Teaching For Success

The Curriculum of Success: Part 3
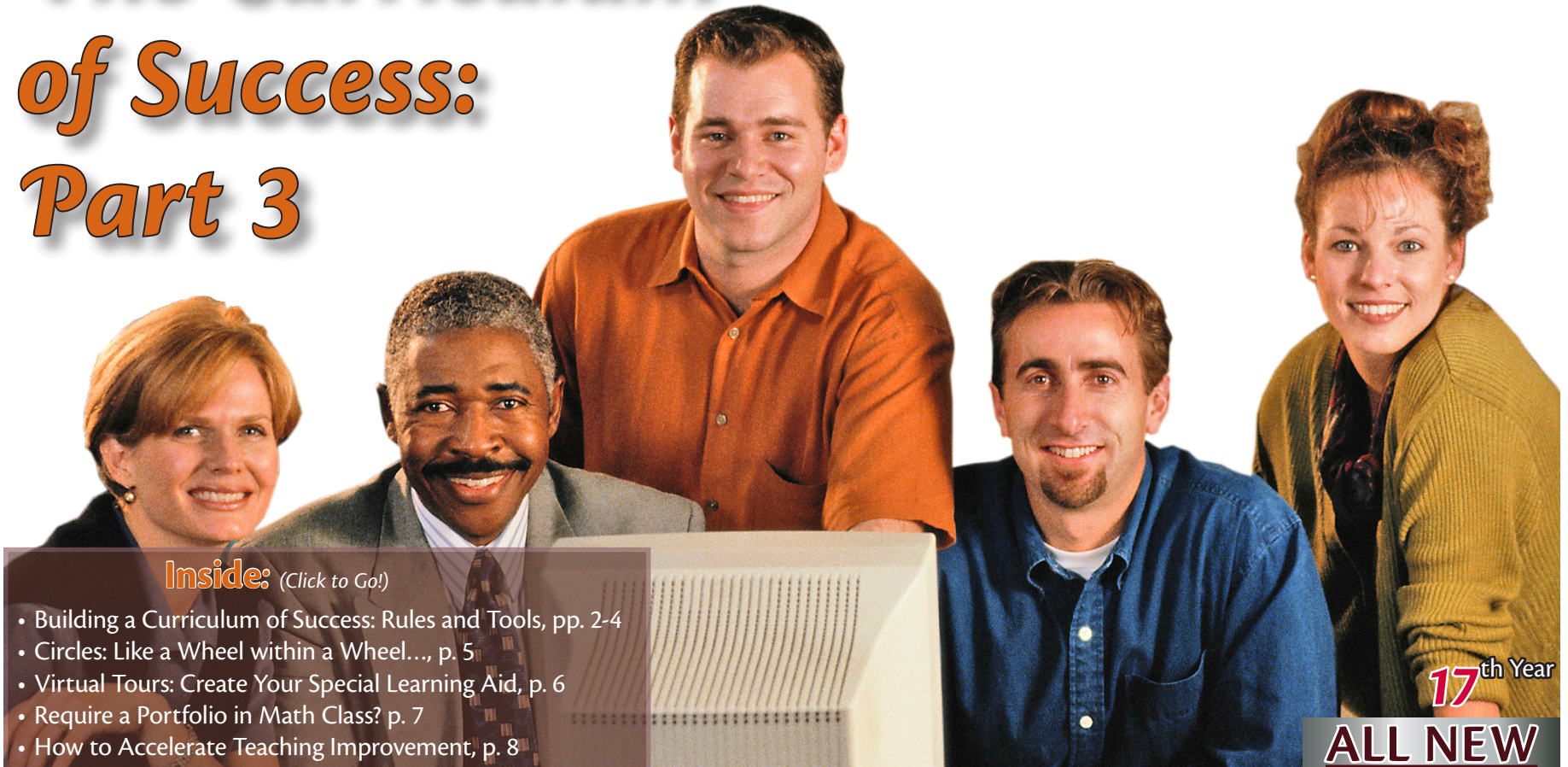
17th Year

ALL NEW

Building a Curriculum of Success: Rules and Tools

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Rules and Tools is the third course in the Teaching For Success Curriculum of Success. This three-part series describes a curriculum designed to help you improve your teaching and identify appropriate success ideas that you can pass on to your students and use in your personal and professional life.

To review, this curriculum consists of:

❑ Success 101: Principles and Foundations
❑ Success 102: Strategies and Applications
❑ Success 103: Tools and Rules

Principles and Foundations was delineated in the February 2005 *TFS* issue and *Strategies and Applications* was outlined in the March 2005 *TFS* issue.

