

Our Story Commentary

Hello, this is AJ, welcome to our last commentary, our last one, oh no. Well, this is it. In this last commentary I'm just going to tell you our story: How did the Effortless English Club Start? How did I do it? What happened? Why did I do it?

Well it all began long ago. My first teaching job -- English teaching job -- was actually in Korea and I had a Masters Degree in Social Work, in fact. And I finished my Masters Degree in Social Work and I didn't want to get a Social Work job immediately. I really wanted to travel and see the world, so I got on the Internet and I found this job teaching English in Korea. "No experience necessary." And that was great because I had no experience.

And so I went to Korea. I went to Korea and taught. I taught for a year and I taught English to small children, which was a very interesting experience, a very difficult experience because, again, I had no idea what I was doing. I had no teaching experience, I didn't know anything about teaching English or the English language and, in fact, I knew nothing about teaching children.

And after a year I learned that teaching children is very tough, ha-ha-ha, it's difficult and I respect people who can do it well because it's not an easy thing to do. But, still, I enjoyed the experience. I really enjoyed just the experience of living in a new country and a new culture and, for me, that was the greatest learning experience.

And then I went back home. I went back home to Georgia in the United States and I got some Social Work jobs and I was a Social Worker for many years. But I found that I always...I really missed traveling. I missed living in another country and learning from other people and other cultures and I really missed that experience of teaching. Like, just emotionally, it was just so much fun.

And so, actually, next I went to Japan and I got a job in Japan teaching English, again. I was in a tiny little place in the state, the prefecture called Aomori. It's in the far north of Japan. I was in a tiny, little village called Shiura. Shiura Village in Japan, in the middle of nowhere, I think there are 2,000 people in this village.

And I was a Teaching Assistant, which means I just helped the Japanese teacher. So there was an English teacher who was Japanese and then I was kind of the assistant. My job was just to be the assistant and we were teaching middle school students, mostly.

And this was a very interesting experience. It was quite difficult for me, actually, because I spoke zero Japanese and I'd never lived in such a tiny little place before. So, actually, I struggled. It was a very tough experience for me. The students were fantastic, the Japanese people, fantastic, but it was very, very tough.

But something else I learned was that, wow, the English teaching system, the traditional system in Japan and really everywhere, every country, really doesn't work. I mean I could see that. I could see that after three years of studying, for example, these poor Japanese students still could not speak English and they couldn't understand it.

And it just got me thinking. I was like, wow, why? What's wrong with this? Something's wrong...I just realized something's wrong. And, you know, the Japanese teacher used mostly translation. In fact, the thing I realized most from that experience, watching the teacher teach, was that, well, she's speaking Japanese more than she's speaking English. So in a one-hour class she spoke Japanese for 45 minutes or 50 minutes and only spoke English for maybe five or 10 minutes.

And I just, you know, I just thought something's wrong. That doesn't make sense to me. That seems like a bad idea. If you're trying to learn English shouldn't you be listening to English? And I'm not blaming, you know, this Japanese teacher. There's nothing wrong with her, that's how she was taught to teach. You know that's what she learned and that was the system. Even if she wanted to do something different they system would not let her, because the whole school system was designed that way.

So she really had no choice. So I'm not blaming the individual teacher, she wasn't doing anything wrong or bad, but the whole system, clearly, was bad. There was something wrong with it. You know I was like "Oh my God, this is terrible." And I really felt bad for these students because they were so wonderful, you know? They were these happy kids and, you know, they really wanted to learn. And they worked so hard and, yet, they were so frustrated. They were so bored. I could just see it in their face and I just felt terrible. I was like "Oh, man, this is horrible these poor kids."

So after that I went back to the United States again, back to America, back to Georgia and I got a job teaching immigrants. So I got a job teaching immigrants mostly from Latin America, so South Americans and people from Mexico, mostly. And they were adults, so this time I'm teaching adults. And, you know, still, at this point I had no idea what I was doing. I didn't know about, you know, any other methods or techniques, so I just used a textbook, just like every other teacher. I was using the same drills, the same methods, as everybody.

