

THE ART OF BEING A

BRILLIANT
★
★ PRIMARY
TEACHER ★



ANDY COPE AND STUART SPENDLOW



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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword by Sharon Gray</i>	<i>iii</i>
1 Rough and Tumble	1
2 The Customer is Always Right	19
3 Happiness Habits	39
4 Marvellous Mondays	65
5 The Google Factor	89
6 Oz Takes Centre Stage	107
7 'Books' and 'Covers'	119
8 An Apple for Teacher?	139
9 The Good Old Days	157
<i>Postscript</i>	<i>181</i>
<i>About the authors</i>	<i>185</i>

Chapter 1

ROUGH AND TUMBLE

We have the most wonderful job in the world. We find people in various stages of sleep. And then we get to tap them on the shoulder and be with them as they wake up to the magnificence of life.

Syd Banks

In a Nutshell

In a short, sharp opening we introduce reality, remind you why you're exhausted and explain why we're not going to give you anything to do. We attempt to win you over by explaining who we are and why you should stick with us when, quite clearly, you have a zillion other things you could be doing with your time. We mention goose-liver pâté, the hokey-cokey and cricket, none of which are likely to be your thing, but we're confident you will get the

wider points. We hint at one of the universal laws of humanity and, while we can't promise you more sex on a school night, we dare to hint at the mere possibility that this book could be the solution. So, for the moment, we urge you to forget about 'Ofsted outstanding' and concentrate on 'myself outstanding'. Away we go ...

Hands up if you're in a state of near-permanent exhaustion. Do you attend too many twilight meetings and have too much marking? And, honestly, although you adore most of the children, are there a few that you don't really like? Do your non-teaching friends think your job is easy? Do they drone on and on about a 3.30 p.m. finish and fourteen weeks' holiday? Or, if they aren't saying it to your face, are you imagining they're saying it behind your back? Do you know how many weeks and days there are until the next half-term? Is your favourite thing to be tucked up in bed at 9 p.m.? *Asleep*. Hands up if you have forgotten the last time you had sex on a school night.

But darling it's a School night



Thought so! Welcome to the world of the primary teacher, inhabited by six or seven week bursts of full-on effort, interspersed with periods of slightly less full-on effort called 'holidays'.

The fact that you're reading this sentence is a fairly good indicator that you're already a primary teacher and you've already clocked that it's physically and emotionally exhausting. In fact, let us rephrase that. If you're doing your job *properly* we'd expect you to be exhausted. You're exhausted because teaching is full-on. And it's full-on because you care. And *brilliant* primary teachers genuinely care, with a passion, because they understand the importance of what they do. Brilliant teachers therefore give their all in the relentless quest to educate and inspire. Sadly, there are a few in our great

profession who care slightly less. They do their best to cover the syllabus but it's all a bit mechanical. They're ordinary teachers. Their classrooms experience less magic, less imagination and the tap of inspiration is dripping instead of gushing.

Furthermore, we have more than a sneaking suspicion that it's only the very best teachers who will be reading this book. That's not a sycophantic nod to our readers, it's a genuine likelihood. We believe it's only the very best teachers who are genuinely interested in personal development. Every teacher gets force-fed a smidgeon of personal development, foie gras style, via INSET days. But to do it in your own time, under your own steam? What teacher in their right mind would put 'reading a book about teaching' on their to-do list? They'd have to be one of two things: complete nutters or genuinely interested in being world class.

So, which camp do you fall into because, ideally, we'd like you to have a foot in both. We don't want you to be absolutely barking but being a teeny bit bonkers is an important attribute for a primary teacher (more on that later). And you have to *want* to be brilliant. What we mean by this is that we can't want it for you. When you started teaching you will have been given some sort of job description which you filed away and never looked at again. In fact, it's

probably a good thing that you never looked at it because it's a big long list of just about everything. Now, we don't want you throwing this book away in disgust (at least give it till half-way) but the next two very short sentences might seem a little irritating.

We want you to go above your job description. And to go above it with gusto and enthusiasm.

No, no, hang on! Don't get angry. Don't swear, effing and blinding that 'I already do more than I should' or 'I already work umpteen hours an effing day'. We know you do! If we were going to sum this book up, we'd say it's much less about your to-do list. So, while we do want to challenge some of your current customs and practices, and maybe get you to do things a little differently, the emphasis is on what we call your *to-be* list. And we promise, as a primary school teacher, your *to-be* list is everything. Your *to-be* list dares you to point the finger back at yourself and ask, who am I being while I'm doing those things on my list? Am I being world class? Am I full of life, joy and unbridled enthusiasm, or am I being ground down by parents' evenings or having to squeeze more performance out of the pupil premium kids?