As with the previous two courses, space limits our presentation to the highlights of this body of knowledge. A complete investigation of all these aspects of success would take many volumes; however, there are significant benefits to even a brief inquiry.

In this third course, I have included success rules and tools with which I have personal experience, and I can attest to their effectiveness and value in teaching and in making my way through the intricacies of personal relationships and business operations.

Rule: Examine Your Philosophy First

Success begins with a realistic philosophy of life. If you're not pleased with where you are or with the results you have been getting from any aspect of teaching or living, the first rule is to examine your philosophy.

The philosophy of life you adopt ultimately controls your choices and thus the outcomes you achieve. The core aspect of a personal operating philosophy can be examined by asking, "Who or what is to blame when something turns out not to my liking?"

A philosophy of success would advise, "The buck stops here"—in other words, it's your responsibility to change something internally or externally in order to bring about an improved situation. A philosophy of failure deludes one into casting a wide net of blame over everyone and everything except oneself.

Rule: Build a Successful Self-Image

To build more success into your life, rely on the **Self-Talk** tool or the **Internal Dialogue Improver**. Have you ever monitored your internal dialogue for an extended period of time, perhaps even for an entire day?

For example, one time I had to give a public speech after not having done it for a while; I was a bit anxious, even though I was looking forward to the opportunity to present my teaching-for-success ideas to the audience.

Beginning two weeks before the event, I made sure that my self-talk included such messages as, "I love to speak in public," and, "I'm an excellent speaker." I made these statements to myself more than twenty-five times a day, and it worked. My anxiety level decreased, I enjoyed speaking, and I received praise for a job well done.

To build more success into your life, rely on the Self-Talk or the Internal-Dialogue-Improver tool. Have you ever monitored your internal dialogue for an extended period of time?

To be most effective, self-talk messages should be positive, specific, and in the present tense. Don't say, "I want to be a successful speaker." Say, "**I am** a successful speaker."

Another tool to use to program yourself for success is **Desired Outcome Visualization**. When preparing for a speech, I also make an extended effort to visualize myself speaking, and enjoying the activity. I imagine seeing an appreciative, attentive audience smiling back at me, thoroughly enjoying what I am saying.

Try **Positive Visualization** of outcomes before any stressful situation: sales, teaching, test taking, job interviews, or performing in front of a audience. I've also experimented with making a voice-over classical music tape to communicate goals to my subconscious mind.

These tapes are simple to create. Write a list of goals, again being positive, specific, and in the present tense. Speak this list slowly while playing a recording of relaxing classical, soft jazz, or other music in the background. Record both your goal statements and the music to an audio cassette or CD. Once made, play this recording to yourself. The best time is right before going to sleep or upon arising in the morning.

These tools work because they use the principle of learning by repetition. Commercials use it to get us to buy. But, why not use it to achieve our own goals?

Building a Curriculum of Success: Rules and Tools

Automatic Improvement Tools

To steadily move forward in mastery of your teaching skills, or your personal life, you need to put improvement on automatic pilot. There are several excellent tools that will do just that. First, there is the **Task Completion Question Couplet Tool**. This consists of a simple couplet of questions that you ask after you complete a project, class session, assignment, life task, year-end evaluation, etc.

First, ask, "What did I do right?" Brainstorm as many responses to this question as you feel are appropriate to the situation. Follow this query with, "What can I do better next time?" Again note as many responses as you can generate. Then, make a plan to carry out the steps that will help you do it better next time.

This question couplet, regularly applied, will fuel a continuous improvement process within your own life and profession. Teach it to your students for their benefit too. Next, hone the **Zero-Based Thinking** Tool. Sometimes we keep doing something simply because it has become a habit. However, the original conditions that spawned the action and made it sensible may have long ago changed or disappeared. Now, the same actions make little or no sense, yet we keep on keeping on.

The Zero-Based Thinking Tool requires periodic reevaluation to ensure the reasons for a specific course of action are still valid. For example, a course of study, like so many other things, tends to pick up more and more bits and pieces of content, such that over time it bloats beyond what is possible to learn within the time allotted. The success-oriented instructor will periodically question the continued relevance and necessity for each topic and unit. Academic courses need an occasional zero-based spring cleaning too.

Problem Tools

I often discover the existence of a particular personal or business problem that I can't seem to solve easily. The solutions that first come to mind don't engender a great deal of confidence that they will produce the desired change or solution. In this case, I activate one of the **Special Problem** Tools.

