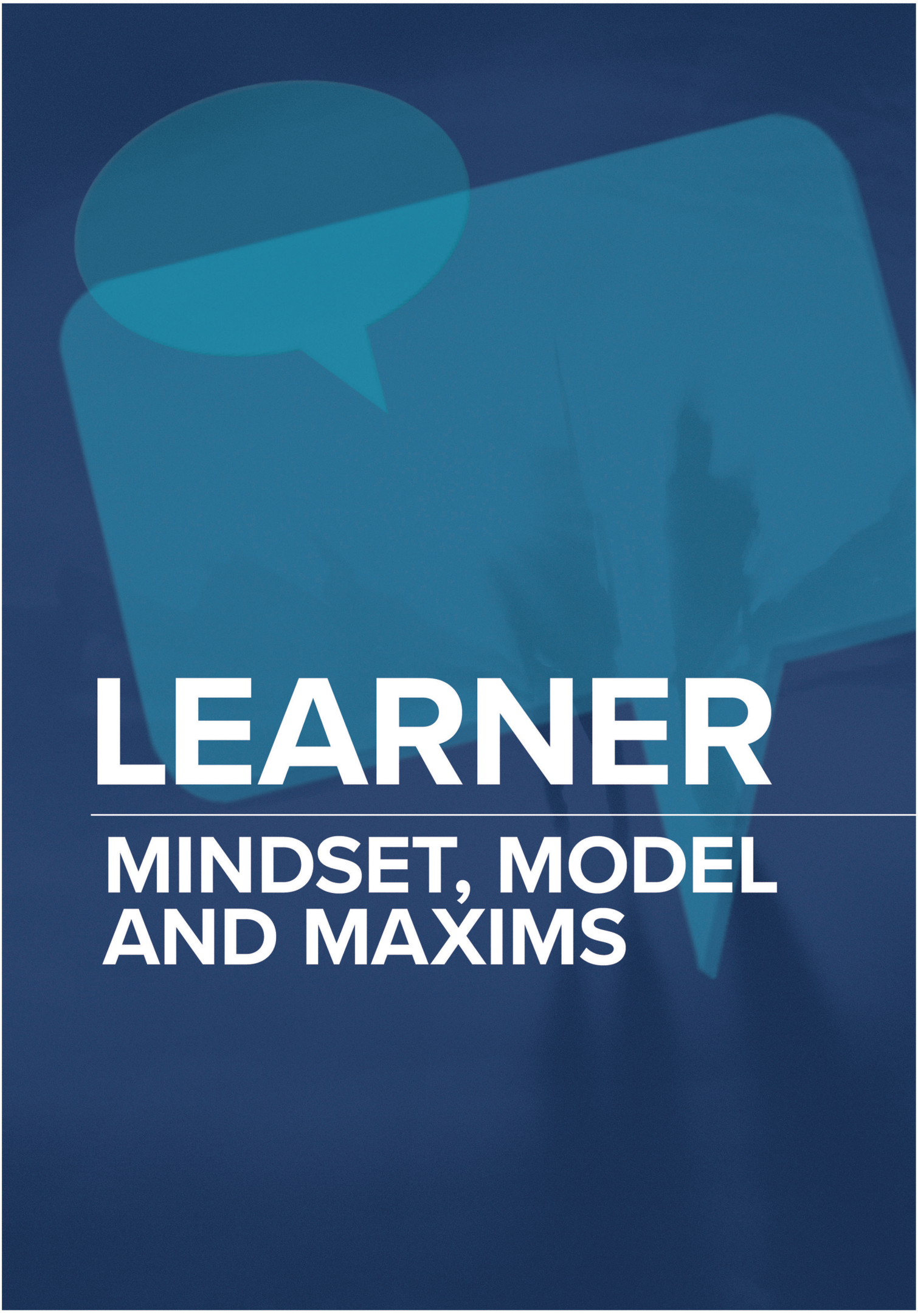


LEARNER

MINDSET, MODEL AND MAXIMS

Learner

Mindset, Model, and Maxims



The first time I heard him teach, I said to myself, *I want to study under that man!* His name was Howard G. Hendricks, and I entered seminary to learn everything I could from this master teacher. I wanted to learn not only *what* he taught but also *how* he taught.

During my four years of graduate study, I listened to Dr. Hendricks for more than 350 hours and always left his class instructed, challenged, and a step closer to God. By the time I was a senior, I began to wonder if "Prof" even understood the word *boring*.

After studying how he taught for four years, I discovered he followed a basic style. About three minutes before class began, his right foot began to bounce underneath the old oak desk. At the precise moment the second hand swept past twelve he raised his right forefinger into the air, announced "Ladies and gentlemen…" and delivered an opening one-liner that was so stimulating all of us couldn't help but

copy it down. After three to four minutes he told his first joke. Eight to ten minutes into the class he would inevitably rise from his desk and draw a graph or chart on the whiteboard. Always the blue pen first. Then the purple. And always with that unique squiggly underline for emphasis. His rhythm was unmistakable. And it worked—just ask any of the thousands who have studied under him.

During my last year of seminary I decided to give Dr. Hendricks a test. I wanted to see what this master teacher would do if one of his students would not—no matter what—pay attention in his class. I sat in the back right-hand corner of the room, next to the only window, and decided to gaze out that window the entire class session. Since there were only thirty students in the class, he was sure to notice. I took off my watch and started timing. What would he do if he couldn't get my attention?

