

# Fighting Against February

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During my very first year of teaching way back in 1987 (yes, we had school back then), I learned more in that year than in any single year before or after that. I learned teaching is a wonderfully difficult challenging field. I learned I really liked working with high school aged students. I learned it is a REALLY good idea to preview a video tape BEFORE showing it to a group of sophomores (Maybe I'll write about that fiasco some other time.) And, I learned having our first child during our first year of teaching (my wife is also an educator) might NOT have been the smartest idea... HOWEVER, chief amongst the lessons I learned that first year, though, was the fact that February – the shortest month in the year according to the calendar – was, in fact, the LONGEST month of the year, or at least it seemed like it was...

By the time February rolls around in the school year, we have all been sharing the same space and breathing the same air for the better part of six and a half months. Winter is deep into its third or fourth or fifth month, depending on the year, bringing with it grey skies and cold, wet weather, and we are pretty much all cooped up together as it just isn't nice enough to go frolicking through the wheat fields (yes, yes, I am a great frolicker). And, frankly, the “newness” of the semester and definitely the school year has gone the way of the Dodo. And, what probably makes it worse is there are hints of spring right around the corner. It was all of that that culminated in my mind that I couldn't believe the days of February were seemingly each taking three weeks to pass.

I can honestly tell you that I simply survived that first February of my teaching career, and I only held on like I did due to the excellent guidance I received from Mr. Leatherman, a fellow teacher who had been involved with teaching for around twenty-five years at that point in time. It's not that Mr. Leatherman said any ONE magnificent and inspiring thing to me about hanging in there or pushing your way through challenges. Rather, it was his role modeling of clocking in EVERY day and providing the students with the best educational experiences they deserved. Basically, I learned by watching him that attitude is EVERYTHING, and if we are to expect our students to be locked in and doing their very best, we, as the leaders of the classrooms, need to set the tone.

I have to admit during that first year of teaching I didn't really understand what I was learning about perseverance and maintaining a positive attitude, not deeply. But, I DO remember thinking how February eventually came to an end and how it really wasn't as

daunting as I thought it had been. I attribute that realization to the fact I adopted Mr. Leatherman's ways and reminded myself what drew me into teaching in the first place – the joy of being involved with others as we all learn and grow together. That mindset made all the difference in the world to me.

From that humble beginning of making it through February, a deeply held life principle of mine took seed. From watching and then imitating Mr. Leatherman's approach, I came to the realization of a powerful belief that truly has impacted my life – both personally and professionally. I learned there are only two things in this life that I truly control: my attitude and my actions. If I choose to be unhappy, I will be. If I choose to be happy, I will be. If I choose to be optimistic, I will be... and on and on and on... This all comes back to the nature of February and how it can impact a person if we don't come into it with the positive mindset.

As I have said for years and years, it isn't anyone else's fault if Annette, my wife, and I have a fight/argument (we have been married for thirty-two year – it happens J), so why in the world should I take it out on someone else? It's not their fault we had an issue. No, that just wouldn't be right. Rather, I choose to compartmentalize the "bad" thing and interact with others in a proactive and productive manner. Simply, I CHOOSE to be happy. I feel this belief of mine is pivotal during months like February, and, yes, this idea of personal choice and being positive rather than negative translates quite nicely into all walks of life.

So, although February might *seem* to be the longest month on the year, in reality it is the shortest. We need to see it as one more opportunity for academic and personal growth. We need to see it as the gift of time that it is. A quote often attributed to Abraham Lincoln fits this sentiment quite nicely. "We can complain because rose bushes have thorns or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses." I like roses. They smell nice. J