But one thing I did do differently was that I tried to entertain my students. I wanted them to laugh and to smile. Because I could see...in Japan I saw those students and they were so unhappy. And I thought, well, you know, I don't know what to do exactly, but at least I can make them happy, at least I want them to enjoy the process.

And I used a lot of, you know, normal, traditional methods, but I did have a lot of energy, so I jumped around and I screamed, I yelled, I ran around the class and they were always laughing. And so, you know, they really enjoyed it. They loved my class. My class got bigger and bigger and bigger. More students were coming. They really loved coming.

You know in most of the other classes the students would quit very quickly, because they're so bored and unhappy. But all these students they were coming to my class and everyone is laughing and having a good time and it was great, except they didn't improve very fast.

I mean I felt good, emotionally they were happy, but I thought, man, something's still wrong, because they're learning so slowly. I mean they're improving, but, still, very slowly. It's just not working. I still realized there's still something wrong. The methods I'm using, there's something wrong. It's great they're having fun, but I need to learn more.

And so at that point I decided to go back to school again and get another Masters Degree. Not really very excited about it in the beginning because I didn't really want to go back to school, but I thought, you know, I need to learn. I need to learn a new way to teach.

And so I was really careful about the school I went to, because you know most school teach traditional methods. So you get a Masters Degree in teaching English, but what do you learn? You learn the same boring, ineffective methods. So most teachers who teach English who have Masters Degrees, unfortunately, are still using boring methods that don't work. They have a degree, they can get better jobs, but they're teaching methods suck, they're terrible. I'm not blaming them as individual people, but it's just the truth.

And, so, I was very careful when I chose this interesting small school in Virginia in the United States called Shenandoah University that really used a lot of unique, different, methods. And I thought okay, well why not? I'm going to try this. So for what, I guess about two years, I studied at Shenandoah University. I did a lot of distance learning, in fact, and I learned completely new methods, completely new ways of teaching English.

And I learned the research and, for me, this was the most important thing. Oh it's not just learning new methods, I learned what really worked. There's actually research out there that compares different methods and they can actually show you which method is the best, which methods produce the best results and that changed everything in my teaching.

That's when I learned about story-telling techniques and this questioning technique, about using the physical body to learn at the same time that you're listening and learning in with your mind, so I took these new methods, these new techniques. Then I lived in Thailand and I started teaching at a university there called Thammasat

University and I started using these methods and I started to get results. It was amazing. It was like wow!

My students started to learn faster. Number one, they enjoyed the class a lot more, even more than my immigrants did in Georgia. These guys were having a lot of fun. They loved the class. They're laughing, they're moving, they had a great time and, I also saw, they got better results. And by better results I mean they actually understood me more and more and they were speaking more. They were more confident.

I realized, well, this is it. I'm on the right track. I'm doing the right things. You know I still was, you know, I was not a great teacher at that time. I'm not a great teacher now. I am always trying to get better. But, you know, I was trying these things for the first time, so I made a lot of mistakes, still, I did a lot of things that didn't work, but it was much, much better.

It was much better than anything I had done in the past, much better than anything I had seen before and my students loved it, I loved it. There was one problem however, my school didn't like it. I was breaking the rules. I was breaking the rules a lot, because my school had a lot of very tough rules.

That you must use this textbook, you must follow these methods exactly, when you test somebody you must use this exact method and when you give grades, you know A, B, C, D, you're supposed to only give a couple A's and a few B's and a lot of C's and you must give D's and you absolutely must fail some people. That was the rule at Thammasat University.

And I didn't like those rules and so I made a decision I decided I can serve my students or I can serve my boss and my school, which one? And, for me, it was an easy answer...I decided I will serve the students.

