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*Winter 2016*

**How To Empower  
Employees**

**Sex Education:  
Its Importance &  
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**The Power Of Connection  
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# How to Empower Employees to Be More Productive

By: Richard Lepsinger

When productivity lags, there's a natural tendency to blame employees. Managers assume their staff is just not working hard enough or lacks motivation. They usually attempt to resolve this with either a carrot or stick approach, proposing more incentives or more consequences.

They may not realize their productivity problems actually stem from their own behavior as leaders.

When employees lack faith in the company's management and its

ability to achieve goals, productivity levels drop. Our own studies on strategy execution reveal more than half of employees believed there was a gap between their company's strategy and its ability to efficiently implement it. Of those respondents, 64 percent did not believe the gap could be closed.

A more productive workforce has a direct impact on your bottom line, as well as benefits that are less quantifiable but just as important.

When your staff is firing on all cylinders, you'll notice improved

satisfaction, higher retention rates and less conflict.

Improving productivity starts by restoring employee confidence in your company's ability to get things done. Here are five steps you can take this year to empower employees to be more productive.

## 1. Share the Strategic Plan Across the Entire Organization

When employees have a clearly outlined plan of action, they're able to

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navigate their daily responsibilities more efficiently. A well strong plan should:

- Identify potential challenges early on
- Prevent operational delays or bottlenecks
- Avoid unnecessary efforts
- Help employees organize their part in the process

All departments within your organization must be involved in developing this plan and have a clear understanding of their part in its effective execution.

## 2. Inspire Open Communication

Employees are most productive

when they feel valued and respected by their company.

That means leaders must welcome all feedback, whether positive or negative. Encourage employees to talk about their successes and failures without fear of judgment or discipline.

The CEO of Red Hat, a leading open-source software company, has done this by implementing Memo List, an email list where every employee is invited to offer comments and criticism. Like the development of open-source software, the best ideas rise to the top.

Managers should use a reward system for exemplary performance and constructive criticism for performance that requires improvement. In an environment that fosters open communication, potential issues are brought to management's attention sooner, where they can be resolved

before growing into a larger problem. This enables the team to focus on getting the job done without the inefficiencies or issues that often interfere.

It also improves cooperation and decreases conflicts.

## 3. Regularly Monitor Progress

Managing performance shouldn't be a year-end endeavor. Instead, make it a routine activity to ensure everyone understands what they should be doing and how it should be done.

The key is to monitor without overstepping. Make monitoring progress a constructive and empowering activity by asking employees to help develop a system for measuring performance. Welcome their feedback and set regular meetings to follow-up on specific suggestions and activities.

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#### 4. Encourage Employees to Connect

Productivity goes hand-in-hand with communication and collaboration. If you want to improve one, you must improve the others. Plan happy hours, lunch outings and other out-of-office events to encourage interaction among employees across all departments.

Some offices have workout rooms or pool tables in shared spaces that encourage employees to connect during breaks; Google even has a ball pit. You don't have to invest in elaborate playgrounds to build connections, however. Start small by initiating office-wide tournament pools or welcome parties for new employees. It's especially important to build this rapport among a virtual team, where spontaneous interactions don't happen as naturally.

Having informal, one-on-one video chats and time to socialize through virtual get-togethers can help your team feel more connected, even when you're separated by distance. For more tips on building connections in a virtual team, check out our blog post ([Link to Why Building Trust Is Key To Managing Conflict in Virtual Teams](#))

Relationship building outside the office improves teamwork on the job, which will positively impact productivity.

#### 5. Eliminate What Doesn't Make Sense

If a task doesn't directly influence productivity, sales, quality or safety, there's a good chance it can be eliminated. Ridding your operation of tasks that no longer contribute to goals will free time and energy that can be better spent on more important priorities.

Nearly every company has some extraneous processes or tasks that don't add value. In the movie *Office Space*, it's the new coversheets on the TPS reports.

At your company, perhaps it's multiple layers of approval for expense reports or vacation time when you ultimately only need one person to sign off on them.

Identifying barriers to getting things done efficiently and making an effort to remove them is one of the most effective ways to promote productivity. This enables your staff to work smarter instead of always striving to work harder

What are the secrets of the companies that empowered their employees to make remarkable achievements in the past year? To find out, download our free guide, "5 Companies That Excelled At Executing Strategy in 2014."

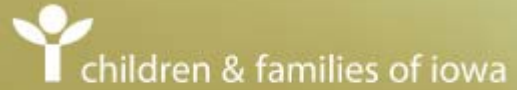
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# Supervisor/Middle Management Engagement

By: Sheila Murray

It makes sense to target your middle managers when attempting to improve employee engagement. It's also less expensive than engagement incentives or training that targets your entire workforce. Satisfied, well trained and supported middle managers will naturally lead to a happier, more engaged workforce.

Things to consider:

Cross Training - If middle managers are equipped to work in multiple

departments, it can ease staffing issues and develop well-rounded managers, who are self-confident and better positioned for advancement.

Management Newsletter – Create a Manager's newsletter with timely articles aimed at specific management issues. Content should be driven by recent issues or situations that have occurred throughout the company and be designed to support, educate and inform. Send the newsletter via email and save the cost of printing.

Management Roundtables -

Quarterly roundtables to discuss dissemination of company information can ensure that middle managers see the big picture, and enable them to explain the company goals and objectives to their employees. Participants should be held accountable for dissemination of company information presented at these roundtables and through other communication efforts.

Lunch & Learns – Lunch & learns, designed specifically for middle managers, that focus on how to

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handle difficult situations, some of which might otherwise require training or experience, can provide much appreciated support. Lunch & Learns can:

- Encourage communication and increase mentoring opportunities
- Eliminate more costly, formal training
- Be used to address subjects such as sexual harassment, anger or violence in the workplace, and performance issues for starters
- Provide an opportunity for Q&A sessions that help insure consistency in the handling of the situations discussed.

Content can be presented by members of your executive team or by outside consultants, and

can be simple brown-bag affairs, prepared on site or ordered in, or participants can bring their own lunches, or contribute to a pitch-in.

