



Avoiding Burnout

by Amy Allibon

I am excited to have another student teacher this semester from TCU, my alma mater. Those of you who have mentored a student teacher can understand the satisfaction of helping someone spread his or her wings in the choral classroom. I know that his eight short weeks assisting and teaching my students will help him get his feet wet in the proverbial pool of teaching. I worry about this generation of teachers, though, and for good reason. In April of 2011, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) released the report, “Workplaces That Support High-Performing Teaching and Learning: Insights From Generation Y Teachers.” The report states:

“Gen Y teachers—that is, those under 30 years of age—account for at least one in five teachers in US classrooms today. They start out intending to make teaching a lifelong profession. However, according to the report, young teachers leave the profession at a rate 51 percent higher than older teachers and transfer to a different school at a rate 91 percent higher than their older colleagues. Studies also show that the national teacher-turnover rate costs school districts approximately \$7 billion annually.”

What is causing this burnout in our young teachers? In his book *Beyond Burnout*, Cary Cherniss uses intensive case study research to identify factors most likely to lead to teacher burnout:

1. **Lack of adequate preparation** for dealing with the kinds of learning and behavior problems that teachers face in the classroom.
2. **Lack of autonomy.** Teachers think of themselves as professionals, and resent interference from administrators, parents, board members, and legislators who usually have little idea about what it is like to teach today.
3. **Difficult student behavior.** Students who lack the ability and/or motivation to learn what the teacher is trying to teach them make it impossible for teachers to achieve that sense of accomplishment that is so important for any professional.
4. **Lack of support and interpersonal conflict.** Teaching can be a lonely profession. Lack of opportunity to engage in meaningful exchanges of ideas with other teachers contributes to burnout, as does conflict with parents, administrators, and students.
5. **Boredom.** Many teachers find that after a year or two in the classroom, each day is very much like the next, and there are few opportunities for doing new and interesting things.

I would add to Cherniss’ list of reasons for burnout the hours we work as choral educators. The myth that teaching is an 8:00-3:30 profession still exists in the minds of many, but any teacher, music or otherwise, will tell you about the hours of work that begin once the students are gone for the day. A 12-hour day is typical, and then the OTHER work day begins – lesson planning, music selection, and keeping up with the business end of our programs. On his second day, my student teacher said as we left the building at 6:00 pm, “So you basically live here.” I did not have the heart to tell him that I was excited to leave BY 6:00 pm!

How do we combat this generation of choral music educators leaving the profession? Experts who have studied this issue write that we must, “offer them the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues; provide support for new teachers that includes ongoing observation of, interaction with, and advice from experienced colleagues; collective teacher responsibility for student achievement; and increasing opportunities for professional growth. (Williams, “Combating Teacher Burnout,” 2011)

TCDA provides a community of support that young teachers need. How many of us connected to more experienced choral music educators through TCDA, and thereby received an entire education through their experience and wisdom? TCDA provides the supportive community we all need to remain purposeful and fresh in our mission. If you have a new elementary, middle school, or high school music teacher in your school district, please encourage them to join TCDA and attend our summer conference. Extend an invitation to all in your district who may not know about the power of being connected with one another through TCDA. Help TCDA find the non-members and hook them into what we already know about the benefits of TCDA membership.