Screw the rules. I don't care about the rules. I'm going to break the rules. I'm not going to tell them I'm breaking the rules because they'll fire me, so I'm just going to break the rules. I'm going to teach from my heart, I'm going to use what I know is the best way to teach, at that time. I mean now I have better methods, but, at the time, I will use what I know that is best.

And I did it and I got great results. The students were very happy. I was very happy. They were learning much faster, much better and everything was great. But then I had a problem. At the end of the semester I had to give grades to my students and I gave a lot of A's, B's and zero- F's. I didn't fail anybody, no F's. I think, maybe, no D's, actually. I think I only gave A's, B's and C's.

And why did I do this? Because I know, number one, from an emotional level I want to encourage people, right? If you give somebody an F does it help them learn better? Will it make them a better student? No. If you give someone an F what does it do? It makes them feel like a failure. You kill their motivation. You destroy it.

If you give somebody an F or a couple F's in English they think "I'm not good in English. I'm a failure." They will never learn English well. They'll just quit. They'll stop. That's what usually happens and I decided I'm not going to do that to somebody. I absolutely will not do it.

I want to encourage my students. I want to build them up. I want them to feel happier and more confident, so they will continue learning, so they'll feel good about speaking English and they'll keep learning and growing more and more and more, faster and faster. So, I gave a lot of A's, a lot of B's and a few C's and then my boss called me to the office.

Hum...he didn't like that. He said "There's a problem. We have a very tough rule here, you must not give a lot of As. It's against the rules, you cannot do it. You must give most students C's. That's our rule. It's in the middle. Therefore, most students must have C's. And then you must give a few B's and a few D's. They must be equal. And then you must give only a very few A's and you absolutely must give a few F's."

That's called a curve. That system is called a curve, a lot of C's, a few B's and D's and then a few A's and F's. And he said "You must do this. That is our rule." And I thought about it and I said, no, I won't do it. I will not change these grades and so they fired me. And that was the end of my job at Thammasat University.

And you know at first, of course, I was really upset. I was angry and sad and I felt, "Oh my God, this is terrible. What have I done?" But very quickly I decided I'm going to change my state, I'm going to change my beliefs, I'm going to change my attitude and I decided you know what? This is not bad this is good, I've learned something. I've learned that working inside a system like that, working inside a traditional school, is not the best way to help students.

Because I know if I go to another school I'm going to have the same problem, because most schools have these same kinds of rules. That's when I really decided to think about students first and to think about starting my own company. And I didn't do it immediately, but I started thinking about it. Maybe I could start my own school. Maybe I could start my own company. I didn't know exactly what to do or how to do it, but I started thinking about it. I want to develop my own system.

And that's when I really started thinking about my teaching methods even more. How can I improve them? How can I make them better? How can I make an even stronger system than what I learned in school from my Masters Program? So I kept improving it.

And I moved to San Francisco and I got a job at a really cool school, actually, a really great place called IIC, IIC School in San Francisco. The reason it was cool is that I had a lot of freedom. They said “You can teach any way you want. Total freedom, do anything you want to do. We trust you. We think you’re a good teacher. You have a Masters Degree. You have good experience.” So, you know, I have to say my boss was really cool, really great, the school was fantastic and I was teaching adults, again, from many different countries. They come to San Francisco to improve their English.

And that’s when I started to test different methods, because I had all this freedom. It was great. So I started using the story-telling system more and the question system more. I started using movies to teach and I would stop the movie and I would ask all these questions about the movie and review and show the same scene many times. I started using little short articles and I’d ask lots of questions about it.

So that’s how I developed the Effortless English System. I developed it working at the IIC School where I had all this freedom. And I developed it, but just testing stuff. I would try something new or I tried a method I’d learned about or read about and I’d try it for a few times and I’d see. What happened?

And sometimes it worked, it was great, the students really improved, they learned fast, they loved it and sometimes it didn’t work, sometimes it failed. If it failed I got rid of it and I tried something else and I tried something else and that’s how, eventually, I developed this system. And so then I finally decided, wow, I have a system, I think it’s great, it’s time to start my own company.