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# Business Update: Legislation Affecting YOUR Access to Federal Contracts

By: Gloria Berthold Larkin

Informed business owners not only are aware of the legislation that affects their business, but also take proactive steps to incorporate the changes into business-building strategies. The areas affected by recent legislation and rulings include:

- Small Business Parity
- Increased Dollar Thresholds
- Sole Source Dollar Award Thresholds
- Women's Procurement

## Program

- Prime Contractor Requirements for Subcontracting Plans
- Bundling Limits
- Size Standards Review

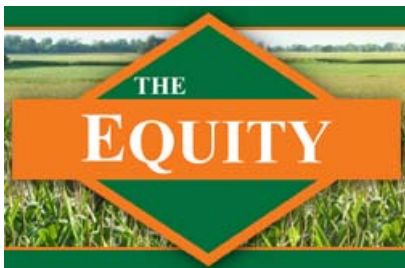
## Small Business Parity

Equal footing was restored to all small business types in federal contracting

programs. The types of small business affected are: those businesses who are "Small" as determined by the SBA Size Standards, 8(a) Certified, Women-Owned, Service Disabled Veteran-Owned and HUBZone. This means that the contracting officer now has the ability to choose the small business type for set-aside opportunities as opposed to being required to focus on just only one type, such as HUBZone.

Owners of small businesses pursuing

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government contracts will take advantage of this situation by answering every Sources Sought Notice or Request for Information (RFI) where their products or services are required. The federal government uses Sources Sought Notices and RFIs as market research to determine if enough qualified small businesses can perform the work, and if so, will then have reason to set-aside the contract for small business, or a particular type of small business. For instance, if two businesses who are 8(a) certified respond, the contracting officer may then issue the opportunity as an 8(a) set-aside. If one business responds who is 8(a) and another who is woman-owned, the set-aside may be for "small business".

It is critical that small businesses respond to these notices in order to give the contracting officer a legitimate reason to use the set-aside

program and not use a full and open competition process where all businesses, large and small, would compete for the contract.

### **Increased Dollar Thresholds**

In the past, contracts between \$3,000 and \$100,000 were to be set-aside exclusively for small business, with a few exceptions. This threshold was increased from \$100,000 to \$150,000. Generally, this means that all contracts valued between \$3,000 and \$150,000 should be set-aside for small businesses.

The exceptions to this new limit would be sales made on GSA Schedules or task orders on other contract vehicles such as Government-wide Acquisition Contracts (GWACs) or Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contracts. Those sales are available to

any size company, large or small.

Savvy small business contractors will take time to contact all current contracting officers for whom they have worked and educate them about the increase in the threshold and ask for any upcoming opportunities that may fall within the new thresholds.

### **Sole Source Dollar Award Thresholds**

Contracting officers have had the opportunity to make sole-source contract awards (where no competitive bidding is required) to 8(a) and HUBZone firms up to 3.5 million dollars for any non-manufacturing work and 5.5 million dollars for manufacturing. Those limits have now increased to \$4 million and \$6.5 million dollars respectively.

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The Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs) threshold for sole source awards has now increased from \$3 million to \$3.5 million for non-manufacturing and \$5.5 to \$6 million for manufacturing contracts.

Educated business owners will contact their local Small Business Administration (SBA) representative and learn how to request and participate in the sole-source contracting process. There is a very specific process to follow to win sole source contracts and your SBA representative is a very important person who will guide you through the process.

### **Women's Procurement Program**

The SBA announced the publication of a final rule, called the 8(m) Program, to implement the federal procurement program for women-owned small businesses (WOSB) that has been over ten years in the making. This is an economic-disadvantaged-based program in which eighty-three industries have been identified where WOSBs are underrepresented among federal contractors. Thirty-eight of which the SBA has deemed WOSBs to be "substantially underrepresented." The 8(m) program seeks to open up more opportunities for WOSBs working in these 83 industries.

To be eligible, the company has to be considered "small" under the primary NAICS code, and not less than 51% unconditionally and directly owned and controlled by one or more women who are U.S. Citizens. Further, the rule specifies that, with certain exceptions, the woman who holds the highest officer position may not engage in outside employment and must manage the company on a full-time basis during the normal working hours just like other companies in the same or similar line of business.

To determine whether a woman is economically disadvantaged for purposes of the 8(m) Program, the SBA will check her income, personal net worth, and the fair market value of her total assets. A woman will be found economically disadvantaged if her adjusted gross yearly income, averaged over the three years preceding the certification, is less than \$350,000, her personal net worth is less than \$750,000, and the fair market value of all of her assets is less than \$3 million. In the 38 industries where women are deemed to be "substantially underrepresented," the rule waives the economic



disadvantage requirement.

Woman-owned businesses may either self-certify or certify through third parties approved by SBA. Regardless of the certification method, every woman-owned business must ensure that all requirements for the following three databases are met:

Central Contractor Registration (CCR)

“WOSB Program Repository,” to be established by the SBA

Online Representations and Certifications Application (ORCA)

This program is scheduled to go into effect in February 2011 and the SBA estimates that federal agencies will be able to start setting aside contracts for WOSBs in the first quarter of 2011.

Right now, WOSBs are planning their strategies to build strong relationships with target agencies and prime contractors so that they will be well-positioned for accelerated success after February, 2011.

### **Prime Contractor Requirements for Subcontracting Plans**

Prime contractors have been required to write specific subcontracting plans for all non-construction contracts over \$550,000 and \$1 million for construction contracts. Now, the limits are increased to \$650,000 and \$1.5 million for construction. Prime contractors will also be required to use the subcontractors listed in their subcontracting plan, unless they went out of business within 1 year.

Prompt payment to subcontractors will also be enforced in that subcontractors must be paid within 90 days. Contracting officers will be required to include this and related issues in the published prime contractor’s evaluation.

### **Bundling Limits**

In the past ten years, the practice of contract bundling, or consolidation, has grown dramatically. This is the practice of combining many related or even non-related services or

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products under one, generally very large, contract. Because the contracts grew to extraordinary sizes, often exceeding 100 million dollars, most small businesses were effectively cut out of competition.

Recent legislation now states that no Federal agency acquisition plan can include consolidation of contract requirements (bundling of contracts) worth more than just \$2 million unless consolidation is necessary and justified. There is now an across-the-board policy on bundling: Agencies will be required to solicit bids from small business joint ventures and teams on solicitations above the bundling threshold.

This means that there will be many more contracts of smaller sizes up for competitive or even sole-source bids. While this is very good for small business, it will make the contracting officers' lives difficult and demanding.

The businesses who will be most successful in this market will have all of the necessary certifications, contract vehicles and full preparation with regards to the needs of the market, not to mention strong relationships built with the decision-makers.

## Size Standards Review

Every business can be identified by its industry with the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). These NAICS have been associated with specific measurements such as number of employees or amount of revenue to determine when a company is considered a large or small company. Some size standards have not changed in over ten years. To keep up with economic changes, the SBA will now conduct a review of one third of size standards (by NAICS code) every 18 months, completing a comprehensive review of all NAICS every 5 years.

