

Chapter 1

Theme:

Goal of book is to find out what motivates teachers who are great.

This book will investigate and identify what makes great teachers tick, ...every day!

Single Best Quote:

"This is my thirty-eighth year teaching fifth grade, but for these students, it's the first time around."

Points:

1. There are many distractions coming from the classroom and from the educational system itself, but great teachers "*adapt to change without losing sight of what really matters.*"
2. There is more to effective teaching than:
 - a. More teacher knowledge in subject area
 - b. Advanced teacher degrees
 - c. Higher scores on teacher tests
3. This book is about who we are. It's about what we do.

Self-evaluation and application as a:

- **Shop teacher** – Even though my subject matter is enjoyable, it can become boring, and mundane which could cause me to present a sloppy program. But, the difference is the young student's interests, their desire to try it themselves, their passion for their turn at the project. This gives my teaching and my educational experience in my classroom the emotional platform to launch fresh time after time. Because it matters to the students, it suddenly matters again to me. Because it is new for the student the education experience is new for the teacher.
- **Bible teacher** – Explaining something for the 1,000th time to someone who is understanding it for the first time empowers me as a Bible teacher.
- **Parent** – Part of the desire to be a parent and a grandparent is this very thing: the desire to show something old to somebody new.
- **Person** – Without teaching life would become dull and repetitious. It would be like living the same day over and over until we finally ran out of our own self-provided energy and died, even though we were still living and breathing.

Questions/Criticisms/Evaluations/Comments of Whitaker's presentation or perspective:

I despised Whitaker's opening paragraph where he expected me to jump on the bandwagon in support of some sweeping assumptions. Two of these assumptions he himself abandoned before we reach the end of page 2:

1. Assumption #1: How much can we really learn from our ineffective colleagues about being an effective teacher or leader? We already know plenty about what not to do."
Whitaker's abandonment of Assumption #1: "Without visiting the less effective sites, we may not have been able to determine the variables that distinguished the effective principals." (p. 2)
2. Assumption #2: "Good teachers already know not to use sarcasm, not to yell at kids, not to argue with teens in front of their friends."
Whitaker's abandonment of Assumption #2: "If teaching were a true/false test, we could raise our scores by looking over the shoulder of an unsuccessful colleague and choosing the opposite answer to each question. However, working with students is never as simple as yes or no, bad or good, true or false. Teaching is more like an open-ended essay exam...As educators, we face a myriad of choices. Simply eliminating the inappropriate options doesn't move us forward."

Point of contention with assumption #1: We can learn from poor teachers. I have learned from poor teachers. It provides a contrast. It demonstrates the type of fruit that poor teaching produces. Research of this subject is used to provide a scale for self-evaluation and professional evaluation. Now, if Whitaker is merely saying, "Because I've already researched and written about what I have learned concerning this subject matter of studying poor teachers I'm not going to review it here." Then, OK. I understand, which means I would agree. But, even then every individual teacher must see, sit under, and work with the low level teacher to truly understand which direction is up and how high and fast they must leave this level of inept teaching! Every individual teacher must have experienced poor teaching to hate it sufficiently enough so that they will recognize the stench of poor teaching from their own performance and begin recovery procedures even while they are going down in flames of a poor performance.

Point of contention with assumption #2:

I use sarcasm. Like most great communicators in history, I use some level of sarcasm. Jesus used sarcasm with his disciples, with crowds, and with his enemies. His disciples learned and altered the course of history.

Yelling. What is yelling? Yelling is NOT losing control. Yelling is an intensified form of communication. It is again used by Jesus (examples can be provided). It is going to be very hard to find a great communicator, a great leader, a great coach, a great businessman, a successful parent, and, yes, even a GREAT, EFFECTIVE teacher who did not know when and how to communicate with yelling. Now, if yelling is frantically screaming nonsensical phrases which do not communicate anything other than the fact the teacher is frustrated, has no appropriate response to the situation and has lost control of the classroom, then, of course yelling is stupid. But, if yelling communicates through the chaos of the situation or penetrates the darkness of a student's soul, then yes, I agree with Whitaker when he says, "As educators, we face a myriad of choices." And, as I have identified, yelling is one of those choices an effective teacher should have in their arsenal.

At times, arguing with a challenging student in front of the class is the clearest way to establish who is in charge of the class. It's the basic alpha-male principle. Arguing is not yelling. Arguing is a debate the teacher knows they can win. Sometimes if the teacher doesn't engage and win the "in front of the class argument" on the spot undercurrents of the "neglected confrontation" will hamper the progress of the class in future meetings and may ultimately need to be resolved with meetings, conferences, interventions, etc. Again, the effective teacher knows when to engage and win an argument. But, also, the effective teacher knows when they should NOT drop to the level of a mere teenager and have a pointless debate over a silly issue that could NEVER be won with a logical argument. The effective teacher knows when the students are a pack of wolves deciding who is going to be their leader (a student or the teacher), or if the students are a flock of lost, scattered sheep waiting for the teacher to reengage the class and move on from the situation. Simply put, are you being challenged by a wolf or a lost sheep? One requires the alpha male to regain leadership of the territory assigned to him under his contract with the public school. One requires the teacher to shepherd the sheep back into the fold of his classroom without a public demonstration.

Sure, it is always going to sound better to say, "No sarcasm. No yelling. No public arguments." But, that's sounds like the opening of a book that Whitaker should have called, "What Safe Teachers Do." Because, the effective teacher (leader, coach, politician, general, parent, etc.) knows they have used it with positive results. The only reason you would not use sarcasm, yelling or a public debate is because you are no good at it and are going to fail if you try. Well, then, this is a different issue, because that means those who do not use sarcasm, yelling and public argument at the appropriate times are not yet great, nor are they as effective as they might be in the future.