

Teaching with Pride, Poise and Pursuit

Pride in Performance, and Poise in Professionalism in Pursuit of Excellence

Bill Collar, "All The Way With PMA!"

- 1. Build a comprehensive knowledge base** – Students respect teachers with a variety of educational skills. Formal training provides a teacher with basic fundamentals in the subject area. One must continue to learn and build an extensive foundation of knowledge as a person matures. An advanced degree is helpful, but professional reading and knowledge building activities are essential. Find the time to participate in conferences, workshops and clinics. Reading 15–20 minutes a day for professional growth will greatly enhance mastery of your subject. Be a life-long learner with an insatiable appetite for more wisdom.

Interact with colleagues and network with teachers in and out of your discipline. It is impossible to know everything. At times it may be necessary to tell your students, "I don't know" and work with the students to find information that will provide answers. Quality teaching involves listening, questioning, responding and at times learning from the students. Most of my computer and technology skills were obtained from students.

- 2. Teach with enthusiasm** – The teacher must be enthused about teaching in order for the student to be enthused about learning. Feedback from students indicates they are most impressed with my love of history and how excited I am about sharing the lessons of history with them. Indicators of teaching with enthusiasm include greeting students with a smile and a kind comment as they enter the room, calling students by name, moving about the room, speaking with emotion, asking challenging questions and using a wide variety of teaching techniques. Make it a personal challenge to know everyone's name by the end of the first week of school.

It is essential to start the class on time and to keep the students engaged for the entire class period. Wasting just five minutes a day for 180 days adds up to 900 minutes. That's correct, 15 hours of class time lost because of a lack of enthusiasm to start on time and to finish on the bell. Instead of considering adding more days to the school year, let's make efficient use of the time we have. It all begins with enthusiasm.

- 3. Establish an atmosphere in the classroom that is conducive to learning** – Excellent teachers utilize effective classroom management to maximize the learning potential of each student. During the first class meeting I emphasize that no student has the right to destroy the learning environment for anyone else. Explain the type of classroom behavior expected and provide the students with a formula for success. Always build on the positive, using uplifting terminology and have high expectations for the students.

Make the physical appearance of the room as stimulating as possible. Appropriate pictures, charts, maps, graphs and displays add color and enhance student attention. Be sure the room is properly lighted, ventilated and that chairs are the correct size for the students. Technology you utilize on a weekly basis should be permanent in the room. Make it a point to demand the tools necessary to provide students with the best learning experience possible. Students are more likely to accept the responsibility of learning when the classroom experience is open and based on mutual respect.

- 4. Outstanding teaching is hard work** – All three of our daughters are teachers and it is impressive to listen to them discuss the extra time and effort they spend outside the classroom. The public perception of an eight-hour day and three months off in the summer is far from the reality of busy weekends and summers filled with classes and preparation for the coming year. Our middle daughter, at age 23, after two weeks in her first teaching position, called home and asked her father with 28 years experience, "Dad, do you get really tired by the end of the day?"

Great teachers have the ability to think on their feet as well as on their seat. They are constantly monitoring and adjusting to the situation and make a commitment to reach every student in the room. Weekends are filled with grading papers, designing lesson plans, preparing materials and often times fulfilling extracurricular commitments. It is essential for your mental health to set aside quality time for yourself and your loved ones.

- 5. Expect students to be successful** – Perhaps life's greatest secret is people get what they expect. As Emerson said, "As a man thinketh, he becomes." This is especially true in teaching. Some of my most enjoyable classes started out to be the most challenging. It is important for the teacher to remain flexible in order to bring out the best of each student in a highly diverse classroom. Research in the areas of learning styles, brain-based learning, special needs and other individual differences, indicates a high degree of adaptability is required of today's educator.

Assume each student is gifted in some way and it is your responsibility to help the individual discover his gifts. In other words, if a student isn't learning the way you teach, teach the way he learns. Don't be so tied to your lesson plan that you discourage creativity. The best classes are often those where the students and teacher lose track of time and an intellectual free-for-all takes place. The ultimate goal is to catch the student being successful.