These legislative updates can bring significant changes to the federal procurement market and either help or hurt business. The more knowledgeable and better prepared you are, the greater the chance is that your business will benefit, increase revenues, employ more people and help rebuild our economy.

Gloria Berthold Larkin is president of TargetGov and a Board Member of Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP.org). She is an expert in business development in the government and corporate business markets. She is a dynamic speaker and book author and adept at negotiating the government contracting maze on behalf of clients.

# Four Characteristics to Look for in a Quality Hospital

By: Andrea Avery

You might not get a second chance with your health. For this reason, the hospital you choose needs to be effective and efficient, delivering cutting-edge technology with compassion. Learn what to look for as you explore various healthcare organizations.

## 1. Clinical Expertise

The healthcare services provided by

a hospital are closely related to the expertise and skills of its clinicians.

The physicians practicing at an institution represent it by providing the hands-on care patients need.

Every physician has an individual record of practice, including information on past procedures and any complications or mortality rates.

An institution will develop an overall rating as a facility based on the ratings of the clinicians that practice there.

Consider the level of difficulty and the diversity of procedures performed at a facility as well. An institution that does not perform complicated and cutting-edge procedures may have a lower mortality rating than another one that does perform sophisticated procedures. This seeming disparity may simply be due to one organization's performance of risky procedures and another facility's avoidance of them.

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## 2. Maintenance and Upkeep

A clinical facility must receive stellar maintenance and upkeep. The environment both inside and outside of the organization must be neat, clean, and in good repair. Lighting should be flawless, rooms must be impeccably clean, common areas should be maintained, and all facilities located within the organization should be managed properly. Check the waiting rooms, the cafeteria, and the hallways. Carpeting, flooring, furniture, and other basics of the surroundings should be of adequate quality. Operating suites and other patient-care facilities must be safe, clean, and technologically sound.

## 3. Quality Medical Staff

You can learn important details about a hospital by its learning about its staff. The people working in the facility should be neat, clean, professional, courteous, and personable with patients. During interactions between staff and patients, the staff should instill confidence and gain patient trust. The staff should demonstrate skills, expertise, and thorough knowledge within their specific fields of medicine. Observation of communication between clinicians and staff should show professionalism and respect, demonstrating that they work as a unified team to serve patients.

## 4. Administrative Management

The administrative team of a hospital has a wide and varied job and must manage and support workers while providing the best care. Administration is in charge of what supplies a facility purchases, what technologies it utilizes, the training provided to workers, and the overall environment of the organization. Administration also makes final decisions about the research conducted by physicians. Finally, administration oversees insurance policies and billing procedures to ensure that patients receive correct bills and that insurance companies are billed as necessary. The administration of a healthcare organization has the responsibility of ensuring that the facility operates cohesively and efficiently.

With an eye for detail, you can examine and analyze a hospital to ensure that the standard of care you observe is adequate for you or your family member.

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# Clinical Competencies for Patient Engagement

By: Donald Bryant

In the March issue of “Making Good Healthcare Better” I pointed out the benefits of engaging patients in their own healthcare as well as how to measure the level of engagement of the patient. In this month’s issue I will look more closely at specific competencies needed by physicians and practices to optimize patient engagement. As noted in “Patients, Providers, and Systems Need to Acquire a Specific Set of Competencies to Achieve Truly Patient-Centered Care” of the February 2013 issue of Health Affairs these competencies will be necessary

to achieve the Triple Aim of the IHI- better outcomes for the patient, better population level outcomes, and lower costs.

There are several distinct types of engagement between the patient and providers. There are:

- Face-to-face between physician and patient
- Face-to-face between clinical staff and patient
- Engagement between non-clinical staff and patient
- Engagement between all three

of the above and patient using health information technology (HIT).

Effective face-to-face engagement between physician or non-physician provider and patient requires several skills. First the physician must be able to assess the capacity of the patient to be engaged and how willing the patient is in making decisions that affect his or her care. The competency of patients to be engaged varies according to gender, age, education, culture and severity of disease. Physicians need to

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be aware of these for each patient. Besides having varying levels of competencies in being engaged patients have varying levels of desires to help in making decisions. According to the Health Affairs article above, "Patients vary in the roles and degree of control that they want to assume in decisions about their medical treatment. Although some patients are naturally inclined to participate, others may prefer that their physician direct their care." A tool that can measure the level of patient engagement is the Patient Activation Measure, discussed in last month's edition of this newsletter.

Besides being aware of the patient's capacity to be engaged the physician must be an effective communicator. The physician needs to be able to explain the patient's condition in terms that the patient can understand as well as clearly explain the choices that the patient has without bias. The physician needs to be a good listener and respond to the patient appropriately. I have found a very good source of videos that simulate discussions between patients and physicians concerning cancer diagnosis and treatment; the simulations can be easily adapted to other patient-physician discussions. The topics covered are:

- Essentials
- Empathy
- News
- Transitions
- Pearls

Each topic has several examples. These streaming simulations can be found at <http://depts.washington.edu/oncotalk/videos/>.

Engagement must extend beyond face-to-face encounters between clinical staff and patients. This is especially true of patients with chronic conditions. For best outcomes patients are engaged by nursing staff acting as case managers. These managers are proactive in contacting patients to see that they understand and are following through on care guidelines provided by physicians. This is especially recommended to see that patients are following medication orders. According to a 2012 study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, about 50% of patients do not take their medication as prescribed. Case managers can also help in connecting patients to community resources, such as dieticians or mental health providers.

Patients engage with more than clinical staff. They also engage office staff. These encounters should be patient-centered. Check-in and checkout should be efficient and pleasant. Patients should receive notice of all test results, even the negative ones. Staff, both clinical and non-clinical,

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should design processes involving patient encounters that are consistent and effective. This not only improves the patient experience, and ultimately the health outcomes, but also helps the practice avoid risks, such as lawsuits and poor social media posting from disgruntled patients.

Another developing source of engagement with patients is through health information technology (HIT). Eligible providers who are involved in the CMS electronic medical records meaningful use program must satisfy several new forms of engagement through the EMR. For instance, physicians must provide a secure portal to exchange messages with patients. Patients need to be able to access their medical records and be able to download them in order to share them with a third party.

