

The Practical Professor

No. 19

Quick and easy tips, tools, and ideas for improving teaching and learning.

Ways to Change a Student's Life

Ask The Practical Professor #4

Dear Practical Professor,

I had teachers who changed my life, and I want to have that same impact on my students. Do you have any suggestions?

We liked this question so much that we typed almost two pages of answers!

J.F. – Early in the semester, catch individual students after class or in the hall and tell them how impressed you were by something they said or did in class. Target the students who need encouraging and make your feedback genuine, not forced. A well-timed validation from a “professor” can stick with a student for decades.

B.S. - First, you have to believe that as a community college faculty member one of your chief tasks is to help students see a future they have not thought of yet.

J.F. – In the same vein, remember that you aren't just teaching your content every day—you're *teaching an idea about what college and learning are and can be*. Possibility, belief, and hope are powerful elixirs. Make learning feel alive with these and you will change students' lives.

B.S. - Sometimes it isn't a small thing, it is an attitude. Check yours. Do you think that almost all your students can succeed? If not, the funny thing is that many will not. Is your role to "include" or “weed-out” students? *Remember, for many of our students, school has been a place of failure.* Build activities that allow students to succeed early, then increase difficulty as the course continues.

J.F. – We wait too long to check in with students that we think may be struggling. Use that sense that every teacher has about who is struggling. Collect some simple assignments or quizzes early and take attendance. Reach out immediately and informally to students who are struggling. Don't wait.

B.S. – Listening, really listening to students is both hard work and a gift we can give them. Sometimes we are one of the few people in their lives who is really listening to them. Many students will open up about what they are struggling with without much prompting; others need gentle probing. Either way, make them feel known and cared about.

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J.F. – How good is your teacher memory? Use it to show students you’ve listened to them. Remember something they said last class. Refer to where they work, what sports or hobbies they enjoy, or what careers they aspire to. Do this, and you reinforce that you want your teaching to be about who they are, not about what you know.

B.S. - How much time do you spend with students OUTSIDE of class? How about letting students get to know some things about you, especially if aspects of your life fit with some of your students. Consider requiring all students to see you outside of class for just 15 to 20 minutes to talk about themselves, NOT the course. Share aspects of your life with them that shows you understand them.

J.F. – Once you’ve made students feel known, listened to, and like they belong in college, let them know frankly and encouragingly when you know that they could have done better on an assessment. The point is not to give them a guilt trip or an ego blow, but to tell that that you know what they are capable of and that their work wasn’t their absolute best. Inquire about what might have caused them to come up short (since you know the level they are capable of). If they feel you respect, know, and listen to them, they won’t want to disappoint you, and your feedback could change their lives.

B.S. - Reach out to veterans especially. Make connections with them, and help them integrate back.

J.F. – A real education is the simultaneous discovery of both the world and yourself. “The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.” - Mark Van Doren

B.S. - Stand up for all of your students. Fight against bureaucratic policies that do not benefit the student. Fight hard. You are a college faculty member, not a rule-follower.

J.F. & B.S. – Get their hearts first, and their minds will follow.

In the next *The Practical Professor*: Student Feedback Technique Series #6

Also available!

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty

The Top 10...

- No. 1 – The All-Important First Day of Class
- No. 2 – Ways to Make Your Teaching Life Easier
- No. 3 – The Crucial Second and Third Classes
- No. 4 – Ways to Show Students that You Respect Them
- No. 5 – Promote Effective Student Study Skills
- No. 6 – Components of a Well-Planned Class
- No. 7 – Observe Your Teaching Tendencies
- No. 8 – Ways to Keep Your Students Learning
- No. 9 – Ways to Get Feedback on Teaching from Students
- No. 10 – Using Short Writing to Assess Learning
- No. 11 – Getting More (and Better) Student Questions
- No. 12 – Mixing Things up Mid-Semester
- No. 13 – Engaging Different Input Preferences
- No. 14 – Helping Students Stay the Journey
- No. 15 – Ways to End Your Course
- No. 16 – Resources for Learning and Teaching
- No. 17 – Create a Memorable AND Functional Syllabus
- No. 18 – Ways to Build Your Students' Self-Efficacy
- No. 19 – Practical Study Tips to Share with Your Students
- No. 20 – Laddering Thinking Skills
- No. 21 – Learning Based Ways to End Lessons
- No. 22 – Ways and Reasons to Be Vulnerable While Teaching
- No. 23 – Using Student Groups
- No. 24 – Components of a Complete Learning Experience
- No. 25 – Ways to Use Visuals for Learning
- No. 26 – Students' Locus of Control
- No. 27 – Help Students with Rigorous Writing Assignments
- No. 28 – Ways to Shake Up Your Teaching
- No. 29 – Teaching to Inspire
- No. 30 – Paths to Mindfulness

Back issues of *The Teaching Top 10* and *The Practical Professor* can be found here:

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