As expected, he started off with a bang and delivered his usual one-liner. Although my hand began to tremble, I forced myself not to record the line. From the corner of my eye I could see that he noticed immediately I wasn't paying attention. He broke tradition and in the first minute told a joke—totally out of context. If I laughed he would immediately know I was listening, so I discreetly put my hand over my mouth and continued staring out that window.

As the two-minute mark passed, he got up from his chair and started drawing on the board—much too early. He again noticed that I wasn't taking notes, and he stopped right in the middle of his chart and didn't even finish it.

He put the pen down and walked to the corner of the room in order to look down the aisle at me, trying to make eye contact. Sweat beaded on my brow, but the seconds continued ticking by. I wasn't going to pay attention.

Finally, he broke. The master teacher almost leaped down the aisle and yelled, "Wilkinson, what on earth are you looking at outside that window?!"

With a sheepish glance, I turned around and said, "Nothing, Prof. Sorry." I looked down at my watch to determine his grade. Only three minutes and thirty-seven seconds had passed! Incredible. His tolerance for one student not paying attention was limited to 217 seconds.

With that remarkable experience freshly imprinted on my mind, I walked down the hall into the next class with a different professor. Talk about a contrast. One side of the room was filled by students who never paid attention but did their homework for another class. This teacher, however, didn't seem bothered; he just turned and lectured to the students sitting on the other side. His mindset was, *It's not my problem if you don't want to learn*.

What a difference. One teacher could tolerate for only a few seconds one student not learning what he was teaching, and the other didn't seem to care for the whole semester!

How would you have fared on that quiz with one of your students looking out the window? *Would* you have cared? Would the clock still be ticking?

Dr. Hendricks believed that, as the teacher, he was the one responsible for my learning. By contrast, the second teacher thought he was responsible only to cover the material, regardless of whether anyone learned.

Learner Mindset

What an extraordinary example of the heart of the Law of the Learner. Dr. Hendricks believed that, as my teacher, he was the one responsible for my learning. He felt responsible, and if I wasn't learning he did whatever it took—changed his lesson plan, his style, told an irrelevant joke, even ran down the aisle and confronted me—to get my attention.

This foundational attitude lies at the very heart of *The 7 Laws of the Learner*. In a sense, all of the laws are like a row of dominoes—this first one ultimately controls all the dominoes that follow.

Every master teacher I know shares the mindset that it is his or her responsibility to cause the student to learn. But do you know what the prevailing mindset is in the preaching and teaching community today? A tragic divorce has occurred: Teachers have separated themselves from their students and redefined teaching as *what the teacher says* rather than *what the student learns*.

Teachers have redefined teaching as "the coherent speaking of an adult located at the head of the class to a passive gathering of students." They believe their primary responsibility is to cover the material in an organized manner.

They think about teaching as what they do—their focus is upon themselves. Many teachers cover their material and leave the room thinking they have taught. But if you gave their students a pop quiz, you would find out they hardly learned a thing. The divorce between teaching and learning is tragic and is at the root of many of our educational woes.

Dr. Hendricks modeled a revolutionary mindset. He saw teaching as not what *he* did but what *his students* did. His focus was not upon himself but was upon his students. Since that student looking out the window was not learning, Dr. Hendricks realized he was therefore unable to teach. That's why he stopped delivering his content and ran down the aisle!

Can you sense what difference it would make in your life and the lives of your students if you joined the ranks of Dr. Hendricks?

We've been asking people wherever we travel how they would define the responsibilities of a teacher. Over and over again they say, "To teach the facts," or "To cover the material," or "To complete the lesson plan." The focus of all these definitions is upon *anything but* the student's learning!

Somehow we think teaching is talking. If I come to the class and go through my notes and get you to laugh a couple of times, and you

copy down my notes and maybe ask one or two questions, then I have taught you.

No, that's not teaching. True biblical teaching doesn't take place unless the students have learned. If they haven't learned, I haven't taught.

What does the Bible mean by "teach" and what does it mean by "learn"? Does God divorce teaching from learning? Let's look at a couple of verses out of Deuteronomy that are very similar but have a different focus. One focuses on teaching, the other on learning.

> And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may *learn* them and be careful to observe them." (Deuteronomy 5:1)

What does it mean to *learn*?

> "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I *teach* you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you." (Deuteronomy 4:1)

What does it mean to *teach*? How are these two concepts—learning and teaching—related? Are they as divorced from each other as we have come to believe?

In order to grasp the full meaning of these words, let's investigate the terms in the original Hebrew. The word *learn* in 5:1 is וּלְמַדְתֶּם, and *teach* in 4:1 is מְלַמֵּד. When the prefix and the suffix are taken off of *learn,* all that remains is the root Hebrew word לָמַד. When the prefix and the suffix are taken off of *teach,* all that remains is the Hebrew root לָמַד.

It's the same word! That's right, the *same* Hebrew word means to learn and to teach. Do you realize the significance of that? We can't

separate teaching from learning. They are married; they are one. Somehow and in some way, what the teacher does and what the student does must be inextricably related.

There is further insight into this Hebrew word for *teach* and *learn*. The root means "learn," but when you alter it and put it into another stem called the Piel, it changes the meaning to "teach."