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology is actively promoting ways for patients to engage with their providers in order to improve their health and the healthcare that they receive. The strategy for doing this is termed the “Three A’s”. The three prongs for doing this are to increase patients’ Access to their health information, to enable patients to take Action with that information and to shift Attitudes so that patients and providers think and act as partners in managing care through HIT. Enabling access is primarily through the meaningful use stages of EMR adoption so far. The National Coordinator is fostering the development of e-health tools and apps that make use of data from the EMR’s. One example of this is the development of tools that make use of data in the Blue Button program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The National Coordinator is also partnering with providers in pilot programs. One is with Geisinger Health Systems; the program there allows patients to improve the accuracy of their health records. Much more information is available for patients and providers at the HealthIT.gov website.

Avenues for engaging patients in their own care are developing rapidly. The beginning of all such engagement is with the physician or non-physician provider. This is the keystone of all successful engagement. Along with this providers can and should try a variety of methods. If your group is a patient-centered medical home you will get best results and returns with care a manager or coordinator. Providers should also work to insure that non-clinical processes such as check-in and notification of test results are efficient and consistent, striving to improve patient satisfaction. Doing so will result in better returns and better health, as well as avoiding unnecessary risks. Engagement with e-health tools will become more common and providers should become familiar with them.

# The Power of Connecting With Others

By Madeline Frank

Lady Jennie Jerome Churchill, the beautiful American mother of Winston Churchill, dined with two of England's premier leaders, Benjamin Disraeli and his rival, William Gladstone, in the same week.

A journalist asked, "Lady Churchill what was your first impressions of the two men?"

Lady Jennie Jerome Churchill replied: "When I left the dining room after sitting next to Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man

in England. But when I sat next to Disraeli I left feeling that I was the cleverest woman."

Benjamin Disraeli on meeting the beautiful, Lady Jenny Churchill, wanted to know all about her. He asked her questions and listened intently to her replies. Disraeli wanted to connect with her and find common ground. Benjamin Disraeli said, "The greatest good you can do for another is not just share your riches, but to reveal to him his own."

William Gladstone, on the other hand,

talked about how brilliant and important he was to Lady Jenny Churchill. He was not interested in connecting with anyone else.

Which leader would you rather sit next to at dinner Disraeli or Gladstone?

The greatest connectors find common ground and lift others higher just like Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli did for Winston Churchill's mother Lady Jenny Jerome Churchill.

Michael Deaver was deputy chief of

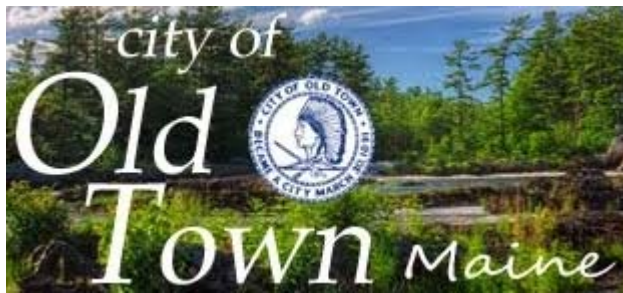
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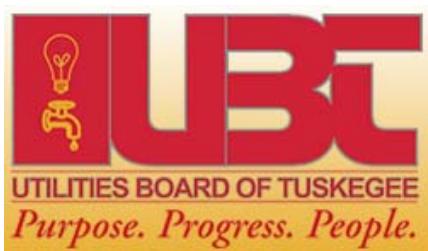
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staff for Ronald Reagan for 30 years. Deaver said, “Ronald Reagan was one of the shyest men I’d ever met.” Deaver was asked, “Why Reagan had such rapport with the press corps?” He replied, “Well, Reagan basically liked people, whether they were part of the press corps or whether they were just ordinary people. That comes through.” It was said that President Reagan cared about people and it did not matter whether they were a gardener, a secretary, or someone on his team. He treated them the same. Reagan “enjoyed being with people” and connected with them.

Deaver said, “Everyone liked being around Ronald Reagan because he loved people and connected with them. He understood that relationships were the glue that held his team members together- the more solid the relationship, the more cohesive his team.”

Dan Quiggle said, “Ronald Reagan spoke plainly and genuinely to the American people-from his heart and with genuine sincerity about what he believed was best for America and for the world.”

Benjamin Disraeli and Ronald Reagan understood about the importance of connecting with others. They cared about others, valued them, and wanted to know about them. They asked questions and listened attentively; wanting to find out answers and common ground with the people they connected to. Connecting is important at all levels of your life; with family members, friends, with other employees at work, or at school.

After two weeks of torrential rain and wind my family and I noticed cracks in the ceilings and several damp spots. When the rain finally stopped we called a friend and got a recommendation on a roofer he liked and trusted. We called the roofer and arranged an appointment in his busy schedule to show him the ceiling damage in the house to have our roof repaired.

My husband and I met the Roofer shook hands with him and showed him the ceiling damage in the house. He then asked us the following questions:

- 1) How old is this roof?
- 2) How often have you had it checked and repaired?
- 3) Do you have extra shingles?

We answered the Roofer’s questions. He then went up his ladder on the roof and photographed, with his phone, pictures of what needed to be repaired. He then showed the pictures to us and explained what needed to be done.



The Roofer said, "Your roof is in pretty good shape considering how so many other roofs have faired in this wet stormy weather. We will need to replace all the tiles missing in the pictures and caulk around a few areas on the roof and repair a gable." He called us a few days later, to tell us how much it would cost. His price seemed reasonable and we agreed to it. He told us what day he would repair it and we left the shingles outside for him to do the repairs.

The Roofer called us after he completed the roof and said, "It will be raining Tuesday or Wednesday. Let me know if we have gotten all the leaks." This Roofer understood how to connect with others and did the work as promised.

On February 20, 2015, five hundred of us trained with Dr. John Maxwell to be certified to join his John Maxwell Team. One of the most important rules he taught us was his "The 30 Second Rule". "Within 30 seconds of meeting someone give them the "Triple A Treatment" - your attention, affirmation, and appreciation".

Two of my favorite books of Dr. Maxwell are "Everyone Communicates, Few Connect" and "Relationships 101".

### **So what are the three things you can do today to connect with others?**

1) Connecting begins when you take an interest in others by asking them questions just like Benjamin Disraeli, Ronald Reagan, and the Roofer did.

2) Listening carefully to their responses, shows that you care and want to know all about them, and how you can help them.

3) As you connect with others you are finding common ground and building a relationship. Look for the best in others by saying positive things to them and lifting others up.

Zig Ziglar says, "Strong people don't put other people down... they lift them up."