My favorite such tool is the **Twenty Solutions** List. This tool is, hands down, the best and simplest problem-solving method I've ever used. All you need to employ this system is a pencil, note pad, and the ability to concentrate your thinking.

Would you like to give it a try? At the top of the note pad, write a problem you are currently trying to solve. Now, write twenty possible solutions underneath the problem you have just listed. Don't stop or give up until you have written the twentieth solution. Creating at least twenty solutions is very important to getting the most benefit from this tool.

Every time I use this venerable system, I'm amazed at two things: how difficult it can be to write twenty thoughtful solutions, and how often a very good or even great solution will turn up somewhere in the list.

Twenty solutions is not a magic number; however, it causes us to really stretch our thinking to include creative solutions that are not at first obvious and therefore may be just the idea that is needed.

Next, hone the Zero-Based Thinking tool. Sometimes we keep doing something simply because it is a habit. However, the original conditions that spawned the action may have long ago changed or disappeared.

The GOSPA Tool

The **GOSPA** system, used in business operations, is a bit more complex but yields beneficial results when a solution to a major problem has been identified but not yet implemented.

When using this five-step tool, begin by writing the **Goals** necessary to implement the solution. Next, form a list of steps or **Objectives** that are required to reach the goal. Follow the objective list with a description of your **Strategies** that take into account your strengths and weaknesses and the best path to reach the goal.

Now make **Plans** to implement the objectives and strategies; you should include some contingencies just in case things don't go quite as planned.

Lastly, define specific **Action** steps, assign responsibility for their accomplishment, and determine deadlines for completion of these actions.

The **GOSPA** goal-achievement system is applicable to teaching and learning goals as well as personal ones. Just modify the system to suit your needs.

The 80-20 Rule

If you have not yet become familiar with the powerful 80-20 rule and how to apply it to as many situations as possible, do it now.

TFS **Critical Success Factors** of Good Teaching:
- Leadership
- Management
- Instructional Design
- Communications
- Evaluation

TFS **PIE-R³ Instructional Model**:
- Prepare
- Input
- Explore
- Retain
- Reconfirm
- Reflect

Building a Curriculum of Success: Rules and Tools

The **80-20** rule can give you guidance when the problem is determining which one of a list of possible action steps will result in the highest payoff in terms of time and effort.

Applied to teaching, this rule predicts that 20 percent of learning activities will produce 80 percent of student learning. Or, applied to life in general, it says that 20 percent of the things you do every day will result in 80 percent of the outcomes you experience. And in a business, 20 percent of customers will produce 80 percent of sales, and so on.

This rule rescues us from the sense of impossibility and defeat that comes from being burdened with too much to do. If you develop such a negative attitude, stop and use the 80-20 rule to focus on the most important goals or tasks to complete. Then, you can reduce effort on the 80 percent that is left that will not be as influential in getting what you want.

Incidentally, this rule, in spirit, even applies to weight loss and exercise, where the first 5 to 10 percent of total weight lost or the first twenty or so minutes of exercise can bring a significantly higher percentage of health benefits than what follows.

Rule of Large Numbers

Basically, this rule says that the more things you try, the more successful you will be. Or, philosophically, the more you give to life, the more you will receive back for your efforts.

Rule of Cycles

Everything has its cycle—its peaks and valleys. Success often means choosing to live below the tumult of the waves that disturb the surface. By living deeper down, you reside in calmer waters that are not disturbed by every storm that happens to blow by.

Learning to use the tools of **Meditation, Reflection, and Perseverance** help one to live in the calmer waters. Knowing your purpose in life and reaffirming your chosen path can give you the power to decide not to become emotionally involved in every up and down cycle and to stay on your uniquely personal path of success.

The Tool of Discipline

One of the simplest yet most powerful success tools is the development of **PID, Positive Internal Discipline**. This concept is not foreign to academics, as the study of a particular body of knowledge is commonly referred to as a discipline.

Discipline as it applies to success has been described as actions that are goal-achieving rather than tension-relieving. Further, discipline means having the ability to think about and focus on the long term for the long term.

Earning a degree, writing a book, or improving a course takes concentrated effort over an extended period of time, and it takes personal discipline to stick with it.

Posteriority Rule

In life, it's far easier to add something than to subtract something. Consider a college course, a lifestyle, or the tax code—they keep on growing in size and complexity unless an equal amount is deleted.

