

[Recording starts 0:00:00]

Aaron Sams:

"I love the newest, I love the latest, I love the thing that have beautiful design. But once you get in there and start to work with it, if it's not working for you it's okay to abandon it and go back to the thing that was working for you originally."

Vicki Davis:

The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.

VICKI: Happy Five Idea Friday. Today we're going to talk to EdTech author and professor, Aaron Sams. (Blog: <http://www.aaronsams.com/2015/11/19/ed-tech-and-robot-tillers/> Twitter: @chemicalsams) He's someone I just look to for so many amazing EdTech ideas. But, you know sometimes technology can just be so overwhelming. It can just get us all so – I mean, I even get overwhelmed.

AARON: Yeah. I love my gadgets, I love my technology but sometimes I just have to flip it off, I have to power it down, I have to take a break. And so what I've been trying to do over the last few months is figure out ways that I become less of a servant to a technology and make my technology work for me. So I've kind of condensed that down into five tips for today and that's what I'd like to share with everyone.

VICKI: Okay. What's our first?

AARON: All right, the first one is to only use technology that makes your work easier. So this is something that I've had to kind of figure out the hard way. Now, I'm not talking about that initial learning curve. Every technology that we learn how to use has a bit of a learning curve, we have to figure out how to use it. But ultimately, once you figure it out, if it takes more steps to use, the technology to use the digital tool, than it does to do something in an analog format and there's no great benefit on the other end of that, it's possible that that technology might not be the one for you. So I've done a decent amount of consulting for some EdTech startups and I really harp on that. When people are developing new products and they say, "Hey, use this in your classroom, it's going to be great."

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And if it takes five or six clicks to get to what I need or if it's just confusing and it doesn't take work off my plate and in fact puts more work onto my plate as a teacher, that's probably not a great use of technology.

VICKI: Yeah.

AARON: So, yes, I'm always looking for things that make my work easier rather than complicating things. But it sounds simple but sometimes we get, I think, enamored by features and shinning objects and we don't think along those lines.

VICKI: Yeah. And no guilt, if it doesn't work for you and make your classroom better get rid of it and move on. Okay, that's great advice. What's next?

AARON: Okay. Number two is to focus on your workflow. Technology is cool but we have to think as teachers, we've got so much on our plate, how does this fit into my daily step by step work that I do when I'm working with my students or when I'm working on planning? So technology is great when it can streamline our life and also even better when everything kind of works together where one thing just flows into the next and flows into the next. So some things that I'm talking about here would be first and foremost email handling. Oh my gosh, I'm so bad about handling my email and I'm still trying to find my good email workflow. But I know a lot of people have achieved "inbox zero" <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/inbox-zero> and organize with folders and what not.

But probably more applicable for teachers is just lesson planning. How do you go from a great idea that you have for a lessons and produce the materials that you need for that, get it into your learning management system, deliver it to your students and have them submit things back to you? So there are tons of storage systems, cloud storage and automation tools, there's a bunch of different ways to make that happen. But think through the process of how you're going to make that work for you. So you don't just have a bunch of files that download into some mysterious folder than you can never find again. Point them to a particular spot so that you know where they are, you can access them with all your devices and you can get the stuff back to your students as quickly as possible.

VICKI: I love that. Because when you save time, you make time. I mean, it just does so much for your productivity.

AARON: Yeah.

VICKI: Okay. What do we have next?

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AARON: All right. Number three is to not fight your ecosystem. So a lot of us teach in schools that might be a Google Apps school, it might be a Microsoft 365 school, you might just have iPads or you might have Chromebooks. And I go to conferences and I see some amazing tools and I go, wow, I want to bring that back to my classroom. And then I realize, that might not be really compatible with my ecosystem, it's okay, as you said before to walk away. You don't have to use all the tools. **My encouragement to teachers is to find things that work in the ecosystem that you have that you really have no control over what system that is. Find things that work within that system and make them work for you.**

VICKI: That is such great advice because, you know, if you've got Chromebooks, make the most of Chromebooks, don't wish you had an iPad and vice versa. Go with what you've got because you can do so much with what you have.

AARON: Yeah, exactly. It's kind of just being content and being okay with the hand you've been dealt.

VICKI: We're so far and light years ahead of where we were 15 years ago, oh my goodness. Okay, what's number four?

AARON: Number four is to go with less paper, not paperless. So paper is not evil, I like keeping things stores digitally because I can access it all the time but I actually walk around with a little notebook in my pocket all the time and a pen in my hand. I've got a few notes about what I wanted to talk today and I was jotting them down on an actual piece of paper. And that's okay. So paper is not evil. But look for ways, though, that maybe you can take your analog devices, your analog notebook and pen and find ways to digitize them. So there are scannable notebooks that are out there where you can take a picture of what you've written and it will then make that text searchable, so that way you get the best of both worlds. You have the paper device and then you have the digital searchability of that later on.

So analog tools that become searchable really accomplish a lot of what we rely on our digital tools to do. And frankly, there are some things that you can only do manually. You can always sit and doodle manually with a pen, it's kind of hard to do that digitally. And there's a tactile of components writing things down.

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And I kind of think by giving things out of my body, by moving my body by moving my body – I'm a fidgeter, I click pens all the time, my knees are always shaking. So by sitting down and writing versus typing, it's a way for me to kind of channel that energy into something more productive.

VICKI: And I'm actually writing on paper now and it will end up in Evernote, so I'm with you still. Okay, what's the fifth one?

AARON: All right, the fifth one is probably the thing that has changed my life more than anything and that's just to turn off your notifications. So if you want to work for your technology, always grab your phone when it buzzes or beeps at you. It's summoning you. It's saying, "hey check your email" or "Hey someone liked your Facebook status.". And that constant distraction, that constant interaction; we simply aren't wired to function that way, we're wired to function in intense burst of work and we can get into the zone, we can get into the flow and your phone screaming at you is just going to distract you from that.

So turn those notifications off, that way when you want to check Facebook, you can go and check for it and your device is then serving you as the vehicle to get you to Facebook. You don't have your device buzzing at you and you are then responding

to it. So this along will slow down your life, it will provide you a little bit of mental space, it will reduce some anxiety. Now, I do keep on messaging app opened on my phone and always have the notifications on and that's simply so my wife and my children can get in touch with me. But everything else, I go to it when I want to rather than having it call and summon me.

VICKI: Well, it just revolves around being a human being and not just a human doing, doesn't it?

AARON: Yes, absolutely.

VICKI: Well, you've give us so much advice. Could you give us a quick 20-second elevator pitch to make us think about how we're using technology so we can reframe and let us master it?

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AARON: I think what we really need to look for is just to turn off our propensity to chase about the shiny objects. I love the newest, I love the latest, I love the thing that as has a beautiful design but once you get in there and start to work with it, if it's not working for you it's okay to abandon it and go back to the thing that was working for you originally. So look for the tools that are going to streamline your life and that are not just going to complicate things.

VICKI: Well, we've had great advice. A lot of our Five Idea Friday experts give us five things to try and this in some ways is to really focus and re-frame what we're doing. And when we become more intentional about the technology we use, then we can truly start having a more remarkable life.

AARON: Yeah. It's my goal to just give people permission to say no, to turn it off and to only use the things that are working for you.

VICKI DAVIS @COOLCATTEACHER

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