"People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This famous quote has been attributed to Teddy Roosevelt, Zig Ziglar and Dr. John Maxwell

So begin today connecting with others just like President Reagan, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, and the Roofer.

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# How to Begin a Conversation

By: Bud Bilanich

Dynamic communication skills are an important key to career and life success. If you want to become a dynamic communicator, you need to master three basic, but very important, skills: conversation, writing, presenting.

Several years ago I read an eBook by Dennis Rivers, called "Cooperative Communication Skills for Success at Home and at Work." I came across the eBook in my files the other day. Chapter 2 really caught my attention. It is entitled "Explaining Your

Conversational Intent and Inviting Consent." Dennis makes some common sense, but seldom seen, points about conversation skills in it. In summary, he says, "Make sure that you tell the other person what type of conversation you want to have. Ask him or her if he or she is ready to have this type of conversation at that time."

Check out some of what he has to say...

"In order to help your conversation partner cooperate with you and to reduce possible misunderstandings,

start important conversations by inviting your conversation partner to join you in the specific kind of conversation you want to have. The more the conversation is going to mean to you, the more important it is for your conversation partner to understand the big picture. If you need to have a long, complex, or emotion-laden conversation with someone, it will make a big difference if you briefly explain your conversational intention first and then invite the consent of your intended conversation partner.

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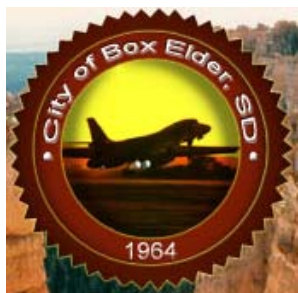
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“Why explain? Some conversations require a lot more time, effort and involvement than others. If you want to have a conversation that will require a significant amount of effort from the other person, it will go better if that person understands what he or she is getting into and consents to participate. Of course, in giving up the varying amounts of coercion and surprise that are at work when we just launch into whatever we want to talk about, we are more vulnerable to being turned down. But, when people agree to talk with us, they will be more present in the conversation and more able to either meet our needs or explain why they can’t (and perhaps suggest alternatives we had not thought of). Many good communicators do this explaining intent/inviting consent without giving it any thought. They start important conversations by saying things such as: ‘Hi, Steve. I need to ask for your help on my project. Got a minute to talk about it?’ ‘Maria, do you have a minute? Right now I’d like to talk to you about... Is that OK?’”

When we offer such combined explanations of intent and invitations-to-consent we can help our conversations along in four important ways:

First, we give our listeners a chance to consent to or decline the offer of a specific conversation. A person who has

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agreed to participate will participate more fully.

Second, we help our listeners to understand the “big picture,” the overall goal of the conversation-to-come. Many scholars in linguistics and communication studies now agree that understanding a person’s overall conversational intention is crucial for understanding that person’s message in words and gestures.

Third, we allow our listeners to get ready for what is coming, especially if the topic is emotionally charged. (If we surprise people by launching into emotional conversations, they may respond by avoiding further conversations with us or by being permanently on guard.)

And fourth, we help our listeners understand the role that we want them to play in the conversation: fellow problem solver, employee receiving instructions, giver of emotional support, and so on. These are very different roles to play. Our conversations will go better if we ask people to play only one conversational role at a time.

To be invited into a conversation is an act of respect. A consciously consenting participant is much more likely to pay attention and cooperate than someone who feels pushed into an undefined conversation by the force of another person’s talking.

It’s not universal, but to assume without asking that a person is available to talk may be interpreted by many people as lack of respect. When we begin a conversation by respecting the wishes of the other person, we start to generate some of the goodwill (trust that their wishes will be considered) needed for creative problem solving. I believe that the empathy we get will be more genuine and the agreements we reach will be more reliable if we give people a choice about talking with us.

The common sense point here is simple. Successful people are dynamic communicators. Dynamic communicators have mastered three basic communication skills: conversation, writing and presenting. Inviting people to participate in a conversation and getting their agreement before jumping in is an important, but often overlooked conversation skill. People who are invited to join a conversation, and choose to do so, are more likely to be better participants. If you want to become an excellent conversationalist, take a few minutes to explain why you want to have a conversation. Ask the other person if he or she has the time and is willing to participate in a conversation on that topic. Your conversations will be better and more productive if you follow this simple common sense advice.

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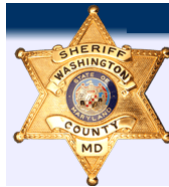


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# The Problem With College and Career Readiness Education

By: Gabriela Gotay

Preparing our children to be successful in college and once they step out into the workplace is certainly an educational goal worth striving for, but should college and career readiness be the ultimate goal of the traditional education system?

I am proof that focusing on college and career readiness can actually work. I graduated with high honors from both college and graduate school. I have a job and time to blog

and come up with other fun ideas and projects. I have good communication skills, interpersonal skills, work with people and take on leadership roles.

However, when I think back and reflect about my years in primary and secondary school, I know there is so much information that is missing. For me, those first years of school seem to be a blur. I know I did receive some information, I know I was there at school, in a room with a teacher and

other 20 or 30 students, I know I had the books and I also know, I was a very distracted girl, I know I did not like all they taught and felt no inspiration to learn. Nevertheless, I did the work, I got passing grades, and moved up from one grade to the next until I was “ready”.

Yes, many students reach a level of “college and career readiness”. But what does that really mean? Even

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more worrisome, could that be the only goal that is worth it?

New schools and new teaching and learning models have been sprung up for years in different countries around the world. In the US these “avant-garde” schools are implementing many different approaches to teaching and learning. These schools are mostly private schools or public charter schools. Unfortunately, many of the students that need these schools the most, as they provide greater literacy reinforcement and a new source of inspiration to learn beyond the expected bottom line, are missing out.

What happens when we forgo true mastery of skills, abilities and understanding for the quick and ready-made? When we don’t allow the teaching and learning process enough flexibility and resources to provide individual attention to students and support to teachers? What happens when the aim of traditional schools continuous to be the mass production of “workers”, giving just enough time, tools and strategies to grasp the very basic concepts and understanding to move on? The answer is simple and worrisome, where the original goal was to produce “useful and moral citizens” the reality is that we are producing nothing more than mediocre children.

Of course many students in traditional educational systems succeed. But shouldn’t the aim be the success of ALL?

And what about this insistence on “college and career” as the next obvious steps, or rather THE steps to take after graduating from high school?

