

Philosophy of Teaching

I. Teaching & Learning

Experience with learners in both industry and university settings has taught me that students learn best when the subject matter is both intriguing and related to their career goals. As an instructor, I attempt to teach in a clear, concise manner using contemporary and personal examples to illustrate key points as well as link theory to practice. In addition, I try to build a meaningful context for each student by using questions which relate to their various majors and career goals. For example, in a discussion of statistical variation I became concerned when I realized those in finance and accounting saw this topic as applying only to production or service areas. To reengage them, I expanded the scope of discussion to include the impact of variation with respect to cost projections and budget forecasting along with examples of how IBM Mutual Funds used statistics to determine staffing levels, justify capital improvements, manage customer satisfaction, and develop an operating budget.

Further, I hope to instill in students reasoning and problem solving skills which go beyond the immediate needs of the course. In discussing a book such as "Good to Great", my challenges to students include questions such as:

- How would you convince someone that the author truly established reasons why certain companies move from good to great rather than simply creating a list of coincidental similarities?
- Is the author's case weakened by his failure to "back test" the similarities against other companies?
- Would the traits identified as helping companies move from good to great remain constant over time or would they change?

II. Diversity

As history tells us, learning provides a positive, consistent path to social and economic advancement. This path is enriched by incorporating the social, ethnic, religious, national, and cultural backgrounds of others. In that sense, I believe the phrase "two heads are better than one" should be restated as "two perspectives are better than one." As an instructor, I feel both a personal and professional obligation to encourage diversity not just with respect to demographics but also with respect to opinion, opportunity, and involvement.

With the above in mind, I attempt to engage students with questions regarding how people from various backgrounds might react to our readings or discussions. In a discussion of customer and business financing, for example, the class might address not only the differing legal treatments by country but also by religion (e.g., Islam prohibits collection or payment of interest).

III. Ethics

I believe that as part of an "examined life" each individual needs to develop a sense of ethics and personal integrity. As role models and mentors to students – as well as representatives to the community – each teacher's personal standards must not only be strong but also in compliance with those of the educational institution and teaching profession. This, however, is not enough; these standards should be passed on to the students through challenging assignments which cause them to question, develop, and solidify their own ethical systems.

For example, U.S. companies have been known to take products considered unsafe in the U.S. and remarket them elsewhere to recoup costs. Discussion of this practice would include the ethical acceptability of this practice, local perspectives (better some defective product than none at all?), and implications to the manufacturing company's image.

IV. The Joys of Teaching

In many ways, my career to date has been a remarkable one with jobs ranging from being a child worker in the pecan orchards to being honored by the NASA astronauts to helping an IBM customer implement a worldwide process management system. Among all those adventures, the best times have been those spent teaching. Each experience was unique – a seminar at The Conference Board, 1.5 years of managing and delivering courses at the IBM Quality Institute, and guest lecturing at universities – yet the common thread of enjoyment and personal satisfaction appeared again and again. So it was during my IBM career that I set a goal for myself: complete an MBA and begin teaching at the college level. I am now living that goal.

As for teaching itself, a major part of the joy for me comes from seeing students share the same sense of discovery I encountered, as well as the self-satisfaction associated with the mental agility I use to get them there. That, coupled with the "I was really able to use what you taught me" feedback from students, makes teaching my chosen profession.