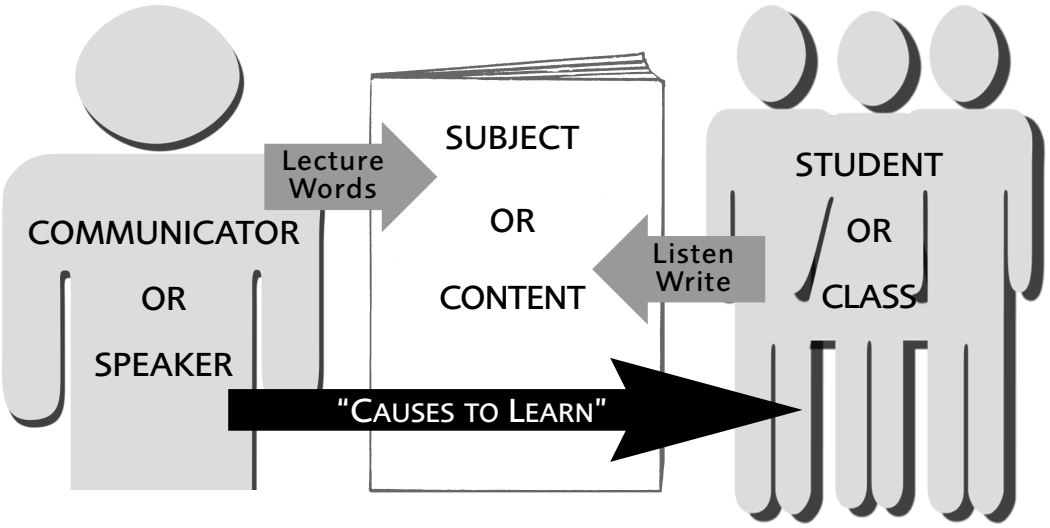
According to Hebrew grammar, the fundamental idea of the Piel is to "busy oneself eagerly with the action indicated by the stem." What's the stem? "To learn." To teach, therefore, means to busy oneself eagerly with the student's learning. It also means "to urge," "to cause others to do," and "an eager pursuit of an action."

Do you see how the Bible's mindset is the opposite of the common mindset of today's teacher? The Bible says that teaching means "causing learning." This is the heart of the Law of the Learner. No longer can you or I consider teaching merely as something the teacher does in the front of the class. Teaching is what the teacher does in the student. How do you know if you are a great teacher? *By what your students learn*. That's why Dr. Hendricks stopped what he was doing and ran down that aisle to challenge me. He knew that because I wasn't learning, he wasn't teaching.

Can you imagine what would happen in classrooms across the country if teachers returned to their rightful heritage? If they walked down the aisles, not with their outlines and notes, but with their students? If they vowed to be fully obedient to the biblical mandate of *causing* them to learn? It would start a revolution. Learning would once again soar, discipline would return, and students would start to love learning instead of hating school.

The Law of the Learner is illustrated by this diagram. The left box represents the "speaker" or "communicator." The center box is the "subject" or "content." And the right box represents the "student" or "class."

Learner Model



The two small arrows in this model represent the actions of the teacher or the student. Normally, the teacher focuses on the subject—"lectures" and speaks the "words," whereas the student "listens" and "writes" those words. Notice both of their points of attention: It's on the process of covering the material. And what often occurs is a thorough lack of learning. Students are free to move their minds into neutral with only their pencils in gear and all too often slide into the *pit of passivity*.

The preferred mindset requires the teacher to refocus attention from the subject to the student. This is represented by the lower arrow pointing from the teacher to the student with the words "causes to learn."

One of the most striking quotes I have ever read was from a frustrated inner-city father speaking of the school system's dramatic failure to cause his daughter to learn:

> You people operate a monopoly like the telephone company. I got no choice where I send my child to school. I can only go where it's free. And she's not learning.

> That's your responsibility. It's the principal's responsibility. It's the teacher's responsibility that she's not learning. And when you fail, when everybody fails my child, what happens? Nothing. Nobody gets fired. Nothing happens to nobody except my child.[1]

How tragic, but how true! *The 7 Laws of the Learner* is written to enable you to turn this situation around—to teach so effectively that no one would ever consider looking out that window.

Learner Maxims

This second section, introducing the *maxims*, continues to develop the main concept introduced in the *mindset* and *model*. In order to clarify and expand your understanding, the "big idea" under consideration is investigated from a number of different angles and perspectives. A maxim is a brief statement of a general principle or truth, and therefore each of the maxims that follow reflects a different facet of "cause to learn." By the end of this section, you should much more fully grasp the greater meaning and significance of what it really means to "cause to learn." The deeper and fuller your understanding, the easier it will be for you to use this truth in your own teaching.

Maxim 1: Teachers are responsible for causing students to learn.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to conduct an experiment. It was my first class on my first day of my first year of teaching college. My slate was clean and my reputation as yet unformed. My students had no way to know what to expect.

Class started and I began teaching the way I had been taught by most of my teachers. You know, the traditional outline with main points

and subpoints. The students dutifully took notes. After about twenty-five minutes, I said to my trusting class, "Please put away your papers. It's time for a test." You could almost hear their hearts stop in unison. They were freshmen, and this was their first class. When I announced a test—on the first day—their world almost came to an end.

Finally the deafening silence was broken by a courageous girl in the back row: "But sir, we haven't even had a chance to study this yet."

"I know, but let's see how you do," I said.

I offered no explanation. (It would have ruined my experiment.) There was a rattling of notebooks as they dug for paper. Then it got real quiet. I asked a few questions from the twenty-five minutes of "teaching" I had just completed.

All but a couple of students failed. Royally. Tension was heavy, and I could read the glances that shot across the room: *I'm transferring out of this guy's class!*

Then the girl in the back row raised her hand again. It was obvious she was used to getting As. "You can't count that!" she protested.

"Why not?"

"It's not fair. We didn't have a chance to learn it!"

"So how did you do on the test?"

She looked down and said, "Sixty percent."

"What am I?" I asked.

"The teacher."