I did follow the very traditional path of college, marriage and career. As I look back and forward into the evolution of our human civilization, that traditional path is still very much ingrained in the way western culture has structured itself. Within society, many of us think we are doing what we want to do with our lives, but in reality, immersed in the traditional education systems, we have been programmed for years. Of course, at the time schools as we know them formally began, its main purpose was to develop rational and discipline citizens, men and women willing and able to follow society’s rules and limitations that make everyday life possible. The school became a civilizing institution.

But, when the standards teachers work with emphasize

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“college and career readiness” we are telling young students that these are the only acceptable options on the table for their future. I believe, that in a never ending quest to produce children that get into college and find jobs, schools have created massive mediocrity.

**College:** before our modern times, going to a higher institution of learning was not designed for everyone. Nowadays we have more than enough physical evidence that people that don’t go to college can still be greatly successful. This success doesn’t happen by accident, but by action and self-discipline. If students grow up and get educated in creative and innovative environments, who can tell how many useful technologies they may be able to come up with or what new ideas they may develop that change the way we live our lives in the coming future. At one time in our human history colleges may have been great places to share ideas and learn about a variety of topics not available to everybody else. Now, that is not necessarily true anymore. People around the world connect and share ideas by the second. The internet is all about information, connectivity and learning that takes place instantly. Many free courses are available online, all the books you could imagine to download and the forums for discussion of new ideas.

**Career:** this word doesn’t mean a Job, not anymore. Now a career may be thought of as the path one entrepreneur takes along a line of innovative ideas, products and services. Now a career is not a life spent working for a company, performing exactly the skill, it says in your resume, you acquired in your college degree. The workplace has changed, and the role of a professional within it has also change. Social skills are needed in the workplace, yes, ability to follow rules and procedures, to work in teams, to manage time... but more and more offices and companies are revamping their organizational structure and what they expect employees to do. It’s no longer a follow the leader, static environment. It is an ever changing and challenging place, where cultural awareness and diversity is the new norm, where each individual is expected to take on a leadership role, where working standing up is ergonomic and we are even having “walking” meetings.

Innovative educational models have come and go, the stronger ones have endured. But to get access to those, most parents still need to pay. While the public



education systems of some states have taken positive steps forward, other are lingering behind, within the security of the states' educational standards and the CCS. Don't get me wrong, having a set of standards is useful in many ways. But the limiting expectation of college and career readiness may be doing more harm than good.

As valuable as is it to prepare children with the skills they will need to be useful and productive once they get out of school, it is also valuable to make the time they spend in school one of self-discovery, reflection, creativity and problem solving outside the box. Because, if children don't see themselves represented in other individual or self-made boxes outside the box of "college" and the box of "career", they will default to mediocrity. Supporting and building of the confidence of children is what opens up the path they will choose to travel no just toward college and career, but through life.

Let's prepare our children to be ready to face life's challenges and opportunities. Let's refrain from forcing "college" and "career" as the only two options and the only to reason that school is worth their time for. School, as a time and place, is so much more than that.

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# Education Loans Can Augment The Boundaries Of What You Can Achieve

By: Amanda Thompson

Education never ends - it is not said without reason. We are educated all our lives and getting an education not only is a great achievement but something that gives you the tools to find your own way in the world. Education is indispensable; little do we realize how much more it can bring to us in terms of worldly amplifications. Anyone can have propensity and the natural endowment for education. But one

might not have the resources to finance their education. You certainly can't let lack of resources impede you from advancing your prospects through education. Then you accidentally stumble upon the word 'education loans'. Loans for education - you have never thought about it as a feasible arrangement. Education loans can open newer panoramas in regard to your education aspirations.

Education loans are open to all people in all its myriad forms. Education loans can realize your education plans or the education plans of your children. You can strengthen you own future and the future of your son or daughter with education loans. An extensive range of student and parent loans are presented under the category of education loans. There are many types of education loans. Discerning

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about the types of education loans will help you in making the accurate decision. The single largest resource of education loans is federal loan. The two main federal education loan programs are the Federal Family Education Loan Program and the Federal Direct Loan Program. In the Federal Family Education Loan Program the bank, credit union or the school is the lender. While the federal direct loans program, the department of education is the lender.

Private education loans are offered to people so that they can provide financial backup to their education plans. Private education loans are not endorsed by other government agencies but are provided by other financial institutions. Private education loans program are optimum for both undergraduate and graduate studies.

Formal education is requisite for future success. Though this is not a hard and fast rule, but education certainly helps you in gaining an upper hand. With universities getting expensive by each day an education loan will certainly give you an incentive to go ahead with your education plans. Each year while contemplating on your education plans the thought of finances almost invariably comes in. While working towards you degree, you are constantly plagued about paying for the education fees, books, and other living expenses. Education loans can provide funding for tuition fees, board and room, books computer, and even student travel. An education loan can help you with all these expenses. Education loans are sufficient enough to take care of all these expenses. If you have been forced to drop your education for any reason, you can still take up your education at any point of time. Irrespective of your age and also where you have left your education.

There are no specific eligibility criteria for education loans. Any person who is in need of sponsorship for education can find an education loan that befits his or her financial necessity. Loan amount on education loans vary with the kind of education you want to pursue. The repayment options with education loans will similarly accommodate your personal financial preferences. You can either repay interest amount while still in school or six months after graduation. Education loans offer up to ten years for repayments. The refund alternatives on education loans also include deferment, forbearance and consolidation. The various sites on education loans can give you innumerable repayment options and monetary remuneration.

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# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF HAMILTON COUNTY

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Education loans will help you in planning your life after graduation. However, an education loan like every loan is a huge financial obligation. An education loan is generally the first substantial loan for most people and therefore the first major expense. Do not be completely dependent on your education loans for the funding of your complete education. Try to apply for any other financial sustenance like university grants, scholarships, fellowships, work study programs and assistance ship and any other form of aid. This will certainly encourage a fluid dispensation of your education loans. You can start by going to the financial aid office in your school or university. It will provide you further insight to the kind of education loans, you must apply for.

Education is an experience of life. It is so rewarding in itself that it helps you to manage almost everything in your life. Education loans discipline your impulse towards education and training into a fruitful contrivance. The payoff is delicious in terms of improved quality of life. Education is expensive! Is it? With education loans it can't be. Now, you don't have to take the road in front of you. Make your own road with education loans.

