

INGREDIENT 1

Passion and Compassion

The Power of a Great Teacher

The primary ingredient for the making of a great teacher is love. This simple word, however, creates a multifaceted influence on your effectiveness and success in the classroom.

LOVE YOURSELF: LEAVING A POWERFUL IMPACT ON YOUNG MINDS

You have to love yourself before you can effectively reach out and educate young and impressionable minds. It is important that you are secure in your own emotions, self-esteem, and qualifications.

It is important that you see yourself as a dynamic influence, as a nurturer in the nest of your own classroom filled with eager, hungry, young minds and spirits. The teacher who embraces the challenge of igniting in children a love for subject content, a love for learning, and a love for themselves

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at the same time can have a tremendously powerful impact. A teacher who loves himself or herself is a teacher who can love others. These teachers are the candles that light other candles, but retain the same amount of light of their own.

Teaching can be tiring, frustrating, and complicated at times. Whether new or veteran, I strongly recommend that teachers maintain a hobby, take a vacation, take a long soothing bubble bath, or romp in the park with their own children. It is important that teachers keep their lives balanced between the personal and the professional. I often challenge teachers to gaze in the mirror and assess who they are as people and all the reasons why they feel it critical to take on the role of a teacher. Ultimately, inspiration and education are the products of teachers giving themselves as a gift to students. A great teacher possesses self-love, which frees him or her to extend love to others.

YOU ARE A ROLE MODEL

As educators, you are truly role models for your students. Even in this highly technological world, young people still look for people they can admire, respect, and emulate.

Each teacher must consider that even if a particular standard for appropriate dress may not be required in your contract, it is important that you are sensitive to the culture of your school and what your colleagues have collectively established as appropriate dress for your workplace. There are schools that have teachers wear a uniform. This may include certain slacks, jackets, or shirts or blouses displaying the school's logo, mascot, or mission statement. There are other schools in which teachers wear suits, dresses, skirts, or slacks. Still other schools may allow teachers to dress at their own discretion, whether casual or dressy. It truly depends on the dynamics and culture of each particular school. Given these considerations, it is important to remember our conscientious efforts to dress appropriately will maintain the integrity of our profession.

As role models, teachers should also be very careful to avoid the use of profanity, gossip, or criticism of others in front of students. This type of unprofessional behavior will totally influence the students' perception of you, not the person being discussed within their earshot.

In addition, students can read us like a book (pun intended). They know if we are having a good day or a bad day. As much as is humanly possible, then, you should avoid giving overt indicators in your instructional day that you are dealing with personal problems. You must make a conscientious effort not to allow unpleasant personal circumstances to impact your potential for effectively instructing your students.

It is important to avoid discussing at length your own problems with the students. I have heard students say, "I'm so tired of hearing about Mrs. ___'s defiant son. It isn't that we don't care. It's just that we get tired of hearing about it all the time!" It is all right, however, for students to clearly understand that teachers are people too. Teachers have families, feelings, and challenges in their own lives, and these may affect their mood, temperament, or delivery of instruction. It is better for teachers to be completely honest with students and not take their personal frustrations out on them. As relationships are strengthened overall, there should develop a sensitivity and concern for each member of the classroom, including the teacher.

As a great teacher, you must say to yourself, "No matter what I am going through, the students deserve my best. If I give them my best, then I can require the best from them." When students admire their teachers, respect closely follows.

LOVE YOUR STUDENTS: ENGAGING THE POTENTIAL IN EACH STUDENT

You have to love your students. Yes, I know, I know . . . sometimes they can be unbearable. But a great teacher can love the child without necessarily loving some of the unproductive behavior he or she may exhibit in the classroom. As teachers, we must see the good in every student. No child is all bad;

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that's just not how we were created. It has been my experience that students will accept the challenge toward excellence when they know that their teacher genuinely loves and respects them and that he or she is concerned about their development as a complete and mature human being.

Some of the worst students in your classroom right now are probably some of the brightest. Great teachers look not just at what students do, but also at what they don't do. They listen to what the students say, but also to what they don't say. Behavior is a form of communication. In other words, it is important not to take everything about the children at face value. A student may not be able to articulate why he or she exhibits inappropriate behavior, but if you dig deeper into the problem and look beyond the outward behavior, I believe that you will uncover an intelligent, creative, and responsive child.

Great teachers realize that a child's abilities are not contingent solely on socioeconomic status, appearance, geographic location, or the presence of both parents in the home. Children are not necessarily assigned intelligence, creativity, wit, and curiosity on the basis of the neighborhood in which they live. Some of our most noteworthy leaders, of all nationalities, have come from modest beginnings. A great teacher, then, loves his or her students for what they can become, not necessarily for what they appear to be during this snapshot of time at a particular grade level.