"And what's the teacher supposed to do? Teach the class, right?" I paused and smiled. "If I'm the teacher and I'm the one who is supposed to teach you the material, then how did I do so far? What grade would you give me?"

Their faces said they were bursting to tell me.

"Young lady, if your test score revealed how effectively I taught you today, what grade would you give me?"

By now, no one was breathing. Everything in this young lady wanted to tell me, but she didn't know if she should. So I told her.

"Your grade is my grade," I said. "What you did or did not learn is dependent upon how I did as your teacher. So your grade of 60 percent designates me as a teacher who failed in his job. I failed to cause you to learn. Give me an F!"

The class was stunned.

I took off my coat, loosened my tie, and continued. "Now, why are you paying this college all this tuition and not expecting me to do my job? How come I can teach for thirty minutes and have the whole class not learn anything? I thought my job was to lead you to learn!"

They wanted to nod. Some wanted to cheer—this was starting to make sense. "From now on, when you come to this class, I'll take the responsibility for your learning. If you'll come with an open mind—and an open heart—then I'll do my part as your teacher to fill it."

For the next twenty minutes I taught them. I taught them until they knew the material. Then I tested them on the material and all but two got As. With a twinkle in my eye I told them we couldn't count the first test because I wouldn't want such incriminating evidence of my poor teaching recorded. Ah, the joys of college teaching!

How many times have you and I sat through an hour-long class, dutifully taken notes, and then met someone in the hall after class who asked us what we learned—and we couldn't remember one thing! Would the Bible say that we had learned? That "pit of passivity" can suck us into its mire if we're not careful.

Are you sensing the utter importance of this mindset, that the teacher is the one who is *responsible*? Obviously, the students are responsible to learn the material—but the teacher is responsible *to cause them to know* the material.

For the most part, the last few generations of teachers have been led to believe that they are not responsible; their students are. Any attempt to point out a connection between student performance and teacher effectiveness can quickly escalate into World War III.

Is our discussion really new or just forgotten? Have we not tragi-

cally abandoned what used to be clear? For instance, what do you think is the dictionary definition of *teach*? Want a shock? The dictionary defines *teach* as "to cause to know a subject"! Therefore, if the students have not been caused to know the subject, has the person who taught them been a good teacher? Wouldn't you say that a teacher is acting irresponsibly if she does not consider herself responsible for her students' learning?

At the very heart of *The 7 Laws of the Learner* is a total commitment to the full responsibility of the teacher to do everything in his or her power to cause the student to learn.

Years ago my son and I were talking about teaching, and I asked him if he ever had to learn anything over and over again—something that he was supposed to learn but didn't.

He laughed and said, "Yes! Language. You know how many times I've learned language, Dad? I still don't understand language."

I said, "Dave, you've never been *taught* language."

"What do you mean?"

"If you didn't learn it, your teacher didn't teach it to you."

"Sure she did. We were on language for weeks."

"Dave, did she keep teaching you until you learned it?"

"No, Dad, she said we had to move on."

"Were there other students in your class who also didn't learn it?"

He laughed, "Lots, Dad. Most of my friends didn't understand either. But we had to move on in the book."

You can see it now, can't you? My son's grammar school teacher thought she was supposed to cover the book instead of teach her students. This law says that the teacher really didn't teach because she didn't cause her students to learn.

While we unequivocally state that the teacher is responsible, we must quickly add that this responsibility is shouldered by others as well: the students, their parents, other related and interested individuals, and society in general. The teacher is not solely responsible for the

students, but he is the one under consideration in this book.

When people begin to understand this law, they begin to reclaim their responsibility. It's happened many times as I've taught this course around the world. The light goes on and the teacher realizes, *It's my responsibility*. Then everything changes, because when you and I accept our rightful responsibility as God desires, learning soars.

One evening at dinner my son announced he wasn't going to get a good grade in math. When I questioned him further, he politely informed me, "Dad, those math grades are not my fault. My teacher is boring and class is terrible. He needs to come to the *7 Laws* course because he is not causing me to learn!"

My wife shot me a glance that said, "What on earth are you teaching our children?" and I realized this moment called for immediate innovation.

"Well, son, you are forgetting the Law of the Student," I said.

"What? You never talked about that at the conference!"

"I know. I'm making it up right now for you and for all who would attempt to follow in your creative footsteps. The Law of the Student states that the student is responsible to learn, regardless of the quality of the teacher. You see, Dave, when you are the teacher, teach like you are 100 percent responsible. When you are the student, *learn* like you are 100 percent responsible."

I could tell David didn't like this, but my wife sure did.

"But then who's responsible, Dad—me or my teacher?"

"Yes. You've got it, Dave! You're both 100 percent responsible. And by the way, son, I'm going to be holding you responsible for your 100 percent in this course!"

As Joseph Bayly has said, "Never let school interfere with your child's education!"

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Shirley M. Hufstedler was right on when she said, "The secret to being a successful teacher is…to accept in a very personal way the responsibility for each student's

success or failure. Those teachers who do take personal responsibility for their students' successes and failure…produce higher-achieving students."[2]

My grandmother had it right years ago when, in a moment of frustration, she said to me, "I'm going to *learn* you, young man."

Maxim 2: Teachers will stand accountable to God for their influence.

The partner to full responsibility is *accountability*. When someone delegates responsibility to us for a given project, usually we must give an account for our performance.

