

ENCOURAGING LESSONS FROM AMERICA'S TOP EDUCATORS

Summer vacation has slipped away and yellow buses are back on the streets, carrying children to schools. Some of the kids will endure classes disinterestedly, longing to hear the bell ring at day's end. Others will get wrapped up in the excitement of studying new subjects, learning with joyful fascination. Perhaps more than anything else, the leadership of their teachers will affect whether the kids love or loathe learning.

If you're like me, then you studied under a wide variety of teachers. Some you recall fondly for their ability to bring subjects to life in a way that captured your attention. Others you have trouble remembering because their listless, droning lectures frequently put you to sleep.

With school back in session, we thought it would be interesting to study what makes the best teachers great. How are these amazing educators able to encourage their pupils to excel in the classroom? We pored through quotes from award-winning teachers and came to the following conclusions about America's finest classroom leaders:

The Best Teachers Recognize and Value the Uniqueness of Each Student

"A good teacher knows how to read a story, and that each and every student arrives at our classroom door with a unique and intriguing yet incomplete story. The really good teachers know how to read a child's story and recognize the remarkable opportunity to help author the story. The really good teachers want to script confidence and success onto the blank pages; they want to edit the mistakes; and they want to help write a happy ending."

~ Anthony J. Mullen, 2009 NEA National Teacher of the Year

"I struggle each day to see students as individuals, to know their stories of learning well enough that I don't have to talk about grades at conferences. I can talk about students, and I can talk about what they learned.

~ Sarah Brown Wessling, 2010 NEA National Teacher of the Year

"All children can learn, but all children learn differently."

~ Clover Stephenson, 2010 Teacher of the Year, Dept. of Defense Education Activity, Korea District

As leaders, we give the most fulfillment to our people, and gain the most productivity from them, when we position them to use their strengths. In order to locate people's niches we must initiate relationships with them. As we learn their unique talents, we can customize their jobs accordingly. In addition, as we discover their values and goals, we can tailor our influence to provide them with suitable encouragement and motivation.

The Best Teachers Prod their Pupils to Take Risks

"Like any teacher, my true success is with my students. My central goal is to prepare each of my students to be successful in life. I encourage them to take challenging risks because they know that I will always be there as their safety net."

~ Donna Patrick, 2010 Texas Elementary Teacher of the Year

“Lechleiter-Luke likens her educational approach, both in classes and in extracurricular activities, to leading students to the cliff-like edges of their comfort zones, then pushing them off and watching them discover the ability to fly.”

~ *Said of Leah Lechleiter-Luke, 2010 Wisconsin Teacher of the Year*

“I became an advocate for students to feel safe within the educational environment, to take learning risks, to never fear failure and to reach for the dream that will give purpose and meaning to their life!”

~ *Catherine S. Webb, 2010 Virginia Teacher of the Year*

Most people’s dreams are sitting idle on the runway. Fear, doubt, and insecurity prohibit them from taking flight. It’s incumbent upon us, as leaders, to see the potential in our people and to help them believe the best about themselves. We instill self-belief in others when we offer hope, give encouragement, and properly define failures as stepping-stones to success.

The Best Teachers Measure Success by the Achievements of Their Students

“My rewards don’t come from grades students get on a test, but from students coming back years after graduation to visit me and tell me about their experiences traveling the world and becoming passionate about learning.”

~ *Craig Divis, 2010 Vermont Teacher of the Year*

“The best teachers are those who are committed to excellence, not only for themselves, but for their students, colleagues, parents and community leaders.”

~ *Mary Pinkston, 2010 Delaware Teacher of the Year*

“The most satisfying part of teaching is at the end of every year, I am able to see the growth of each student academically and behaviorally and say that I was a little part of that.”

~ *Brad Shonk 2010 Mississippi Teacher of the Year*

As a leader, don’t fix your gaze on profits or prestige. Likewise, be careful not to expend your energies trying to achieve personal greatness. Instead, concentrate on uplifting the people you lead. Make their success your number one priority. Serving those beside you is the surest path to greatest.

