

Rebel Writers: An Introduction - Year Two

This column idea took shape due to USC's English Department seeking a way to promote writing both in the school district and the community. We also wanted to find another way that connects the two entities. Once a month there will be a USC "Staff" writer, not always English, followed by a "Student" writer the week after (hopefully multiple times a month). The messages are meant to be positive while giving some insight into the daily "happenings" of a very busy place: school. This is also a great opportunity for young, aspiring writers to get published and to use the published work on academic resumes as they pursue life after high school.

As readers, feel free to send "positive" feedback via email if you were struck by the message in some meaningful way: rrouth@unitedsouthcentral.org. I will share that message with the writer. Writers and readers are meant to interact with each other and hopefully it sparks that desire. Finally, thank you to Nicole and Heather for helping with this process.

Thanks for taking this journey with us - USC Rebel Writers.

Robert Routh
English teacher - USC
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Raining Happiness

As the school year returned, I remember entering my classroom and noting how clean and organized it was. I remember standing in the doorway for a moment just taking it in. In a week or so students would return casting the classroom in chaos once again. Upon that thought, a smile creased and the "Oh, it's about to begin and I better get prepared" morphed to "I can't wait to get ready." This mindset change is a learned behavior that I continually have to practice - see an obstacle and find a way to seek growth from it.

After that moment of switching mindsets, I walked to the desk and noted a small card on it. It was a card I left from the preceding summer from a senior student as school closed. The custodians, who clean every classroom with such impressive care and detail, thoughtfully (or accidentally) left that card laying neatly in the center. There were several nice moments written, but the one remembered, "Saying Hi to you in the morning always makes my day." Early in my tenure at USC I made a promise to greet students by name with a smile and "Good Morning." My nature is one of Grover the Grouch - that trash can residing green minion on Sesame Street - but by greeting others happily my mindset changes as much as the students. These moments add so much to me and many students I interact with daily - happiness becomes reciprocal - even if unnoticed that greeting changes us.

Dollhouse expert (see what I did here - dolls = happiness), Vivian Greene, exemplifies finding and experiencing the happiness mindset, "Life's not about waiting for the storm to pass . . . It's about learning to dance in the rain." The active choice to seek happiness is hard but ultimately is a choice. How we perceive our emotional context often extends into how we interact with others. I challenge you, even when a storm is raging and life's challenges become pressing, to peer upwards and greet the storm with fondness for all the good it brings. The subtle act of thanking challenges makes a massive difference. We only grow from challenges and struggles, not from the things that we already do well. Life is much easier when we smile at those challenges.

As a wrestling coach, one of the pieces of advice I gave my wrestlers just prior to doing a "black flag" workout (as much a mentally taxing workout as physical - I never let them know how long or what I was going to do to create misery) was to EMBRACE THE SUCK. The black flag workout was going to suck, by telling the wrestlers to "embrace" it - or even smile while doing - made it easier to cope. And when the athlete was on the wrestling mat in difficult moments, these black flag opportunities and monikers such as Embrace the Suck helped navigate and often overcome momentary difficulties.

Finally, one of the key strategies of finding happiness through life's challenges comes from Mark Manson's *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F@ck*. If you want to read something sarcastic but enlightening, this is the one. In it, one of the key messages by Manson can be summarized with the following: The key to a healthy lifestyle is simply getting after our problems - taking ownership and improving is how a happy lifestyle

improves and continues. First, own the problem, then apply happiness to the struggle. So how do we gain that mindset? Start with greeting others in the morning. When a storm is raging, thank it for its potential growth FOR you. When life truly gets challenging, verbalize something like "Embrace the Suck." By verbalizing something so ridiculous forces a smile "raining happiness" on what was crushing only moments before.

It is going to be a great school year. I hope you enjoy Rebel Writers. Like last year, other staff and students will hopefully answer the call to write and share with you, the reader, how we view school and life. Please, if you enjoy future messages, email me at rrouth@unitedsouthcentral.org and I will share those messages with the writer.