God's Word clearly reveals that each of us is going to be held accountable to God for how we fulfilled His instructions:

> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

There will be a future Day of Accountability. Not only will God hold us accountable for our motives, words, actions, and faithfulness; but He also has announced that He will hold some of us additionally accountable. Repeatedly the Bible admonishes leaders about the seriousness of their responsibilities and its accompanying accountability:

> My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)

James is clear: *Teachers will be more strictly judged by God* because of their greater responsibility. God will hold us accountable not only for how we live, but also for how we teach. We face a stricter judgment because of our role as teachers.

> Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, *as those who must give account*. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17)

The writer of Hebrews also notes that those who have positions of authority will give account. Because that is true, the author encourages the believers under those leaders to obey and submit to them, making it easier for them to fulfill their responsibility. It appears from this verse that not only will teachers be held accountable, but in some way so will the students.

There are several practical implications of this maxim. First, the only reason God can hold us accountable as teachers is because we are responsible!

Second, God views the role and responsibility of the teacher as extremely important. *Don't allow society's current lack of respect for the teaching community to lessen the honor you give it.*

Third, allow the emphasis of Hebrews 13:17 to impact you fully. Remember, teachers: Watch out for your souls, not just the test scores!

Finally, some classes and some students will be more inclined to cause you grief. Realize that such classes and individuals are part of the teaching territory. Even the Master Teacher Himself had students, such as the Sadducees and Pharisees, who attacked not only His content but His reputation and eventually His life. Don't allow yourself to retreat into the false conceit that when you teach for the right reasons and with all your heart, everything is automatically going to be wonderful. It may not! God never promised to give you a class that always responds joyfully to you and your subject.

So set your expectations clearly. Teach when you experience joy, and teach when you feel grief. Teach because God has divinely called and commissioned you. Teach for your students' grade on Friday's test, and teach for your grade on the Final Test.

Maxim 3: Teachers are responsible because they control subject, style, and speaker.

Although it may not always appear to be true, the teacher has incredible control in the teaching-learning process. It's because of that control that the Lord can hold us accountable. Consider for a moment what the teacher has control over.

Full control over the subject. The teacher can control every word he speaks. If he wants to change the subject at any time and for whatever reason, he can. If he wants to give an illustration, he can. If he wants to go in depth in one area and skim over another, he can. If he wants to tell a joke to relieve a bored class, he can.

Full control over the style. The teacher also can control his delivery and method. If he wants to whisper or shout, stand still or jump, clap hands or fold his arms, it's all in his control. Likewise, he can employ small groups or lecture or discussion or panel or debate or a film or a skit. Dr. Hendricks changed his style repeatedly during those three minutes and thirty-seven seconds in order to cause me to learn.

Full control over the speaker. The teacher also is in full control of himself. He can come dressed any way he wants, from formal to informal—even a costume. He can come early and stay late. He can talk with the students or remain distant from them. He can sit, stand, or walk around. The teacher has full control over the speaker.

Do you see how very much control the teacher has over almost everything in the teaching-learning process? It's amazing when you think about the incredible power and freedom of the teacher (within boundaries, of course).

The teacher has control over every major element in the teaching-learning process except one—the student! If the teacher is supposed to cause the student to learn, and yet cannot control him, how does this law work?

The teacher causes the student to learn by the correct and appropriate

use of the *subject, style,* and *speaker.* Those three elements have the overwhelming power to cause the student to learn.

Do you know what an *effective* teacher does? Effective teachers control these three elements in the right way. Ineffective teachers don't.

Illustrations of this occur in classrooms across America every day. Just recently my daughter told me about one of her classes which is "just a disaster—people talk all the time, throw things, and don't learn anything." One week the usual teacher (and I use that word begrudgingly) was sick and a substitute teacher was brought in. Jennifer couldn't believe the difference. Within three minutes she didn't recognize the class. No one was talking—they were learning and even enjoying the subject for the first time that semester.

Then Jennifer said something I'll never forget: "Dad, I know this is not very kind, but I kind of hope my regular teacher doesn't get better very soon."

We can all identify with that, can't we? It's sad because it is so unnecessary.

I can almost guarantee, the regular teacher had long ago decided that the unruly class wasn't his fault; it was just that they were completely out of control. The truth was, *he* was out of control because he was misusing the subject, style, and speaker.

Do you know the only real difference between those two experiences of my daughter's class? Notice what was the same:

The same school.

The same subject.

The same day of the week.

The same students.

The same class objectives.

What, then, was the difference?

Must be the teacher, right? Yes, but what about the teacher?

Not the color of hair.

Not the height.

Not the width.

Not the type of clothes.

Not the personality.

What, then?

The only difference was that the effective teacher knew how to cause the students to learn by readjusting what she did, what she said, and how she said it.

Master teachers develop such an advanced understanding of the teaching-learning process that they immediately recognize the problem that is hindering learning and then implement the corresponding solution.

Too often teachers cast blame—"Something's wrong with my class"—when the problem really lies with the class's teacher! The first step in solving this almost universal problem is to clearly identify the problem. Once the problem is obvious, then identifying and implementing the correct solution becomes much easier. (The Learner Method, which will be presented in the next chapter, tells you how to determine the problem and implement the solution.)

Maxim 4: Teacher should judge their success by the success of their students.

Suppose you were a principal interviewing two candidates for the post of high school science teacher. Which of these two candidates would you select?

> *Candidate A*. Female, forty-eight years of age, married with three grown children, master's degree in science, twenty years of teaching experience, published numerous articles in magazines and journals, served on various administrative committees, working on her doctorate, hobby of gardening and raising award-winning orchids.

Candidate B. Male, twenty-five years of age, single but has a cat named Whiskers, bachelor's degree in science, three years of teaching experience, no published articles or books, served on building-and-grounds committee, considering starting master's in the next couple of years, hobby of water-skiing, and volunteers at the nearby zoo.