LOVE THE PROFESSION OF TEACHING

Last, great teachers love the profession of teaching. Teachers have many responsibilities other than being the "giver of knowledge." You may often find yourself expected to fill the role of surrogate parent, tutor, nurse, counselor, security blanket, psychologist, social worker . . . and the list goes on. Some people have the misconception that our occupation must be easy because schoolchildren are dismissed in the late afternoon, we typically don't work weekends, and we are paid on most major holidays. Pshaw!

Teachers spend countless hours outside of the school day calling parents and guardians at home or work, preparing lessons, correcting papers, and keeping records of grades and attendance. Elementary teachers must respond to 20 to 30 different students, and most secondary teachers encounter more than 100 preteens and teenagers every day. Teachers often feel that they are not adequately compensated for these laborious duties and for wearing all their numerous “hats.” It can be a thankless job.

Great educators, however, teach because they love being in this profession. They fully understand that the rewards are not always monetary. They relish the opportunity to observe the “lightbulb” of understanding turn on in a child’s brain, to witness the emergence of self-esteem in a child whose confidence was once shattered, to see a disposition change from bitterness to happiness, and to see a negative attitude become a positive one and failing grades turn into honor roll grades. These rewards cannot be measured in silver or gold.

THE POWER OF ONE: ENCOURAGING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Teachers must look at themselves as having the “power of one.” Every teacher has the awesome responsibility to educate and influence the lives of young people. They have the power to compel, encourage, challenge, entreat, and motivate children to achieve excellence beyond their own expectations. Teachers can expand horizons, open opportunities, stretch imaginations, and tap intellectual capabilities in the educational womb of the classroom. This may ultimately influence students’ decisions to become doctors, lawyers, educators, ministers, architects, entrepreneurs, politicians, presidents, and CEOs. Who knows—in your classroom, right now, may be the child who grows up to discover a cure for AIDS or cancer, facilitate world peace, or eliminate worldwide hunger and poverty.

Step proudly into this honorable position. Accept your calling as a great educator, and watch how the power of your

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role as an educator can influence a change that is greater than what you could ever have hoped or imagined. Your passion for teaching and your compassion for students will have a far-reaching impact on your life as well as the lives of your students!

It is vital to really get to know your students—likes and dislikes, joys and challenges, talents and dispositions, goals and aspirations. In addition, it is essential to make contact with your students' families, become acquainted with the neighboring community, and determine the resources, both on and off the campus, that can assist you with meeting the needs of your students. Most schools have resources and professionals both on staff and in the community that will be instrumental in providing ongoing academic, mental, physical, and emotional supports.

True Story

I had a high school student who declared that she hated me and conducted herself in a manner that pricked my last nerve. I continued to love this tormented and tormenting human being. She tried everything she could to upset me: tardy to my class, disrupted lessons, used profanity, turned in homework late, if at all . . .

One day, I had enough of her antics. I took her by the hand as if she were a six-year-old child and walked her to the dean's office. I told her that I loved her very much and it brought me much despair and unhappiness to know that she refused to cooperate and learn in my class. After we talked, I returned to my classroom and prayerfully resolved that I had done everything in my power to show her how much I cared.

She later admitted that she was very unhappy because of personal problems. She thanked me for showing her unconditional love. I was able to secure the much-needed assistance she needed to begin the healing process. We have continued to stay in contact with one another over the years. This same rebellious and defiant young lady is now a minister, preaching to and teaching others about the love of God.

EXTRA SEASONING

A Person's Perception Is His or Her Reality

Students have preconceived notions or perceptions of how a teacher should act, dress, and speak. Whether you are a novice teacher or a seasoned veteran, students will offer you their highest esteem if you present yourself in a professional manner. Your love for them will foster the practice of looking beyond outward appearances to touch the heart of each child. In fact, great teachers fully understand that they will affect not only the lives of individual children; they also touch the lives of the children's families and communities.

SAVORY MORSEL

To find the good in the world, start with a mirror.

—Kamau (as cited in Bell, 1995)

REFLECTION MENU

- What are your reasons for becoming a teacher (other than the money and benefits)?
- How do your impressions about yourself (background, culture, religion, biases) influence your perceptions and treatment of students?
- Why is love an absolutely essential ingredient for your effectiveness in the classroom?

IF YOU LIKE THIS INGREDIENT, YOU'LL ALSO LIKE . . .

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