

# 12 SUGGESTIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ESL CAREER

By Rob Jenkins / February 2019

There are many facets of the ESL profession. The most common and perhaps the most rewarding is teaching. Those who have the desire to help people will find this experience one of the most rewarding. It isn't about making a lot of money or gaining great prestige, rather it is about being part of something that allows them to open doors for people with a need to communicate and progress in an ever-changing and evermore complicated society.

Those who decide to pursue this experience can choose to be part of the community of teachers who come to work every day and who strive to make a difference in a personal way within the classroom or they can choose to be leaders. Full-time faculty are often hired because they have decided to lead out and make a difference on not just a classroom level, but in a larger way. There is a great deal of competition at the full-time level. The following will help you identify ways you can stand out if you elect to pursue teaching and the profession as a career. Of course, if you want to teach part-time only, the opportunities are much more accessible. Some have created for themselves something similar to a full-time job by working part-time at several institutions at the same time. However, such an approach can be exhausting and hardly leaves time to lead in the field, not to mention the almost certain absence of benefits, long-term contracts, and office space.

The suggestions below will not ensure a full-time position, but will certainly get you closer to being considered. After over 20 years of watching individuals and mentoring many, I have concluded that these ideas will be of great use. A growth mindset and an unquenchable spirit will lead to success.

## **STRATEGIES FOR GETTING A FULL-TIME ESL TEACHING POSITION**

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1. Remember, you cannot reach your potential alone.
2. Build a knowledge base and vision; never stop learning. In other words, cultivate a growth mindset.
3. Build a resume by padding it with intentional experiences and courses.
4. Get into the classroom as soon as you can. Take the extra time that it takes to be exceptional.
5. Love what you do! Your students are always the first priority. Love them and make them the center of all decisions.
6. Get experience in *different* facets of ESL education, and choose one or two areas where you can become an expert. Then make yourself indispensable.

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN ANY ESL TEACHING POSITION INCLUDES ALL OF THE ABOVE PLUS:**

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7. Vision, passion, and enthusiasm will get you the job, but they must be bridled to reach success in the job. If you have been hired as a leader, lead; don't merely manage or maintain.
8. Nurture critical thinking and objectivity. They are required skills for success; however, don't expect all faculty and administrators to actually practice them.
9. Persistence means that you don't give up on ideas and your vision, but are willing to strategically present them again and again even over years if necessary until you have the support and the resources to implement and achieve success.
10. Be willing to work hard for what you believe in even if some think you are wrong or simply refuse to understand your vision.
11. Be humble! Be willing to adapt your ideas and change either for strategic reasons and compromise or because there are better ideas that come from others.
12. Enjoy the profession. It is the best act of service you can provide and is the most fulfilling occupation you will ever find.

*For detailed explanations, please see the following pages.*

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## GETTING A FULL-TIME ESL TEACHING POSITION INCLUDES ALL OF THE ABOVE PLUS:

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1. Remember, you cannot reach your potential alone.
  - a. In graduate classes, form or be part of study groups.
  - b. Find a mentor who is successful in the profession.
  - c. Be part of a community of practice or professional learning community.
2. Build a knowledge base and vision; never stop learning. In other words, cultivate a growth mindset.
  - a. As you learn, develop a vision of what good education is and what good classroom practice means to you. Adapt the vision as you learn more.
  - b. Apply what you have learned in course work. Don't be afraid to try new things and give yourself time to really get good at them.
  - c. Learn about the field through conferences, communities of practices, online research, and through mentors. For example, learn about legislation, standards, and online resources and trainings.
  - d. Observe classes of experienced instructors and ask questions!
3. Build a resume by padding it with intentional experiences and courses.
  - a. Seek opportunities that will enhance your resume even if it costs money like taking specific trainings online.
  - b. Seek help from a mentor to create an appropriate and eye-catching resume.
4. Get into the classroom as soon as you can. Take the extra time that it takes to be exceptional.
  - a. Create lesson plans every day. Sketch out the entire term ahead of time, but be flexible.
  - b. Keep a teacher journal.
  - c. Experiment with new ideas and apply what you have been learning. Use classroom research to validate effective practices.
  - d. Do all required tasks.
  - e. Care!
5. Love what you do! Your students are always the first priority. Love them and make them the center of all decisions.
  - a. Think of your job as service.
  - b. Get to know your students through learner-centered instruction.
  - c. Care!
6. Get experience in *different* facets of ESL education, and choose one or two areas where you can become an expert. Then make yourself indispensable.
  - a. Learn about how the department works at institutions where you work.
  - b. Learn about and participate in the curriculum process if possible.
  - c. Learn about and participate in assessment discussions and implementation.
  - d. Learn about and participate in professional development.
  - e. Offer to give workshops (Do them with your mentor or colleague if you would be more comfortable at first.).
  - f. Learn about state legislation and standards. What are the institutions doing about these areas? For example in adult education, these might include CCRS, ELPS, CB21, WIOA, IELCE, IET, SLO's and CAP.
  - g. Learn about and get involved in discussions about classroom resources, textbooks, and OERs.
  - h. Learn about and practice the use of classroom technology and the implementation of digital literacy instruction.
  - i. Learn about and get involved in research and data collection.
  - j. Volunteer to do everything you can in these areas.