It's decision time. Should you hire candidate A or B?

Believe it or not, you have no way of knowing. If the definition of *teach* is "cause to learn," then *none* of the above information gives me any real clues as to the teaching ability of either.

Not their gender.

Not their age.

Not their marital status.

Not their earned degrees.

Not the articles they've published.

Not the committees they've served on.

Not their hobbies.

Not even their years of teaching experience.

Of course, their credentials *are* relevant and important. But none of them tell us anything about how effective that person will be in the classroom because they all center around the teacher, not what the teacher can do in the lives of the students. Both of these candidates could be *dismal* teachers. Or they could be outstanding.

The only fact which indisputably proves what kind of teachers the candidates will make is how their previous students performed at the end of a school year compared to the start of class in the fall.

After I taught this Law of the Learner in a recent conference, a well-dressed businessman of about fifty came striding up to the platform. It was obvious he had something on his mind. "I decided after all these years in business to go back to graduate school and earn my MBA," he said. "But something recently happened that really upset me. I had to

take a course on statistics, and the teacher was chairman of the entire MBA program. I couldn't wait to study under this great teacher. But do you know what she said on the first evening we met? She said that this course is so tough that more than 70 percent of us would fail! At first I was so impressed. I thought, *What a teacher this is!* But now I realize the opposite is true—she isn't that hot of a teacher. Only 30 percent of her class even passed!"

The businessman's conclusion was right. This professor may be a great leader, a smart woman, and an outstanding author, but her performance as a teacher earns her a dismal grade. Never forget this: *Teachers cause students to learn the material—and great teachers cause great numbers of students to learn great amounts of material.*

Not only do we hire people on the wrong basis; we also reward and promote on the wrong basis. Which of the two teachers listed below would get the higher recognition, promotion, and financial reward? These two high school teachers teach the same subject to the same age to the same type of students in the same school:

1. Teacher A is completing his second master's degree; Teacher B's students score 25 percent higher than Teacher A's students on the SAT exams for that subject.
2. Teacher A publishes three articles in a professional magazine; Teacher B's students win three blue ribbons in the subject at the statewide competition.
3. Teacher A serves on the education committee for the county; Teacher B's students average a full grade higher on their report cards.
4. Teacher A receives the majority of the teachers' votes for the Teacher of the Year award; Teacher B was fifteenth on the list. However, Teacher B receives the majority of the students' votes for the Teacher of the Year award, and Teacher A was fifteenth on the list.

The philosophy assumed in this book is that though the activities and committees and degrees are undeniably important, *the most important test of teacher effectiveness is student performance.*

Sometimes the very things we promote can lessen the effectiveness of the teaching process. It was an all-too-common joke among the students when I was in graduate school that the more degrees behind a teacher's name, the less effective the teacher probably was. More knowledge doesn't necessarily make a better teacher. This may sound untraditional, but it would be interesting to test student performance before and after a teacher receives his next degree.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm all for higher education and am constantly encouraging others to pursue further study. I attend courses, watch training videos, listen to audios, read books, and attend seminars. But the focus always must be upon the result of those educational activities, not the *accumulation* of them.

It's what the student does that counts, not what the teacher does. If the student has succeeded, then so has the teacher.

Maxim 5: Teachers impact more by their character and commitment than by their communication.

This maxim compares the impact of "who the teacher is" (character and commitment) with "what the teacher says" (communication). Character out-influences communication every time.

Consider your own career as a student. Pick out two or three of your favorite teachers. I'll bet your selection had more to do with what you thought of them than what you thought of their talk.

The timeless proverb "Actions speak louder than words" is true. When words and actions are in opposition, actions always overpower words.

Unfortunately, the world and the church often sing the tune that words are all that matter. Recently, a deacon of a local church told me the deacon board just voted six to three to keep the church's pastor, a

man in the middle of divorcing his wife to marry another married woman in the same church! I asked him how his church could rebel so blatantly against the principles of Scripture. "Oh," he said, "our pastor is such a wonderful preacher, we don't want to let him go. Besides, a larger church in another state has offered him another senior pastor's position. We'll probably have to offer our pastor a large raise to keep him, but almost everybody wants him except for a few hard-nosed conservatives."

Is it possible for that pastor to openly sin, splitting his own family and another woman's, and still be a powerful preacher?

Yes, I believe it is.

Some of the world's "greatest" teachers and preachers are openly opposed to Christ. Many of the men who hold the most powerful pulpits in the land do not hold to the doctrines of the virgin birth, the inspiration of the Bible, the resurrection of Christ, or even the deity of Christ. Yet their powers of oratory and persuasion are remarkable. Their words can move us to tears. But being moved emotionally does not always equate with God's affirmation or bring about His blessing.

We err greatly when we think that just because a man or a woman can teach effectively or pastor graciously or preach powerfully that the hand of the Lord must be on that life. The hand of the Lord cannot be upon a person who rejects the deity of Christ—the Bible labels him an "enemy of the gospel."

When that church chose to retain its pastor, it took a public stand for sin and against the Savior. The unbelieving community will once again blaspheme the cause of Christ because even they know a moral outrage when they see one.

But what about that preacher's powerful preaching? Come back in five years and you'll see the fruits of what is now being planted. You can already glimpse the word *Ichabod* being etched over the entryway. I've seen it happen too many times without exception. God's principles for ministry have always been the same: first the character, then the communication. That's why 1 Timothy and Titus are so clear—the life of the

communicator must first be in harmony with the message before he speaks the message.