Therefore, posteriorities must be set along with priorities. Practically, this means if you are going to add a unit of study or several new learning activities to a time-constrained course, either the rate of delivery must be increased or a like amount of material must be removed. If neither event happens, the change will make success less likely instead of more likely, and unintended outcomes will result.

These rules and tools have all worked for me time and time again, and I pass them on to you with full confidence in their value. Even basic knowledge of the discipline of success can turn the dispirited, low-GPA student into one who successfully sets and reaches his or her academic goals with your help along the way.

Circles: Like a Wheel within a Wheel

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I'm not sure if it has to do with my month-long bicycle trip and my speedy changes of flat tires and bent spokes, or if it's my rich baritone voice heard ringing through the hallways, singing:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
Circumference is equal to two pi r.

But this I know, I can teach circles, and definitions, areas, and circumferences are explained and easily grasped by my students. I also know, strangely enough, that as soon as I cut the circle in half, mount it on a square, rectangle or triangle and then talk about perimeter and area, students are lost.

What makes me feel even more inadequate as a teacher is that this confusion always follows my logical, multistep explanations. For years I would dread this chapter in our college pre-algebra course. I knew I had to do something new, so I made my explanations more visual, more detailed, and then more concise, with the same results.

I guessed I was doing something wrong when one of the students, Jeanette, asked me how to find the perimeter of a doorway with a semicircle arch above it and I found myself getting frustrated and angry with her. I went home, reviewed my presentation, then came back the next day with a similar but shorter presentation and a review that hopefully would help reteach this concept for part of the period.

This was a first, since previously I had followed the department syllabus and allowed only one class for

these concepts. To my surprise the results mirrored the previous day. Jeanette's questions were different, but the result was the same. She was unable to solve the problem by herself.

On the third day, my determination weakened. I still set aside five to ten minutes to review these problems, but I was ready to chalk up doorways with arches and ice cream cones (triangles with semicircles representing ice cream) as "Mission: Impossible." Luckily I had a few successes and my determination was renewed. Unfortunately, although Jeanette asked different questions, she still couldn't do the problem by herself.

The next day (day 4), as was becoming my tradition, I devoted some time to ice cream cones and arched doorways. I put up a problem on the board, waited, and roamed the class. I didn't see Jeanette's regularly raised hand, so I went over to see how she was doing. "Ted, why didn't you tell me it was so easy?" as she shoved her paper with the correct answer in front of me. I was speechless.

I didn't know why this day was different from any of the three previous days. "That's wonderful," I said, almost drowned out by the class's applause. It seems that the whole class was celebrating not only Jeanette's victory, but also their own.

I had discovered a few things. First, when complex concepts aren't grasped the first time, it's my responsibility to review until the concept

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is understood. Students know the value of repetition. Why was I so slow to catch on? Secondly, I realized that what's obvious to me isn't always obvious to everyone else in the class.

Putting myself in the other person's shoes seems mandatory for understanding when students have problems. Finally, even though all this seems so simple, when I'm caught up in the war between covering the department's syllabus and helping students understand the material, I forget about the value of repetition and review. ✴

What's Your Opinion?

Reader Comments and Feedback Needed!

*W*hat has *TFS* done for you this academic year? Did one particular idea stand out above the rest? Which ideas helped you the most? Do you have a teaching improvement story to share? What are the toughest teaching challenges you face?

What has *TFS* done right? What should *TFS* do better? Sharing your opinion would help us give you a better *TFS* next academic year. Where should *TFS* be going next?

Please, e-mail your thoughts, opinions, comments, and stories to: Jack Shrawder, jack@teachingforsuccess.com, or Penny Shrawder at penny@teachingforsuccess.com. Your responses are very important and appreciated! We will see you in August with more great *TFS* improvement ideas. ✴

Virtual Tours: Create Your Own Special Learning Aid

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*D*esign the Virtual Tour as if students were on a tour. Include a description of how events, items, or places observed relate to class concepts.

*A*s an associate professor, my classes meet after regular business hours. In criminal justice, it's sometimes difficult to demonstrate concepts unless the student is actually observing some criminal justice function in progress.

As such, I require my Court Function students to observe an hour of court proceedings and write a response paper regarding what they observed. However, many of my students work full time and cannot take time off to observe court.

There are no local night court sessions to which to devote class time. As a result, some students settle for watching Court TV. In addition, students who observe court may not be able to catch a trial in progress. These logistical issues result in varied and often less-than-desirable experiences for my students.

I pondered how can I ensure that all my students experience the same meaningful, high-quality, real-life experiences to which to apply concepts learned in class and expand their experiences and knowledge beyond that available through local resources.

