

Find Your Marigold: The One Essential Rule for New Teachers (excerpt)- Jennifer Gonzalez

Welcome to your first year of teaching. This year will test you more intensely than just about anything you've done up to now. It will deplete all your energy, bring you to tears, and make you question every talent or skill you thought you had. But all these tests, if you approach them the right way, will leave you better and stronger than you are today.

Advice is available everywhere you look, and some of it is very good. Still, with everything you have to do right now, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of it all. And the fact is, a lot of those tips won't work very well if you fail to follow this one essential rule:

Surround yourself with good people.

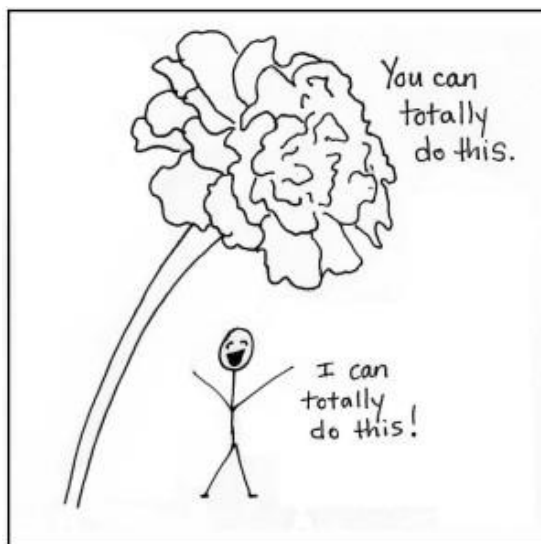
By finding the positive, supportive, energetic teachers in your school and sticking close to them, you can improve your job satisfaction more than with any other strategy. And your chances of excelling in this field will skyrocket. Just like a young seedling growing in a garden, thriving in your first year depends largely on who you plant yourself next to.

The Marigold Effect

Many experienced gardeners follow a concept called *companion planting*: placing certain vegetables and plants near each other to improve growth for one or both plants. For example, rose growers plant garlic near their roses because it repels bugs and prevents fungal diseases. Among companion plants, the marigold is one of the best: It protects a wide variety of plants from pests and harmful weeds. If you plant a marigold beside most any garden vegetable, that vegetable will grow big and strong and healthy, protected and encouraged by its marigold.

Marigolds exist in our schools as well – encouraging, supporting and nurturing growing teachers on their way to maturity. If you can find at least one marigold in your school and stay close to them, you will grow. Find more than one and you will positively thrive.

Few teachers will be lucky enough to be planted close to a marigold – being assigned to one as a mentor, co-teacher, or team leader will be rare. You will have to seek them out. You can identify them by the way they congratulate you on arrival, rather than asking why anyone would want this godforsaken job. Or by the way their offers to help sound sincere. Or just by how you feel when you're with them: Are you calmer, more hopeful? Excited to get started on a teaching task? Comfortable asking questions, even the stupid ones? If you feel good around this person, chances are they have some marigold qualities.



Once you've identified your marigolds, make an effort to spend time with them. Having a hard day? Go to your marigolds. Not understanding how to operate the grade reporting system? Go to your marigolds. Confused by something the principal said at the faculty meeting? Marigolds. They may be on the other side of the building, out of your grade or subject area, or otherwise less convenient to reach than others. If your school is especially toxic, you might have to find your marigolds in another school, or even online. Make the effort. It's worth the trouble.