In fact, *character will always control the content*—eventually. When the Spirit of God is quenched and sin is given free reign, not only will the Spirit not be present in the teaching, but soon neither will the Scriptures. The teacher or preacher will begin to shape the content to match his lifestyle. I shudder to think of that pastor, his new wife, and those six deacons when they stand accountable before another Court for the travesty they have wrought.

When I ask adults to select the teacher who most influenced them, it is always the one who had the most noble character and commitment. Those teachers usually were neither the easiest nor the hardest in the classroom, but something about them aroused genuine respect and admiration. We, their students, wished that someday we could be like them.

May *your* students desire to be like their teacher!

Maxim 6: Teachers exist to serve the students.

Everyone enjoys going out to a nice restaurant for a graciously served, delicious meal. How would you respond if the next time you visited your favorite restaurant and asked for some water, the waitress said, "Get it yourself! What are you, helpless? I'm not your slave, you know"? You'd quickly leave that place thinking the service was the worst you'd ever seen. You'd probably never return.

You view that waitress as your servant. Part of what you pay for is her willingness to serve you; that is her job. If, however, you were out on a picnic a couple of days later and saw that same waitress and asked her to get you some water, how do you think she would respond? The roles we play in certain situations influence the behavior we feel is appropriate.

Now consider the role of the teacher. Who in the classroom is supposed to serve the water and refill the plate and ask the people if there

is anything else they would like? Unfortunately, many of us in the teaching-preaching profession have forgotten that we are servants. Most classes have a severe case of "role reversal"—by all appearances, the student has become the servant. Teachers have forgotten that they exist to meet the needs of their students, not their own needs.

Why is this problem so easy to recognize when it surfaces in the restaurant but so difficult to recognize in the classroom?

I remember the first time I had to speak in front of a large audience many years ago. My heart was racing, knees shaking, palms sweating, and I was frantically praying that maybe God could help me out by initiating the Second Coming right then. Sitting next to me on the platform was a well-known, seasoned speaker. While we were singing the hymn right before I had to speak, I turned to him and said, "I'm so nervous! I don't know if I can do this."

Without batting an eye, this great man said, "Bruce, don't be so proud and self-conscious."

That's not something you like to hear right before you speak. So I asked him, "What do you mean?"

"You are so concerned about yourself and how you will do and what the people will think about you—that's why you are nervous. If you'd get your eyes off yourself for a moment and on the people in front of you and start caring about meeting their needs, not your own, you'd stop being so nervous. You see, it's only when we are self-conscious rather than other-conscious that we become so very nervous. When we focus on serving our audience, then the Lord is free to use us."

Then he smiled and went back to singing the hymn as if nothing had happened. And I went back to the Lord for a moment of divine readjustment and purposefully stopped serving my needs and started attending to my audience's needs. Most of the butterflies headed south for the season, or at least they began flying in formation.

Serving students can be much like loving our children. Often we

do things for our children that we think communicate love to them, but they don't receive it that way. Similarly, many times I think teachers strive to serve their students, but their students don't feel it. Perhaps it's because the teachers unconsciously do things that communicate the very opposite of their intentions.

Throughout this book I will present many ways to concretely serve your students—ways they will recognize and appreciate. In the Law of Expectation you'll learn practical ways to communicate love to your students. In the Law of Need you'll learn the secrets Christ used to motivate His students to want what He was going to teach. In the Law of Retention, you will be exposed to some revolutionary approaches that will enable you to speed-teach material.

All seven Laws of the Learner are focused on this very issue: How does the teacher truly serve the student in the classroom? As you begin to understand these laws and practice them, you will see frustration replaced by motivation. You'll have an incredible set of transferable skills that will work with any subject you are teaching to any age student. How can I make these claims? Because these principles are universal, like gravity, and when you and I practice them, our students feel served.

Learn them and join the small band of teachers who enter the classroom with clear resolve and unwavering purpose to serve your students with all of your heart, all of your mind, and all of your soul.

Maxim 7: Teachers who practice the Laws of the Learner and Teacher can become master teachers.

A number of people applied for an open teaching position at a junior high school in Dallas. After screening the candidates, the hiring committee narrowed the field to two finalists.

The first man had taught school for thirty-five years; the other candidate was in only her second year of teaching. The experienced teacher

with all the credentials was sure he would get the job. But at the end of the week, the young woman was chosen.

The older man was livid. He stormed into the personnel committee meeting, demanding to know why he wasn't hired—after all, he was the one with thirty-five years of experience. The wise administrator paused for a moment and then answered, "Sir, it's true you have been teaching for thirty-five years, but I could not see any improvement over those years. The way I see it, you had one year of experience *repeated* thirty-five times!"

The popular notion is that great teachers are just born, but I believe master teachers are not born, not manufactured, but just improved! To believe that people are born great teachers is as illogical as believing that people are born great scientists. Of course, there are varying degrees of innate ability, but the majority of people who achieve in their fields do so with persistent effort over a long period of time.

Blot out of your thinking the other false concept that greatness comes through gigantic steps of improvement. Real effectiveness is developed through many years of improving just a few steps at a time.

Every year at the ministry of Walk Thru the Bible we saw concrete proof of this truth. We had a tradition of publicly recognizing the top ten Walk Thru the Bible instructors each year. Inevitably there was at least one surprise. One year, I had some intense discussions with our dean of faculty about one of our lowest-rated instructors. We held a high standard of excellence for our seminar faculty, and I kept encouraging the dean to dismiss this man. Finally he said, "Give this man one more year of opportunity to improve. If he doesn't, I'll be the first to vote to let him go."