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## **SUCCESS IN ANY ESL TEACHING POSITION:**

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7. Vision, passion, and enthusiasm will get you the job, but they must be bridled to reach success in the job. If you have been hired as a leader, lead; don't merely manage or maintain.
  - a. Your vision will come through in the interview. Stay true to yourself and don't say what you think others want to hear if you don't believe it.
  - b. Once in the job, be mindful that some in your department may have fixed mindsets and not respond favorably to new ideas at first. Don't be afraid to share ideas, but accept the expertise of colleagues and patiently wait for your time.
  - c. Look for colleagues who support objective professional discussions and seek after more mentors and a diversity of ideas.
  
8. Nurture critical thinking and objectivity. Critical thinking and objectivity are required skills for success; however, don't expect all faculty and administrators to actually practice them.
  - a. First cultivate critical thinking in yourself. Suspend judgment about ideas and processes until you have all the information. Don't attempt to change people or their minds about something they have been doing the same way for years without having all the facts and clear ideas or remedies. Even then have patience. Pick your battles!
  - b. Be mindful that some or all will not understand a new idea or see its application because of a fixed mindset, or simply because they have trouble being objective.
  - c. Look for colleagues who support objective professional discussions and seek after more mentors and a diversity of ideas. Always be positive. Avoid all negativity!
  - d. The federal government, the state, or your school leadership might impose initiatives that are vague or don't make sense to you. Be sure not to dismiss them out of hand and find the silver lining. Make them work, find hidden value, and identify the intent as much as you can.
  
9. Persistence means that you don't give up on ideas and your vision, but are willing to strategically present them again and again even over years if necessary until you have the support and the resources to implement and achieve success.
  - a. Don't expect to have your ideas accepted the first time you present them. Ask for support, but if you don't get it, wait until you can get it. You may choose to do it on your own if permitted and are willing to take on the task alone.
  - b. Think of various ways to present new ideas including presentations, pilots, research, department meetings, through mentors, etc. Always be positive. Avoid all negativity!
  
10. Be willing to work hard for what you believe in even if some think you are wrong or simply refuse to understand your vision.
  - a. Embrace and don't resent extra hours. Sometimes your passion will be your only support. To make a difference, you may need to put in extra hours that you are not paid for.
  - b. Look for networking opportunities with counselors, other department leaders, and other colleagues.
  - c. Keep accurate data and tout successes through reports, newsletters, articles, and apply to receive awards for your efforts. Seek for awards for your achievements or programs you may have developed and not for yourself.

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11. Be humble! Be willing to adapt your ideas and change either for strategic reasons and compromise or because there are better ideas that come from others.
  - a. Don't allow rejection to stifle your creativity and vision, but recognize that there are others who can help you refine your ideas and in the process of getting help, you have allies.
  - b. Don't seek after praise. Your body of work, will speak for itself after years of service. Give credit to all involved.
  - c. Recognize that even the least experienced novice teacher can have amazing and productive ideas and a fresh perspective.
12. Enjoy the profession. It is the best act of service you can provide and is the most fulfilling occupation you will ever find.

## My Vision and Smart Goals



# My Journal #1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Reasearch Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson Topic: \_\_\_\_\_



Briefly and broadly summarize the classroom activities:

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Things I did well:

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Things I want to work on in the future:

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Other Concerns:

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Positive and Negative Trends:

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# What I Can Say Instead

Instead of saying...	Try saying...
I can't do this.	<i>Example:</i> I need help understanding this.
This is too hard.	<i>Example:</i> It'll take me some time to get this.
I give up.	
I tried and it didn't work.	
It's good enough.	
I'm just not good at this.	
I'm just not going to get this.	
It's not going to work anyway.	
I'll never be as smart as my friend.	
This is as good as it's going to get.	
<i>Add other fixed mindset phrases you use.</i>	