The Virtual Tour

The answer is what I call Virtual Tours. I created my first Virtual Tour using photographs from my own tour of Alcatraz. I scanned the photographs into my computer, created a slide presentation, and added music. When I presented this in class, I narrated the presentation to relate what students were seeing on the screen to what had been discussed in class. Voila! The Virtual Tour was created. Now, when I am in a class discussing prisons, my students are able to "experience" Alcatraz. Although the topic of this Virtual Tour is criminal justice, Virtual Tours are nearly unlimited as far as what can be presented. One of my coworkers liked using the idea in her Medical Terminology course.

To develop your own Virtual Tour: Develop a list of places and events useful for students to observe; obtain written permission from these entities to use visual and/or audio equipment to record the location or event. Next, develop a lesson plan to correlate the tour or observation with class objectives. Design the Virtual Tour as if students were on a tour. Include a description of how events, items, or places observed relate to class concepts.

Also, include a question-and-answer session using questions typically asked by students. (You may want to poll your students to develop a list of desired questions.) If the event or location is local, coordinate with your college's media specialist to assist with production. If it is distant, you may be able to use your college's media equipment. If not, be sure your personal equipment is adequate. Also, coordinate the tour or observation with the site host, utilizing the visual and/or audio equipment.

Next, merge the recorded tour or observation into a presentation for use in the classroom. Your Virtual Tour has just been created! Finally, make two copies (on disc) of your Virtual Tour. Keep the original—it's your work. Give a copy to your division chairperson, so your fellow instructors can sign it out and use it in their classes. Place a copy on reserve in the library so students who miss a class do not miss the Virtual Tour. Show the Virtual Tour in class or assign it as an out-of-class assignment as appropriate to correspond with class concepts.

A Virtual Tour ensures a consistent and high-quality experience for students; it brings the outside world, beyond local resources, into the classroom. ✷

Mastermind Group Forms
An Opportunity to Make a Difference.

*T*FS is looking for a small group of individuals who are passionate about improving teaching and learning in higher education and would like to help *TFS* continue to improve, expand, and more effectively serve the needs of part- and full-time faculty. Mastermind members interface directly with Jack Shrawder, the publisher and editor of *TFS*, via phone and/or e-mail. Please call Jack at 800-757-1183 for more information. ✷

Require a Portfolio in Math Class?

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Preservice elementary teachers must take a two-semester course, Fundamentals of Mathematics I and II, at my college. The second course includes the concepts of geometry, probability, and statistics. Students are often familiar with many of the topics covered, so I had to find a way to make the material meaningful to them as prospective teachers.

I chose to focus on the geometry topics of planar and spatial figures. Each student was tasked to create a "Geometry Portfolio" by selecting ten different planar figures and ten different spatial figures using the following criteria.

For each figure, you must:

❑ Identify the figure by its mathematical name.

❑ State the mathematical definition.

❑ List all of its identifying characteristics. List all commonly used formulas, i.e., area, perimeter, volume, etc.

❑ Construct the figure and label dimensions (variables used in formulas).

❑ Find a picture (photos, Internet, magazines, etc.) demonstrating how it is used in the real world.

Students are asked to be creative in their presentation of the material in their portfolios, including an organization device and a cover that exhibits the purpose of the portfolio.

Finally, students are asked to keep a journal of their escapades in creating the portfolio. This journal is summarized at the end of the project and submitted in the back of the portfolio. This written evaluation could include: the strategies used in creating the portfolio, discoveries made during the project's development, the value of this activity, and how it may be used in their future as a teacher. This gives the students an opportunity to reflect upon their work.

I have used this activity for four years in this course. Each semester, students refer to this activity as one of the most challenging, yet most helpful activities they have completed. They say they can actually see how they can use it in their future classrooms as a resource. Some have even said they would like it to be an activity that they do with their own students—of course, after they adapt it to the needs of their own curriculum.

This activity gives me an opportunity to talk with my students about geometry in a unique way. Students use various styles of learning to create a useful and meaningful portfolio. Each student becomes an owner of the information that they actively collect and organize.

I am always surprised to hear them say that when they travel somewhere, even to and from school, they see shapes everywhere. They surmise those figures have always been there, they just haven't really seen them before; until this activity was assigned to them, they had not had a reason to look for them. Their families and friends even got into the act by pointing out figures while driving the car, taking photos, etc. This activity provided both my students and me with a wealth of information that will be with us forever.