The refreshing reality is that we're not going to give you any more stuff to do. Phew! You will be delighted to know that we're on your side - we reckon you're already doing more than your fair share. The painful truth is that we're going to challenge who you're *being*. If you let that sink in for a moment you will realise it's a 'yikes' moment. Because this doesn't merely challenge your working hours but your home life too. We think the crazy world of teaching has converted too many of us from 'human beings' into 'human doings', where your burgeoning to-do list has become so overwhelming that you might have forgotten who you are. In a spooky conspiracy

of the laws of the universe, when you're being your best self a lot of your to-do list just sorts itself out.

But (whisper this carefully because if you say it out loud it might scare you) being your best self is a lot bigger than your career. It is also the key to living a brilliant life.

We've distilled each chapter down to a few top tips, but we're not going to provide you with endless resources, lesson ideas or even an accompanying CD-ROM to fulfil your digital needs. This book is not even very long (we've designed it to be read in one half-term sitting) and it doesn't beat around the bush in an attempt to make subtle points. And while we're on the subject of what this book isn't about, it's not going to tell you how to be an Ofsted graded 'outstanding' teacher or give you a list of criteria for you to tick off until you reach that immortal state. It's not even going to mention the word 'outstanding' any more because that's a label that can be so easily removed during a single twenty minute observation (actually, we do say it a few more times but hope nobody notices).

If being a brilliant primary teacher was about to-do lists and checking off criteria, we'd have a generation of generic super-teachers who were transforming children into insanely well-rounded individuals capable of giving any

established genius a run for their money. We'd need no one else to enter the profession (at least for a few decades) and there would be no need for training in education. A simple A4 chart (which, in true teacher complication style, would be enlarged to A3 for easier use of a highlighter pen) would reveal all the tricks of the trade. Problem solved. Ta daa! Brilliant primary teachers everywhere and no one moaning. Yeah right!

We're guessing you're sick to death of change and that being asked to 'think outside the box' causes you to grind your teeth. So, in a bizarre twist of retro thinking, we're going to challenge you to think 'inside the box' by providing some anecdotes and snippets that we hope will make our points in a slightly different way. And guess what? They're in boxes. We hope these thinking activities might cause some sort of reaction - a chuckle, contemplation or maybe even a groan. Most are very short but here's your first one and it's of the slightly longer variety.

In a Nutshell

It was past midnight and the man was on his hands and knees, searching frantically beneath a streetlight. A couple sauntered around the corner. 'What are you looking for?' asked the woman, getting down and helping with the search.

'I've dropped my keys,' said the man.

'Where did you drop them?' asked the woman.

'In the long grass in the dark, about half a mile away,' replied the man, feeling with one hand and pointing with the other.

'Then why are you looking here?' asked the woman.

'Because the light's better,' replied the man.

An adaptation of an ancient Sufi story that highlights the common problem of looking for solutions in easy places but not necessarily the right places

So what is this book actually going to do?

With regards to the story above, we want to point you to the right places. If we had a strapline it might be something like 'stop trying to be perfect and start being remarkable'. *The Art of Being a Brilliant Primary Teacher* will remind you of what a brilliant and capable teacher you already are when you've nailed your to-be list. Yes, you! Jab a finger into your chest. We mean you at your best - you are awesome! Miraculous, in fact. Sometimes! And then Lucas kicks off, or a snotty parent gives you some grief, or Chardonnay falls asleep in maths and you're blown off course. This book is going to remind you how to have more and more of those good days. It's grounded in pure realism, often provocative, sometimes reassuring and it's self-challenging in that, when combined with a little bravery and risk taking, it will refresh your teaching until retirement day.

So, here is something refreshing right away: brilliant teaching isn't about meeting standards, nailing observations and marking every single piece of work on the day it's produced. It's about moulding what is already there into something unapologetically brilliant. Grow, challenge and inspire your way to being a brilliant primary teacher - grab this book every now and then as a reference point and push yourself in the right direction. In fact, hurl yourself in that direction because, not only will you love it, but you will be the very best that you can be.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE SECRETS OF BEING A BRILLIANT PRIMARY TEACHER, READ ON ...

Andy Cope and Stuart Spendlow have more than a sneaking suspicion that it's only the very best teachers who will be picking up this book. That's not a sycophantic nod to you, it's a genuine likelihood. Andy and Stuart believe it's only the very best teachers who are genuinely interested in personal development. What teacher in their right mind would put 'reading a book about teaching' on their to-do list? They'd have to be one of two things: complete nutters or genuinely interested in being world class. Either way, this book is for you, and it's not your typical reading about teaching fodder.

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A BRILLIANT BOOK FOR PRIMARY TEACHERS

"I have always believed that education should be about living, learning and laughing. That's why I love this book. Andy and Stuart will have you doing all three, brilliantly!"

Richard Gerver, speaker, author, broadcaster

"This book will warm the hearts of the best teachers, it will stir those requiring improvement, challenge the ordinary and probably defeat the inadequate."

**John Pearce, Lead Facilitator,
National College for Teaching & Leadership**



Andy Cope



Stuart Spendlow



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