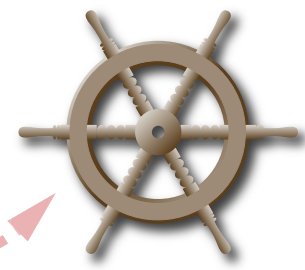


Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Transitioning to the NEW YOU!

By Betty-Jean Aucoin, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

“There are moments that mark your life, moments when you realize nothing will ever be the same, and time is divided into two parts.

‘Before this and after this.’

When a moment comes,

*You either do the right thing
or the wrong thing.*

— Joshua Naylor

Once or twice in everyone’s life we have an experience we call a ‘life changing’ moment. In that moment, we often make life-changing decisions. These decisions inherently involve a change in our actions and our life. Such a moment happened collectively for the NSTU membership this year.

Before this; there were many moments within our teachers’ journey which brought them to a point of no return. Throughout the first two months of the 2016-2017 school year, I had the opportunity to visit many schools. During these visits I saw many teachers tired, exhausted, and frustrated. What was different? Why was I seeing this happening in all Boards, in all areas of the province? It may have been many years of additional workload being dropped at the doors of schools and classrooms without anything being removed. It could have been the increase of mental health issues without additional supports or resources, or one of the many stories teachers recounted at Law Amendments.

On Monday, December 5 public school NSTU members began a work-to-rule job action. The legal strike directed teachers to perform the duties of a teacher as outlined in the TPA, minus a few contractual items such as meetings. The just over two months of work-to-rule brought many light bulb moments, moments when members realized they had time to teach, develop relationships with students and staff, eat lunch without disruption, be home to cook a healthy supper, take up walking, be a present mother, father, spouse and so much more. Veteran teachers were reminded of the past when students were valued as more than data. Mid-career teachers were able to balance professional life with personal life. New teachers were shocked to realize many of the expectations placed upon them were not contractual. These light bulb moments caused teachers to pause and reflect on the number of hours given above and beyond their professional responsibilities. It also gave an opportunity to find their voice.

After voting no to the third tentative agreement, the life changing moment happened. That moment took place on a cold Friday, February 17, 2017 when the Nova Scotia Teachers Union participated in its first strike. Ninety-three hundred public school teachers left their classrooms schools and offices to strike for better classroom conditions and fair bargaining. During this strike, their NSTU colleagues from APSEA and Community College, students, parents and others supported them. Teachers walked for their students, for public education and for their profession.

After this; on Wednesday, February 22, the NSTU members woke up to an imposed legislated contract. NSTU members lost their right to negotiate a contract in good faith. With this imposed contract, many conversations took place discussing the *New Normal*. How will teachers move forward having experienced a momentous WTR, Strike, and Legislated Contract?

Lest we forget. It is human nature to return to what we have always done. Over the years, all of the additions became normalized and accepted. After all of this you can either do the right thing or the wrong thing. To support teachers in framing their new normal, I developed a workshop for members in transitioning to the ‘New You’. I veered away from the concept of New Normal. What is normal for me as an educator may not be for someone else.

This workshop supports participants within the three areas of their lives they experience every day: structured professional, unstructured professional and personal life. In the session, teachers come to an understanding of the difference between contractual and non-contractual responsibilities. Finally, they learn new strategies in moving forward, transitioning to a life of balance that respects and values them.

Who cares? Should you? This 2016-2017 school year taught us that we could neither ignore nor hoard time. It also showed us that we cannot rely on others to honour our profession and our rights. Every moment offers us the opportunity to do the right or wrong thing. My wish is that teachers take time this summer to reflect on the past year and make choices of how they will proceed next year in support of their students and themselves.



Credit: Bryghton Towns