Example

Here's an example of a Geometry Portfolio entry for a planar or 2D figure. (See figure 1.)

Name: Square

Definition: A square is a rectangle with four congruent sides, "s".

Characteristics:

❑ A planar, 2D figure composed of four sides, "s" all of equal length.

❑ Consists of a simple closed curve.

❑ Is a polygon.

❑ Has four right angles.

❑ The diagonals are congruent.

Formulas:

❑ Area, $A=s^2$

❑ Perimeter, $P=4s$

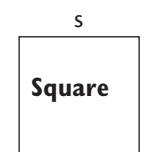Real life examples: chessboard, floor tile, fence post cross sections.

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s

| **Square** | s |

figure 1.

TFS **Critical Success Factors** of Good Teaching:
•Leadership
•Management
•Instructional Design
•Communications
•Evaluation

The Return of QuickQuestions

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One of the most popular features of the past ten years in *TFS Idea Monthly* has been QuickQuestions. In this feature, questions are posed to faculty by the *TFS* QQ editor, Becky Schantz. (To participate, contact Becky at rschantz@prairiestate.edu.)

Ms. Shantz selects the best responses to each question and compiles a list covering the range of ideas offered to be published each month. QQs may have just the idea you need, when you need it.

This feature is popular because questions are pertinent to everyday teaching and learning challenges and responses are practical and to the point. With QQs you see many excellent tips in just a few minutes when browsing your *TFS Idea* Monthly issue.

Super Idea Contest Winners

Look for the six winning Super Ideas and QuickTips selected from entries to this spring's Super Idea Contest, to be published in the August through October issues next fall. These top-notch teaching and learning improvement ideas are likely to be found nowhere else.

To ensure that you will receive these terrific issues, please urge your department head, teaching and learning center coordinator, instructional dean, or VP of academic affairs to renew or order *TFS* for your college. Appreciative comments to these folks about the value of *TFS* are essential to keeping *TFS* available or you and your colleagues next academic year.

How to Accelerate Teaching Improvement

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Now you can accelerate teaching and learning improvement by making use of all three TFS resources, especially the brand new **QuickCourses** and *The Solutionary*. The seventh in an ongoing series of QuickCourses has just been published.

What is a QuickCourse? It's an easy-to-use-and-apply set of ideas on a specific instructional task or skill that deserves a more in-depth presentation than can be given in the pages of *Teaching For Success Idea Monthly*. QuickCourses are self-study resources that can be browsed on your computer anytime, 24/7. Or you can print a QuickCourse file in color or inexpensive black and white and use it as you would a booklet or a loose sheet document in a three-ring binder.

The QCs currently available are:
- ❑ Ensuring Quality Testing
- ❑ Positive Classroom Discipline
- ❑ Creating Active Lectures
- ❑ Making Small-Group Learning Work
- ❑ Planning a Successful Lesson
- ❑ Constructing an A+ syllabus
- ❑ Harassment in the Academic Setting

More are in the works, and they will soon be added to this growing course library. About 25 percent of TFS-subscribing institutions currently have also purchased QuickCourses; therefore, ask your administrator about the availability of QuickCourses at your institution.

*A*re you experiencing teaching challenges such as attendance, fair grading, testing, effective assignments, and active learning? Depend on *TFS* for practical answers.

A second new resource is *The Solutionary*. It's an eight-year compendium of the best ideas ever published in *Teaching For Success Idea Monthly*. What is it good for? When you are preparing for a class you can search for a unique way to make learning more authentic and active. When you experience a teaching challenge such as attendance, fair grading, testing, effective assignments and term projects, *The Solutionary* can give you many terrific ideas from its store of more than 500 pages of tips, recommendations, suggestions, and examples.

If you are assigned a new instructor to mentor, *The Solutionary* is a perfect source of information on all the major teaching tasks that you can share and discuss. Or you may need instructional design or management ideas for a seminar or a conference presentation. In each case, you'll find *The Solutionary* to be a treasure trove of valuable ideas.

The Solutionary is a very new resource, so you may wish to ask your institution to purchase a copy of *The Solutionary* for you and your colleagues.

By using all the TFS resources, you can benefit from access to a full range of SuperIdeas, QuickTips, and QuickCourses. By combining the information from all these resources, you will accelerate your professional growth. Finally, add to these sources the concept of **Critical Success Factors** and the **PIE-R³ Instructional Model**, and you'll be a double winner.

TFS **PIE-R³ Instructional Model**:
•Prepare
•Input
•Explore
•Retain
•Reconfirm
•Reflect

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