- 6. Make all learning relevant** – When teaching history, students are informed at any time they may ask, “Why do we have to know this?” It is the obligation of the teacher to be prepared to explain the significance of the subject matter. Attention is enhanced when the learner understands how the knowledge may be applied in contemporary times or in the future. When the teacher brings in current events or demonstrates an awareness of current culture, students see the lesson as more meaningful. Be prepared to discuss the importance of daily events that influence student lives.

When we inspire students in our classrooms we witness positive changes in their attitudes and relationships with others. Inspired students are able to transcend previous levels of achievement. The teacher may promote understanding and inspiration through relating new learning to current times or previously learned concepts. An individual conference with a reluctant learner often will stimulate interest and creative thinking.

- 7. Motivate through employing a wide variety of methodologies** – Motivation may be defined as, “A desire held in expectation with the belief that it will be realized.” It is extremely difficult to motivate someone who has no desire to learn. Consequently, it obligates the teacher to discover the methods to use that will stimulate the student’s desire to learn. This may be class discussion, role-play, music, drama, reading, writing, videos, PowerPoint, etc. This is why it is essential to become familiar with the student’s gifts and interests. Completing an information card and providing activities early in the year that provide students with an opportunity to share and display their interests can be extremely beneficial.

A reticent student is more likely to participate in class when she may use her skill in music or art to make a presentation in literature, history, math or science. It is very rewarding to witness students integrating a number of learning subjects to provide an educational experience for the class. Educators must put the fear of failure aside to bring out the best in their students. Be unique and keep the students wondering what will come next. I wear a different tie every day of the year and encourage students to ask questions about the historical significance of each.

- 8. Maintain a sense of humor** – An effective teacher doesn’t have to be a comedian, but it is essential to laugh with your students and at yourself. In the course of a class at any level, certain humorous situations will come up. Take advantage of these to lighten the lesson or provide a chance to have a good chuckle. Of course, this should never be at the expense of a student. The teacher must do everything possible to avoid sarcasm or embarrassment.

Have enough confidence in yourself to allow appropriate laughter aimed at the teacher. I enjoy using song lyrics to emphasize historical events even though my singing voice leaves much to be desired. Research indicates learning retention is enhanced when combined with humor. Having humor as a vital part of each class will contribute to a relaxed classroom atmosphere receptive to new ideas encouraging student participation. Learning can be fun. A laughing classroom is a learning classroom!

- 9. It is good to be nervous** – Student teachers often tell me that they are nervous about getting up in front of students and conducting a class. I tell them the same thing I tell students who are making a presentation, “It is good to be nervous, that means it is important to you and you are prepared to do a great job.” Someone once explained to me that nervousness was simply fear of failure. Fear is like fire. Fire can be your best friend by cooking your meals and heating your home, or it can be your worst enemy by burning your house down. It depends on whether you control it, or it controls you.

By controlling our fears we can convert that nervous energy to confidence and perform at an exceptional level. Utilize the tools of positive preparation, affirmations and visualization to help convert fear to faith. I have taught thousands of classes and given hundreds of speeches, but still experience nervousness prior to the opportunity to experience success. Be prepared, be yourself, be confident and be successful!

- 10. Become the “Guide on the side” instead of the “Sage on the stage”** – I first heard this statement years ago while attending a conference on integrated learning. The presenter emphasized the more students participate in their learning the more they comprehend. It reminded me of the Chinese proverb, “I hear, I forget, I see, I remember, I do, I understand.” Teach for understanding. It is time consuming and requires exceptional planning, but I’m convinced student-centered learning is the most effective form of instruction.

This does not mean the lecture method should be discarded completely. It means lectures should be well-planned and carefully orchestrated using appropriate questions and visual aids. Some teachers have decided to refrain from using a textbook. It seems to me not using a text (or suitable CD) for student research and reference is just as bad a relying on a text for all lessons. In a classroom of students with a variety of talents and gifts, the challenge to the teacher is to bring out the best in each through providing a variety of educational options.

