

## **Blog 10**

### **Four Ancient Rules for the Modern School Year's End**

#### **May 2026 - Courageous Leadership Series**

It's May. You're exhausted. The year that started with fresh hopes and careful plans has become a daily exercise in managing and leading through the unexpected. Budget cuts arrived amidst states not even having budgets set. Teachers resigned. Student behavior challenges escalated. Parent complaints multiplied. And now you're supposed to close out the year with grace, complete evaluations, plan for next year, and somehow, find energy you don't have.

This is where ancient wisdom meets modern leadership. The Stoics, those philosophers from ancient Greece and Rome, spent their lives studying how to stay calm when life isn't. These four Stoic principles can help educational leaders finish the school year strong, and calmly.

#### **Rule 1: You Control the Response**

The crisis that hit your school last week? Not in your control. The parent who sent that scathing email? Not in your control. The district decision that makes your job harder? Not in your control. But your response to all of it? Entirely yours.

Epictetus called this the "dichotomy of control." Some things are yours—your interpretation, your words, your choices; most things aren't—whether your boss recognizes your work, whether parents appreciate you, whether the budget gets approved. Before you react to the next crisis, get back to what's yours to control. The colleague who irritates you most can teach you patience. The failing initiative teaches you how to communicate bad news with honesty and care.

#### **Rule 2: Name the Emotion Before It Names You**

"We suffer more in imagination than in reality," Seneca observed. You've already played that difficult evaluation conversation seventeen times in your head, and in each version, it went terribly. The mind magnifies trouble far beyond what reality demands.

Name your feelings to take back control. When you name a feeling, such as "I'm anxious about this meeting" or "I'm frustrated my team isn't stepping up," you create distance from it. Distance creates choice. You are not your feelings and emotions. You are the awareness of them. As Epictetus said, "What disturbs men's minds is not events but their judgments on events." Naming the emotion is the first step. Acknowledging it is how you see it for what it is. Then comes detaching from it so you can get back to leading.

#### **Rule 3: See the Obstacle as the Instruction**

Marcus Aurelius had a simple formula: "The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way." The obstacle itself is your way forward. You get passed over for a promotion. A key initiative fails. A staff member undermines you in a meeting. Your first instinct might be anger or resignation.

But what is this teaching you? Maybe you need to make your leadership more visible. Perhaps you need a direct conversation you've been avoiding. The obstacle is neutral. What you build

with it is up to you. "Difficulties strengthen the mind, as labor does the body," Seneca once said. The teacher shortage becomes an opportunity to redesign your staffing model. The budget cut forces creative solutions you wouldn't have considered. What stands in your path becomes your path.

#### **Rule 4: Judge Your Day by Your Values**

Epictetus said, "First say to yourself what you would be, and then do what you have to do." Work produces infinite external feedback: praise from your superintendent, recognition from the board, gratitude from parents. The machine runs on your need for it. The Stoics recommended a different approach.

Each evening, review your day against one question: Did I act according to my values? External results are outside your control. If your values are integrity, courage and putting students first, did you practice them today? That's the only metric that matters. Ask yourself: Where did I act against my principles? What did I avoid that I knew was right? Did I act or just intend to act? Was I ruled by reason or by impulse?

#### **Finishing Strong**

The last weeks of school are when leadership matters most. Staff are exhausted. Students are dysregulated. You could let the chaos control you or you could practice these ancient disciplines: Control what's yours. Name your emotions. See obstacles as instructions. Judge your day by your values.

The Stoics weren't philosophers in ivory towers. Marcus Aurelius led the Roman Empire during a plague. Seneca advised a tyrant. Epictetus was a slave. They knew about impossible decisions and leading when everything felt out of control. And they discovered that the gap between what happens and how you respond is where your power lives.

You have a few weeks left. You don't need to be perfect. You just need to control your response, name your emotions, learn from obstacles and stay true to your values. One moment at a time. One decision at a time. One courageous choice at a time.

The school year will end whether you finish in chaos or in calm. That part isn't up to you. How you finish? That's completely yours.

*"You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength." — Marcus Aurelius*

#### **Reference:**

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (paraphrase)

Oppong, Thomas (April 22, 2026). 4 Stoic rules to master your emotions at work.

<https://www.fastcompany.com/91527520/4-stoic-rules-to-master-your-emotions-at-work>