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# Sex Education:

## Its Importance and Need in the Society

By: *Amna Tariq Shah*

Sex Education, as the term clearly indicates, refers to education which is based on human sexual behavior. Parents, schools or caretakers offer it in some parts of the world to educate the children, who are stepping into their adolescence. If formally received, sex education is either taught as a full course at high school or junior high school level or in biology, health, home economics classes. Teaching sex education is rather a controversial issue; debates have been going on for several decades discussing if it should be taught formally in schools or not.

Sex education in schools should exist without any doubts and apprehensions as it offers many benefits.

Adolescence is called the “age of storm and stress”. The young teenagers, during this phase of life are under deep psychological pressure. Mainly, this psychological pressure is the result of one’s growing sexual needs and the biological changes and hormonal effects on the individuals. During this time, most of the children are observed to become easily irritable. They find it difficult in most situations

to deal with the family members. They might not want to talk to them about the natural changes taking place in their body and mind. In such circumstances, one highly suitable option is that of the teachers who are able to teach them to control their urges until a proper age. In schools, trained teachers would help the students to know how to deal with their sexual impulses. This role can not be replaced by parents or other entities. A classroom discussion and lesson would make them feel it is natural, and they would also feel that they are being understood by

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**SCHOOL DISTRICT 101**

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someone. However, taking them individually to psychologists or other trained educators would not help. In such a situation they might consider themselves to be different and misunderstood by family and people around them. Therefore, it becomes crystal clear that the best way to offer sex education is always in school.

It is a psychological phenomenon that children at young age are under an immense peer pressure. Something that they learn in the class with their peer group is what makes a better impression on their minds than otherwise. They are more focused in the lessons that teachers offer and are more eager asking question to clear their ambiguities. They might feel embarrassed and uneasy questioning their parents about it, but it always differs in case of the teacher in the class. This is because everyone in the class is going through the same stage. A class discussion becomes healthy source of learning as it helps in enhancing the knowledge on the subject.

Many people advocate that sex education should only be restricted to families, that is, that parents should personally educate their children. This view is totally illogical and holds complications and questions. The first point is that not all the parents would be willing to do it or would be able to do it. Secondly, this education needs a proper

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channel through which it should reach its required learners. There could be many possible problems in the families so they might not be able to take the role of a teacher in educating their children regarding sex. The demand of annulment of sex education from the schools is highly conservative.

Most importantly, there are many single parents, how would they take up this challenge of educating their children on their own? Parents can not properly educate their children about sex also because they lack details that qualified sex educators convey in schools. Thus, the stance of abolishing sex education in school is not a favorable thought. In many observed cases where parents or children are embarrassed about talking over sexual matters with each other, it is most likely to be uneasy situation at both the ends. This keeps the children from learning the

answers to the questions they might have in their minds. This can be a great flaw of shifting the duty of sexual education from teachers to the parents. It will leave the children only half or less educated about the issue and as they say “Little knowledge is a dangerous thing”, this might end up in grave situations.

According to research, most of the parents also feel uneasy because they know that they are not equipped to provide the apt sexual information to their children. They also fail to comprehend what details and information should be concealed and what should be revealed, keeping in mind their children’s age. On the other hand, there might also be parents who would feel comfortable talking to their children about sexual matters, but only when the children bring the matter up.

Most parents, around the world, may

also lack role models to look up to as they would not have talked over sexual issues with their own parents in their adolescent. This makes them inefficient to trigger their roles of educating their children in an effective way as the assigned teachers are able to do in schools.

Sex education is not limited to only a single branch of knowledge. This education focuses on a number of significant sexual matters that are offered with especially designed courses and programs. Sex education covers the education of relationships, sexual abstinence at a certain level and teaching to practice safe sex to the level of children who are thought to be sexually active. Therefore, its claim for being appropriate and guiding holds strong base.

At a certain age of adolescence, growing children have problems

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facing relationships and controlling their personal emotions. Conflicts related to such matters persuade many youngsters to commit suicides or take part in other immoral activities. Proper sex education in schools also concentrates in making the youngsters emotionally stronger and in educating ways to cope with relationship problems. This argument strongly shows the immense benefit of sex education in schools.

Sex education is an important health strategy and this cannot be denied. AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases can only be controlled if people are aware of precautions and have a vast knowledge in this case. This knowledge is conveyed through sex education, and if sex education is banned in schools and if parents have to educate their children, then it would not be as beneficial to the individuals and the society on the whole as teaching in school could be.

Sex education does not exist in all parts of the world. Asians are commonly regarded conservative when compared to westerners. It is not a part of their course in schools; this does not in any way mean that their teenage pregnancy rate is any lower if they are not exposed to sexual matters openly. In fact, this is one way how peers can mislead most of the youngsters and persuade them to bask in young age

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sexual relationships without any attempts for safety. This has resulted in serious problems such as the spread of fatal diseases like AIDS and has also increased rate of illegitimate births.

Researches have shown that the cause for ramification of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) in the eras of 80s and 90s in the US and the UK is the lack of knowledge and information provided about sex in schools or home. Home and family has never and will never play an integral part in conveying sex education to teenagers, therefore to rely on the option of home, is to deceive your own self from the expected exigency in the future.

Some conservative groups assert that to discuss sexual issues openly is to devalue religion. No religion in the world abstain its followers from spreading the information that is so

essential for human lives. Sexual behavior is natural and takes place through biological changes and this cannot be questioned as this is a part of human life. Thus people who take refuge under the religious shelter, to make their arguments strong, are misinterpreting religious ideas and laws.

Modern time is the time of internet and powerful media. Teenagers are exposed to Hollywood, TV and internet. These sources offer demonstration of sex which is highly thoughtless and casual; in this situation it is almost illogical to leave the teenagers on their sexual choices. They are young and fully excited; therefore they can not make a favorable choice. Sex education in school offers the information and knowledge they need to understand to know the responsibility that is accompanied by sexual relationships. The teacher in school helps the students to know the difference between a thoughtless and thoughtful

sex. Having an urge for sex is not a problem; it is a natural process showing that the young people are developing to become adults; however the problem is having unsafe sex and hurting people through sexual choices.

People who claim that sex education in schools have more cons than pros, often come up with the statements suggesting that sex education in classroom should be avoided because the most effective tool for offering sex education, according to them is TV, films, magazines and media. Such people fail to understand that trained sex educators under especially designed programs teach sex education to children in schools. They are thus able to handle children's problems and clear their ambiguities in the best possible way, whereas magazines, films, TV and other channels and mediums of providing sex education

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are be reliable. They are most of the times urging the young people by encouraging their sexual promiscuity rather than effectively teaching and educating them. This wrong approach damages the society and the individuals in disguise of ameliorating them.

