

Promoting Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

Learning and Relationships

This article first appeared in the January, 2003, issue of the Gazette on <teachers.net>.

The two are inseparable

In my February, 2002, free electronic newsletter, "Promoting Responsibility," I relate how the famous horse whisperer, Monty Roberts, trains a wild mustang in 30 minutes.

http://www.marvinmarshall.com/promotingresponsibilitynews/promotingresponsibility_2-02.htm (Number 4 - Improving Relationships)

The article concludes by describing the fundamental principle he uses: **trust**.

Trust is really the foundation of any relationship. It assumes that you will be safe, that you will not be harmed.

With people, trust also carries with it an implicit message that the other person has your own best interests in mind. That is why we can accept criticism and even anger from those whom we trust. We know, deep down, that they really mean to help us.

Trust is an interesting quality because, once it is lost, it is hard to recapture. Many a relationship gasped its last breath on the words, "I just do not trust you any more."

To have optimum relationships, all parties must feel a sense of trust, a sense safety. The feeling must be that harm will not be forthcoming-- physically, emotionally, or psychologically.

Trust also has a direct influence on behavior and learning.

In a recent class visitation, I observed the teacher having great difficulty getting students to behave responsibly. The teacher continually raised her voice commanding the students.

In private, I interviewed a number of students who gave the teacher trouble and asked them the reasons for their irresponsible behavior. All gave me the same response: they **felt** that the teacher did not like them. The relationship became reciprocal--and resulted in the students' trying to sabotage what the teacher wanted them to do.

Students do not need to like a teacher, but when students' **feelings** are so negative about a teacher, they rebel against what the teacher wants them to do. And this is exactly what the students were doing each time they were given an order.

I do not recommend a goal of having the students like you--respect you, yes. (Respect is earned; it is a result of your actions.)

When students harbor a visceral dislike, then teaching and learning suffer. Here are a few tips to engender **feelings** that are **conducive to learning**:

1. **Plan procedures before content.** For example, be sure you have an efficient attention-getting technique to obtain all your students' attention within five (5) seconds. **IF THE PROCEDURE TAKES ANY LONGER**, let your students know you are confident that they can give you their attention in less time. (This is a challenge; students love challenges.) Reinforce the attention-getting technique by practicing it again--and sometimes again and again.

(My favorite is, "Give me five"--raising my hand with five fingers apart representing two ears listening, two eyes watching, and one mouth closed.)

2. **Rather than raise your voice, lower it.** The most effective teachers I have seen, Kindergarten through twelfth grade, never used loud volume to talk to students. More often than not, a quieter than usual voice was used. Using these first two approaches will greatly increase the effectiveness and pleasantness of a classroom.

3. **Use the pause.** Just wait. Speaking when you do not have the attention of the class is fruitless. Dare not count how often you do it. On the other hand, when you become conscious of how often you speak without the class's full attention, you will quickly stop the practice.

4. **Influence by persuasion--rather than by coercion.** No one likes to be told what to do. Just think of your own experiences of how you **felt** when someone TOLD you to do something. **Telling** conjures up negative feelings. Instead, think of SHARING. When your mindset is to share

information, you will notice an immediate release of stress and a much more joyful approach to teaching--which, in turn, will have a significant effect on students' learning.

5. **Encourage.** Encouragement is often the spark that ignites motivation. It is a significant motivational approach to stimulate a striving to do well. "The teacher believed in me," is a comment that researchers have heard time and time again by students. Remember that A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT AFTER A FAILURE IS WORTH MORE THAN A WHOLE BOOK OF PRAISE AFTER A SUCCESS. A comment such as, "I have seen how capable you are; I know you can do it," is a good starter.
6. **Empower.** Empowerment is a close cousin of encouragement. Encouragement is usually vocal--something you say to someone. Empowerment may be vocal, but it need not be. For example, giving the student a responsibility can be very empowering. In my own case, my eighth grade social studies teacher gave me the assignment of being the class secretary. That responsibility empowered me in such a way that I began to participate in school government. My co-curricular activities gave me experiences and values that played a significant role in my development.
7. **Find an interest and build on it.** Everyone has something that he or she likes to do. An easy way to determine this is to find out what students do during their leisure time when alone. A good way to start is to have students share their interests in small groups. Then have students complete a 3 x 5 or 4 x 6 card with their names and one or two favorite activities. Make a list of possible interests--art, writing, reading, volunteering, mechanical things, etc. Then classify the students in one of the categories. Refer to it when planning differentiated lessons.
8. **Ask for help.** For a student who is particularly bothersome, let the student know that YOU have a problem and the only person who can help you is that student. (Of course, the problem is the student.) Machiavelli knew the effectiveness of this approach when he told the "Prince" that he would gain as much loyalty BY HAVING HIS SUBJECTS DO SOMETHING FOR HIM as when the prince would do something for them. There is something almost genetic in young people that, when given the opportunity to help someone else, they rise to the occasion.
9. **Use positivity.** Before saying anything, ask yourself, "Will this communication be perceived negatively or positively?" If it will be interpreted in a negative way, change it so the statement will be interpreted in a positive way. "Don't do that!" vs. "Can you find a more

appropriate or better way?" "You are not standing in line as you should!" vs. "Show me how you should stand in line." "Put that down!" vs. "How should that be handled?"

10. **Develop procedures to help students help themselves.** For example, if a student is hyperactive, elicit--perhaps with a suggestion or two from you--some procedure(s) that would redirect his energy. The student may tap his thigh; stretch; take a long, deep breath; hold his sternum high for better body alignment and more efficient, breathing (and thereby learning); or some other technique in which the student can engage that is not bothersome to you or disruptive to other students.

How we **feel** effects and even directs how we behave and learn. As you have heard time and time again--with a great deal of truth--students don't care how much you know until they know that you care.

Superior teachers avoid stimulating students to have negative feelings toward them. ***This is not to be confused with having high expectations and giving quality assignments***

You can be rigorous and a "demanding" teacher. Just don't do it in a demanding way.

Ideas for implementing the proactive (Covey), inspiring (Maslow), noncoercive (Glasser), collaborative and empowering (Deming) approach to reducing behavior problems and promoting learning is at <http://www.MarvinMarshall.com>

© Marvin Marshall 2003