. Remember, your students can take an active role in helping maintain their learning environment.

## Your Turn

1. Ask other teachers how they handle the clutter in their classrooms. We recommend you ask the teachers who don't have much (if any) clutter.
2. What ideas can you share about minimizing classroom clutter?
3. How can reducing classroom clutter help you become a more efficient teacher and also help your students learn more?