

e-teaching

Management strategies for the classroom

Creating inspiration through meaningful relationships

I recently had a fabulous discussion with an experienced educator who was soon to head into retirement after an extensive career as a teacher. We engaged in a stimulating conversation about the elements of success in teaching. After a thought provoking exchange we agreed that the ability to understand others and build meaningful relationships with students, colleagues, school leaders and parents has over and above the utmost impact of all. This inspirational professional shared with me his experiences and what he saw as the distinct difference within schools. He explained, "You have teachers and then there are educators," going on to outline how educators have an interest in the individual beyond the subjects and seek to have meaningful interactions with others. The variant was the ability to give yourself and your time to students, connect, engage and thrive as a professional responsible for empowering youth in their journey to develop a strong sense of self, not through marks or academics but through emotions and positive energy.

Adam Grant (2013) has a fascinating perspective on reciprocity relating to 'givers' and 'takers' which reinforces the importance of the methods we use to interact with others and the style we are most at ease with in building, maintaining and developing our relationships. He refers to three types of people:

- 1 Givers – Those who seek to please others and tend to offer help, support and advice with no expectation of others
- 2 Takers – People who strive to gain all they can from interactions with others with a clear self interest



- 3 Matchers – Networkers who aim to balance the measure of offer and acceptance for both parties.

Reflection on my style and that of this motivating educator led me to question, what is it that creates effective relationships with students, colleagues, leaders, staff and parents? Six top suggestions, based on my experiences within a range of sectors, including education, follow.

Be genuine in thoughts and actions

Nothing is more disheartening than someone 'faking' interest in you or your child. A genuine interest in others or activities is not easy to falsify. When engaging in a

relationship, be sure to have a sincere purpose and reason. This may be for a student to achieve their personal best, a colleague to develop through your experience or aiming for a positive impact through active engagement in school initiatives.

We can show our genuine interest or involvement by:

- Being prompt and prepared for meetings
- Utilising active listening, acknowledging others' views and opinions
- Maintaining eye contact and nodding in understanding
- Writing notes and referring to them to ensure clarity.



e-teaching February 2015 (1) – researched and prepared for ACEL by Kathryn Taylor, Director and Owner of Turning Point Consulting, specialising in delivering educational strengths-based programs to schools, student groups, businesses and professionals. www.turningpointconsulting.com.au

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Demonstrate honesty

Being vulnerable is a difficult task for most. As educators we are visible daily and often feel the need to know everything, being in control at all times. It is essential in building resilience that you understand your capabilities, limitations and learn from errors made.

As students build a sense of self, they should be offered the opportunity to question while hearing others' stories of success and failure sharing their views in an uninhibited setting. Equally staff can only develop meaningful relationships through candid understanding, allowing everyone to understand how they can best support, partner or work with each other.

Ask why?

One of the questions we dread from students is "why?" yet it is one of the foundational questions for engagement. As noted by Simon Sinek (2009), a comprehensive assessment of why allows us to build a sense of purpose, to emotionally connect and so identify our responsibilities within the activity, class, subject or committee. Equally we need to ask ourselves and others why on a regular basis.

- Why do I teach?
- Why is this subject important to you/your child?
- Why am I the best person to work on this project/committee?
- Why are we focusing on this area/strategy?

Be sure to continue to ask further questions, listen well to answers and hold a meaningful dialogue to ensure a genuine interest in understanding this person and how your relationship may form or extend.

Give time generously

Working across a range of industries with professionals at all levels I sense a consistent feeling of 'busyness' and sense of being time poor, in both the workplace and our personal lives. We must value our time and the time of others, respecting how we use it. Experts in wellbeing recognise the significance of 'giving' to emotional and mental health. Be it to charity, others you know, by way of experiences or through donations, giving encourages a sense of fulfilment.

To make time for others:

- Assess what is important to you and others
- Understand how you can contribute in many areas
- Work smarter not harder
- Minimise disruptions and negativity
- Identify the value of your interactions.

Show interest in others

Relationships are personal, like it or not. Everyone experiences various highs and lows throughout their lives to differing degrees. While you should not delve into people's personal world, family troubles and history, you should listen for the cues that are offered in conversation as to what is important to those around you or impacting them at that time, whether it's what they have been doing on the weekend, their social network or what they spend their time doing.

- Remember people's names, as they like to be called
- Understand what is important to others personally and professionally
- Know their world, understanding privacy
- Recall what they have shared with you previously

- Share your interests that are aligned.

Communicate proactively and follow up

Relationships are built on trust and trust is created through positive interactions and behaviours over a period of time. If you are committed to creating a positive relationship with your students, be proactive in understanding why they are interested or disinterested in your subject/class, what extra-curricular activities are important to them and what they hope to achieve from the year. As activities arise or they come closer to attaining their goals share your sense of pride for their effort, behaviour and achievement. Encourage students to recognise and celebrate the milestones that will support the attainment of their eventual goal.

We must remember when relating to parents to respect that there is an emotional connection between parent and child; they are seeking your support as an expert who is instrumental in the development of their child. Suggestions to create positive relationships with **parents** include:

- Use their child's name with respect
- Be honest about capabilities and share strengths you have noted in the child
- Provide constructive advice and follow up on challenges and outcomes
- Utilise positive, open body language, welcoming the parent to the discussion
- Offer a plan of next steps and a follow up meeting if required.

The bulk of your day will be spent in connecting and communicating with a variety of colleagues. Be it a small rural school or a large private institution, you will require a deep relationship with multiple people. When communicating with your **peers and staff** remember to reflect on your style.

- Be genuine
- Share your experiences
- Ask why
- Give your time generously
- Remember what is important to others
- Be respectful and demonstrate confidence
- Use proactive communication.

References

- Grant, A 2013, *Give and take*, Viking, New York.
Sinek, S 2009, *Start with why*, Portfolio, New York.

Quotes on relationships

We are afraid to care too much, for fear that the other person does not care at all.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Nothing is perfect. Life is messy. Relationships are complex. Outcomes are uncertain. People are irrational.

Hugh Mackay

Friendship may, and often does, grow into love, but love never subsides into friendship.

Lord Byron