People contradicting the notion insist that sex education always makes the learners have sex and experience it personally, once they learn about it in school. The reality is that sexual urge for any human being is a natural occurrence. When children reach to a certain age, whether they find people to educated them about sex or not, they do have natural instincts about it, and therefore if provided a chance they would surely want to satisfy their urge. This natural reaction can not in any way be related to the outcome of sex education in schools. In fact, the best time for letting sex education play its role is when the sexual urge increases and the teenagers want to find a source for its satisfaction. It offers individuals with the required knowledge so that they are careful. It is only then that they understand the consequences of sex leading to child birth as well as sexually transmitted diseases. Thus sex education is basically a warning and a caution for such children who are stepping into the phase of life where they would need to know all this.

Some people who go against the topic also argue that even though sex education exists, it has still not decreased the rate of teenage pregnancies. I would rather not go deep in to the moral issue of the topic, but it is important here to discuss and point out the shortcomings of our society. Social values that insist that being single, pregnant and teenagers is fine, is what has to be changed. Through educating the children and making them aware that it is just not 'cool' to be pregnant when single or teenager, and just because 'others are also doing it' does not in any way justify their actions, this change can be achieved. There are many sexual education programs that teach the learners about the grave consequences that can result in having early sex. This type of sex education in schools is helpful and makes the learners responsible and mature enough to understand the difference between morality and immorality.

People, who are against the notion, repeatedly state the question that why sex education is given so much importance when there are also many other issues connected with juvenile delinquencies such as drugs, drinking and aggressive bullying. No doubt, there are also many other issues to consider important enough to be taught in school for awareness but psychological researches show that behind most of the juvenile behavioral problems, one main reason is always the active



sexual urge which drives the young people to indulge themselves in harmful activities like drug abuse and alcoholism. It is also commonly observed that young teenagers who indulge into such activities are unaware of proper sex education. Once they are given a true picture of sex and its consequences their mental status relaxes and they are easily able to cope with other social taboos.

Parents, who believe that sex education pollutes the minds of their children, have in large number taken their children out of schools promoting sex education. In this process of instilling in their minds their religious and family values, they forget that the media, their children are largely exposed to can also lead them astray. Sex education in schools does not in any way offers them an invitation to have open sex by making them aware of the risks; it just educates them about the matter in the best way.

Apart from educating the students about safe sex, sex education in schools is also helpful as it helps students to learn proper terminology for reproductive system, STDs and birth contraceptives rather than the street lingo that is commonly used by laymen. Sex education classes are gender based and that is why the young learners are not embarrassed and are only taught what is related to their gender. Early inclusion of classes also helps the teenagers to either become abstinent for some time or to become responsible if they are already active. Therefore, many sexual problems that occur in adulthood can be controlled if effective and apt sex education is given at the right time.

A proper sex education which is holistic, nonjudgmental and comprehensive never misleads or misguides the teenagers. Such a curriculum should be imposed in all schools around the nation; it is an answer to many social problems and conflicts. Would any parent leave their kindergarten kids to walk alone on the streets without letting them know how to walk safely? No parent would actually do that, in the same way, letting your teenager children socialize with their peers and fellows without any proper sexual education is nothing contrary to the analogy mentioned above. It is hazardous and risky for their lives. Thus, proper sex education in schools should be encouraged so that they learn all the significant facts through trained teachers, who help and supports them in these matters of highly crucial value. Sex education should be taken as a positive aspect which promises healthier and better life for the youngsters. It therefore should be taken as a subject taught in schools to enhance knowledge on the subject matter; something merely as human anatomy or biology class. Sex education should be given in all schools to educate the children for their betterment, avoiding it will only result in emotional, social and health problems.

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# What Are the Most Effective Teaching Strategies?

By: Mary Muroski

If I had to decide what my most successful teaching strategy is, what I find to be the most effective teaching strategy, without a doubt it is the connection that I make with students. You see without a connection to your students, there will be little or no content understanding.

**Always remember this: connection before content.**

This should be at the top of your list of effective teaching strategies.

This connection with your students is a two way street - you to student, and student to you. You need to give something of yourself, and in turn your students will give back something of themselves.

This connection applies to teachers at every level and in different learning situations: from kindergarten to fifth grade, high school to college; in seminars, employee training, or sales presentations. The teacher must connect with the students or audience

before they will hear the message being delivered, the content.

Think back to situations you have been in, whether it was school or a sales pitch. Who are the teachers or people you connected with? Most likely they were the ones who you felt acknowledged you, wanted to get to know you, enjoyed what they were doing, and were committed to your success. They are the people you want to be around and enjoy talking to. They know and understand that connecting with students is the most

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important of all effective teaching strategies.

So, as an educator, how do you make this connection? **Here are some effective teaching strategies** for making that connection:

**Be fully present in the moment.** When your teaching day starts give your total focus to your students and the task at hand. This will send a message to your students that they are important.

**Learn something about each of your students.** This is easier for those that teach one group of students. It takes more effort for those at the middle, high school, and college level where you have large groups throughout the day, but it can be done. I think if you really enjoy teaching, you enjoy the interaction with students.

**Try this quick check - write down something you know about each of your students.** If you are struggling trying to come up with something for particular students make a point to learn something about them. If you have large classes set a goal for a number of students you will make a point to speak to each day. This way over the course of the week you will have connected with each of your students one on one. Sometimes we have those quiet students who slip under the radar and we don't always check in with them as often as others who are more vocal or needy.

**Share information about yourself with your students.** Very early in the school year my students know about my family, pets, favorite foods, what I do on the weekend (well not everything), my hobbies, and my general likes and dislikes. Sharing this information with students lets them see you as a person, and gives them common ground to connect. Little bits of information are easy to weave into your general teaching and conversations with students. Don't cross the line by giving too much personal information, or boring students with long stories about your kitchen renovation. Give information that is relevant in their lives that they can connect to.

**Be in tune with your students each day and for every class.** Besides connecting with them individually you also need to connect with the mood of the group. If the group energy is low, get students moving with a game or stretch break. If the group is restless and having difficulty settling down, do some calming activities with them. If students seem stressed extend an assignment deadline, or give a “night off” from homework. Being in tune with your group is such an important teaching strategy and most often students will be more productive when you respond to their needs.

**Remember, each student and class is different.** Respecting and acknowledging those differences will go a long way to achieving a personal connection with your students.

When you connect with students and they connect with you, they trust you and are invested in their learning. Your students will be able to hear the content you present to them because they know you are invested in their success.

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