I asked why he was so supportive of this marginal performer, and the dean said, "The man is working harder to improve himself than anyone else on the WTB faculty. He is watching the videos of the best teachers, having his wife and friends constantly evaluate him, always asking me for ways to improve. I believe he can do it, and he deeply wants to."

The next year, when evaluations were made to determine the top ten, guess who had achieved it? The same man I was ready to dismiss the year before. Did he have those rare abilities to make it naturally to the top ten? No, he didn't. The best rarely are the people who have the most natural talent, but rather those few who have a passion to fulfill their God-given talents and reach for their full potential.

Meaning

The essence of the Law of the Learner is these three words: "Cause to learn." The teacher should accept the responsibility of causing the student to learn.

Conclusion

As you have already sensed, this first Law of the Learner is the building block upon which every other law is built: *The teacher is responsible to cause the student to learn.*

For some teachers, this sense of commitment and responsibility has been with them for as long as they can remember—but they are the rare ones. To others, this commitment comes amidst difficulty and even trauma, but it alters their hearts and classrooms forever. And to still others, unfortunately, this commitment never finds entrance into their hearts or classrooms. Not only do these teachers suffer, but so do their students.

As a teacher of teachers, I have come to treasure those who have purposed to hold this commitment in their hearts, especially those who have had to pass through the fire to develop it. Of all the stories of such pilgrimages, my favorite is undoubtedly the Teddy Stallard story.

Teddy Stallard certainly qualified as "one of the least." Disinterested in school. Musty, wrinkled clothes. Hair never combed. One of those kids with a deadpan face, expressionless—sort of a glassy, unfocused

stare. When Miss Thompson spoke to Teddy he always answered in monosyllables. Unattractive, unmotivated, and distant, he was just plain hard to like. Even though his teacher said she loved all in her class the same, she knew she wasn't being completely truthful.

Whenever she marked Teddy's papers, she got a certain perverse pleasure from putting Xs next to the wrong answers, and when she put Fs at the top of the papers, she always did it with a flair. She should have known better; she had Teddy's records and she knew more about him than she wanted to admit. The records read:

> 1st grade: Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude, but poor home situation.
>
> 2nd grade: Teddy could do better. Mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home.
>
> 3rd grade: Teddy is a good boy but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year.
>
> 4th grade: Teddy is very slow, but well behaved. His father shows no interest.

Christmas came and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson's class brought her Christmas presents. They piled her presents on her desk and crowded around to watch her open them. Among the presents there was one from Teddy Stallard. She was surprised that he had brought her a gift. Teddy's gift was wrapped in brown paper and held together with Scotch tape. On the paper were written the simple words, "For Miss Thompson from Teddy." When she opened Teddy's present, out fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume.

The other boys and girls began to giggle and smirk over Teddy's gifts, but Miss Thompson at least had enough sense to silence them by

immediately putting on the bracelet and putting some of the perfume on her wrist. Holding her wrist up for the other children to smell, she said, "Doesn't it smell lovely?" And the children, taking their cue from the teacher, readily agreed.

At the end of the day, when school was over and the other children had left, Teddy lingered behind. He slowly came over to her desk and said softly, "Miss Thompson…Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother…and her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you liked my presents." When Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her.

The next day when the children came to school, they were welcomed by a new teacher. Miss Thompson had become a different person. She was no longer just a teacher; she had become an agent of God. She was now a person committed to loving her children and doing things for them that would live on after her. She helped all the children, but especially the slow ones, and especially Teddy Stallard.

By the end of that school year, Teddy showed dramatic improvement. He had caught up with most of the students and was even ahead of some.

She didn't hear from Teddy for a long time. Then one day, she received a note that read:

Dear Miss Thompson:

I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class.

Love,

Teddy Stallard

Four years later, another note came:

Dear Miss Thompson:

They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I like it.

Love,
Teddy Stallard

And four years later:

Dear Miss Thompson:

As of today I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive.You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year.

Love,
Teddy Stallard

Miss Thompson went to that wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat. She deserved to sit there—she had done something for Teddy that he could never forget.[3]

What can you give as a gift, my fellow teacher? Instead of giving something that money can buy, risk giving something that will live on long after you. Be extravagantly generous. Give the gift only you can give—yourself—to the members of your class. All of them. Give so much of yourself that they will learn so deeply and meaningfully that they'll invite you to their weddings, because it's the only reasonable thing to do.



Discussion Questions

1. **Who would you say was the best teacher you ever had? What three main characteristics made that person your favorite? How important was his commitment to "cause you to learn"? What do you think would have happened if he had lost that commitment?**

2. **How would you say the average teacher would define teaching today? If you flew in from outer space and were assigned to find out what happened in those buildings called "public schools" and invisibly visited a fifth, ninth, and eleventh grade classroom, what would you write to your supervisor? Remember, you've never seen a school before, so to develop a good answer, you will have to think outside the norm.**

3. **You have been asked by the president of the United States to develop a new model for hiring, training, and paying teachers. His only prerequisite is that he wants U.S. students to be back on top academically within the next three years. He has given you complete power and an unlimited budget; every decision is yours and will not be questioned except by the results. His only request is that your model be governed by no more than seven principles. What principles will you choose?**

4. **Consider yourself as a teacher for a moment. How much have you bought into this concept that it's your**

responsibility to cause your students to learn? Let's say that I could wave a magic wand and instantly give you that attitude to the fullest. After one week of teaching, how would your students describe the difference between the "old you" and the "new you"? Which of the two would you prefer, and why?

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