

You Gotta' Have H.E.A.R.T.

by Tim Lautzenheiser

The seed of this article came from a student who was asked to write a paper about her most influential teacher. She had to describe what separated this particular educator from all those who had been a part of her school experiences. The last line of the paper succinctly and beautifully put everything into perspective with this sentence, "Above all, Mrs. Taylor had a good heart; that's what made her so special."

It has been said, "We will all have two or three great teachers in our lives." For many of us, our select mentors were our music teachers. In fact, it is probably safe to say these very special educators are responsible for everything from our career choice to our professional philosophy of music education. The roles are now reversed and we have a wonderful opportunity to positively impact our own students as they musically travel along their educational journey.

As you think about your most influential teachers, do you remember what they taught or the way they taught? May I suggest, for most of us, the answer will focus on the way; their personality, their communication style, the atmosphere they created surrounding the curriculum, etc. This is not to suggest mere "personality" can substitute for substantive curriculum content, but it does highlight the importance of the contextual aspect of every master teacher's success-formula. Who we are is equally as important as what we teach. Let us examine the qualities and character attributes of a master teacher who as H.E.A.R.T.:

H- HONESTY: Think about the exemplary teachers you admired and respected, those you held in highest esteem. You could always trust them to be honest in their assessment of every situation. They respected truth for the sake of truth, and while their decisions were not always popular, they were the right choices to reinforce the basic values of ethics, integrity, and dignity. They demanded excellence at every level and they realized building quality programs with quality people required a foundation of honesty.

E-ENTHUSIASM: Enthusiasm is not to be confused with the shallow excitement we often associate with lack-of-substance; quite the contrary, the great teachers exude a passion for their work, their programs, their schools, their communities, and - most of all - their students. Enthusiasm, taken from the Greek language, "en theos" (in the presence of a Divine spirit), is a reflection of the teacher's desire to exchange valuable knowledge that will make a lasting impression on his/her students. Enthusiasm is the spark that ignites the learning process and stimulates intrinsic motivation, opening the mind to an unlimited number of creative processes.

A-ATTITUDE: Did you ever know a great teacher who did not have a vivid attitude? Like it or not, students tend to reflect the attitude of their teachers. Most certainly, the extraordinary teachers raise the bar-of-expectation while modeling a positive attitude of acceptance and a willingness to help others who need extra attention in the learning process. The truly great educators do not have the time or the inclination to play in the game of sarcasm and cynicism; they refrain from being involved in negative conversations and they devote their time and energies to problem resolution instead of problem recognition. They understand the power associated with a positive role model; thus their attitude is primary in everything they do and everything they are.

R-RESPONSIBILITY: Master teachers understand the crucial importance of responsibility - “the ability to respond.” They do: What needs to be done, when it needs to be done, whether they want to do it or not, without anybody asking. The art of teaching requires a constant focus on self-discipline. Unlike many professionals, the teacher’s workday never ends. Although the final school bell completes the official school day, the special educator is always thinking, planning, organizing, and creating more effective and efficient ways to support program growth to benefit the students involved. They are always encouraging others to new heights of achievement, focusing the human potential to provide a healthy atmosphere for safe and meaningful learning experiences, and they are constantly recognizing and rewarding those students who are making strides towards the given goals. Simply put, they are there for everyone; they are responsible.

T-TRUSTWORTHINESS: Great educators are “worthy-of-trust.” They refuse to take advantage of another individual for personal gains. They do not take shortcuts or unfairly make decisions that would put another person in an uncompromising position. While they stand firm on their convictions, they are not restricted by outdated policies or myopic rules and regulations. Master teachers are true-to-their-word; they do what they say they will do regardless of the price they must pay. They “walk their talk.” The framework of every successful program is based on the trust of the participants who are mirroring the trustworthiness of the teacher. There you have it, the H.E.A.R.T. of great teachers: Honesty, Enthusiasm, Attitude, Responsibility, and Trustworthiness. We all live with the possibility of teaching with H.E.A.R.T. It requires a personal commitment to practicing these cornerstone characteristics as we go through our daily agenda. Would you like to be remembered as one of the “special teachers” in the lives of your students? If so, “You gotta have H.E.A.R.T.”

Let the music begin!