

Professional insight

Dealing with those everyday issues

By Doug McCarthy

AVOIDING A HARDENING OF THE ATTITUDES

Teachers do not live easy lives. Higher expectations, increased responsibilities and intense accountability have made the job challenging and demanding. There is a difficult task that few people would be willing, or even able, to shoulder professionally. And the expectation is that teachers are to be perfect, in spite of the imperfections of others, and they are not let off lightly when they are perceived to be less than perfect.

Although many teachers find their work to be rewarding, exciting and fulfilling, the challenges they initially tackled with enthusiasm can eventually wear teachers down. Original teaching goals can seem out of reach, encumbered by bureaucratic hurdles and lack of resources. The danger is that a teacher may become more passive in his or her role and less likely to be a risk-taker. The result, in spite of best intentions, could be – a hardening of the attitudes.

Bob Conklin, founder of the Human Dynamics Institute, and author of a program called “Adventures in Attitudes” says, “It is apparent that these attitudes of ours are our very life. What we are going to get out of life depends on the attitudes we hold in our minds.”

Earl Nightingale, American motivational speaker and author, also believed in the power of personal attitudes. He said, “It is our attitude towards life that will determine life’s attitudes toward us.”

Either consciously or unconsciously, we have attitudes about most aspects of our lives that program the way we think about people, events, and ourselves. Attitudes influence our behaviour, our feelings, the personalities that we project, and how we feel about ourselves. Negative attitudes can erode our effectiveness, cause us to respond harshly, and keep us from living up to our own possibilities. Positive attitudes help us seek new levels of achievement, gain more favourable responses from others, and live more effective daily lives.

Conklin says, “Attitudes shape the visible reflection of our person.”

William James, philosopher and psychologist, said, “The greatest discovery is that human beings can, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, change the outer aspect of their lives.”

Most experts in this area suggest a three-step process to bring about change:

- Examine our attitudes and determine in which direction they lie;
- Decide what changes need to be made;
- Behave and respond in a manner that is compatible with our decision.

We can avoid a hardening of the attitudes. Building on success and new confidence will produce optimism and enthusiasm in what we do, in our teaching careers and in our lives.

Doug McCarthy is a retired OECTA member and principal, and currently a member of OECTA's Speakers' Bureau.



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