And so while I was still working at IIC I would come home and I would record my lessons. So I’d be working at IIC and I would teach some lesson and if it was successful, if it went well, I would come home and then I would get on the computer with my little microphone and I would record that same lesson or lessons, really, because it was more than one.

And after some time I had a bunch of lessons and I decided to create a website. And I started with just a really cheap website, \$200. I started my company with \$200 and I uploaded all my lesson files, my mp3 files and then I waited. And I was really afraid. I’ll be honest, I was very afraid. I thought no one’s going to buy my lessons. I thought, not one person.

That was my fear. My fear was I won’t get a single customer, not one. And I’m going to be embarrassed because I told everybody about this company I’m starting and everybody is going to laugh at me and I’ll cry and my life will be over, ha-ha-ha-ha, right? That was my crazy stupid fear.

And luckily it didn’t happen, because somebody did buy my lessons. In fact, a few people bought my lesson, not many, but a few, but that was enough. That was enough to encourage me. I said “Yes! Woo-who! It’s possible! It’s going to happen!”

And that's when I started learning about business, because then I realized I know how to teach English, but I don't know anything about business.

So that's when I started going and reading every business book I could find and talking to people who had their own online Internet businesses and learning, learning, learning and learning. And I used the same exact approach that I did as a teacher, I just tried stuff. I tried something and I waited. If it was successful I kept it and I kept using it. If it failed then I got rid of it and I tried something else. And I just kept doing that, testing, testing, try something, try something, try something, try something.

And over time the business grew and developed, it changed quite a lot, actually, and, finally, we developed a nice business system that's working very well, which is what we have now. But, of course, this never ends. I'll always keep trying stuff with my teaching and trying to improve it. I'll always continue to try new stuff with the business and, again, keep the stuff that works. It's a never-ending process.

And that's where we are today. Now we have our Master Member Site with our videos. That's something new. We've got a whole bunch of different lesson sets. We've got Learn Real English. We've got these Power English Lessons that you're listening to now. We've got our original lessons. We've got our Business Success English Lessons. In the future we hope to develop more.

We hope to start developing live seminars so that you can actually meet me in person. We'll go to different countries and I'll teach you, maybe over three days or five days or seven days, intensive seminars. That's an idea we have.

We have an idea to maybe create a resort, I think probably somewhere in Thailand. You could go to this beautiful island, Tropical Island, and stay for maybe a week or two weeks or more and get intensive English classes from me. Four, five, six hours a day learning intensely, but in a really fun way and in a beautiful place.

And then after you finish studying and learning English with me you can go swim in the water or go scuba diving or just sit on the beach or something. So that's another dream I have, another idea. I don't know if we'll do it or not, but we might. It's something that will continue growing, something that will continue to develop forever, for all of my life, I hope.

That's our story. That is the Effortless English story, up until now. It will continue and you can help it continue. You're going to continue it by joining our community, by growing it together. Because now this is no longer just me or just Tamoi and I or even just Kristen, Joe, Tamoi and I or other partners or friends that we have, this is now a tribe, a family of learners that includes you.

You are now a part of Effortless English, so now you are a part of growing it. You will determine what we're going to do in the future. Get on the Forums. Tell me your ideas. You think we should do something, something sounds cool, interesting? Get

on the Forums and tell me. You have a suggestion? I want to hear it. Or tell the other members or help the other members.

You are now a leader. You are now sharing this movement together. You are helping us go into the future. You're helping us choose our direction. So I hope you will be active on our general Forums and also as a Master Member.

Be active, be a leader, join us so that all of us together can create this amazing community, this amazing tribe of international people all over the world connecting with each other, sharing with each other, learning from each other, helping each other grow as learners and teachers, but more importantly, as human beings.

That is our true mission together. That is our true purpose here at the Effortless English Club. I hope you will join it and contribute to it. And I will see you again.

Have a great day. Have a great life.