

How to Become An Unforgettable Teacher

Follow the Example of the Master Teacher

By David Cadavero

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Jesus was an unforgettable teacher – the Master Teacher – and He is our example. He went to where the people were – the well where the women were drawing water; the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha; and the home of a tax collector – and He used objects people could relate to. To fishers he said, “I will make you fishers of men.” He talked about lost sheep, seeds, a lost coin, and a runaway son.

By following the Masters’ example, today’s teacher can have a similar effect on children. Today’s unforgettable teacher gives honest praise and affirmation, has a sense of humor and is fun to be around, enjoys life, doesn’t take himself or herself too seriously, is loving and caring, is positive, is flexible, and is passionate about their subject. God uses our qualities and virtues to get His work done.

As Jesus did, today’s teacher also can plant unforgettable lessons in the mind of each student. An example is a Bible teacher who offered a student in front of the entire class a \$5.00 bill as a gift. “You can accept it or reject it,” the teacher said. “God offer us a free gift of eternal life. It’s called salvation. We can accept it or reject it.” This profound but simple illustration left a tremendous impact upon students in the classroom.

Keep the Gospel Commission As A Key Focus in Your Classroom

Remember that the primary aim of Seventh-day Adventist education is to provide opportunities for students to accept Christ as their Savior, to allow the Holy Spirit to transform their lives, and to fulfill the great gospel commission of preaching the gospel to all the world. The #1 goal of a Seventh-day Adventist teacher is to lead students closer to Jesus.

Be Prepared

Be faithful in carrying out your responsibilities. Begin your day on your knees in prayer followed by morning worship. Maintain a positive “can do” attitude before greeting your students with a warm, embracing smile at the beginning of school. As a result of thorough preparation, have a command of the subject matter. Know what, if any supplies you will need before the class period begins and be ready for any creative ideas that God gives you – and share them passionately with students. Unforgettable teachers set goals and objectives. What is your aim? Is it for your students to grow academically – as well as spiritually? Do you want them to have mastery of subject matter? How do you plan to accomplish this?

Write the aim of your classroom recitation in a short sentence on the board. How will the student apply the information you shared during your class recitation to their lives? It is not your responsibility to work in the hearts of students – that is God’s responsibility. It is your responsibility to be an

example of excellence to your students. An example of a student's heart being touched by a Christian teacher is the student who requested no gifts at her birthday party, but asked her guests to bring money as a donation to construct an orphanage in a developing country. She developed this idea through a powerful concept shared in her Bible class, which came out of a discussion, "Who is my brother/sister?" The unforgettable teacher does two things: they set high standards, and they connect learning to life.

Have an Embracing Classroom

Is your classroom neat? Clean? Inviting? Cheerful? Are your bulletin boards colorful, meaningful, and eye-catching? Is the furniture in your room well maintained and in good condition? Is the temperature comfortable? Does your room say, "Come in! You're welcome here"? Researchers at Harvard University have discovered that a personal connection between student and teacher may be the single most important factor in encouraging student growth and enhancing their own satisfaction with their education.

Arrive First

Set the tone in the morning. Be in the classroom before the first student arrives. Greet each student with a smile. Know each student's name – and call them by name when they raise their hand to answer a question or want your assistance. Such recognition makes students feel a "sense of belongingness" and embraced by you. Remember, it's the "little" things that you do which demonstrate you care about your students.

Show Kids That You Care

Know the children's needs in your classroom. Are there problems in the home? Do they need encouragement? Love? A hug? (Watch yourself here and do it appropriately.) A smile? Demonstrate to your children that you care about them– beyond their grades – A, B, C, D, F. Pray for them **and** with them. Remember: Teaching can be a tremendous pleasure or dreadful chore. It's your attitude, however, that can determine the difference. It's okay to run out of worksheets and even sometimes out of patience, but never out of encouraging words.

Communicate

Listen to your students. Listening shows them that they are important. It affects their self-image. Ask questions. This works well when students first arrive at school. A student's need to be heard is not an interruption of your lesson plan. Their willingness to have you listen to them may enhance their willingness to help carry out your lesson plan. Other suggestions: Don't interrupt or complete their thought; be courteous to your students; listen to them with the same respect you'd give an adult. Give them your undivided attention with appropriate body language – sometimes you need to "rap with them" at their level – but remember to lift them up to your level.

Use eye contact and feedback, such as "Wow!" and "That must have been exiting." Ask questions, such as, "Then what happened?" Younger children respond well when you exaggerate your facial expressions and nod your head in agreement.

If you're in the habit of listening only to words and not the child who express them, change your focus and *really* listen. Hear what isn't being said – the silences, moodiness, slumped posture, rejection, and pained looks of distress.

Listen to the students' tone of voice – frustration, heartbreak, rebellion. Listen to their words and to their feelings. Are they tired? Did they go to bed late the night before? What happened before they left for school? What happened on the way to school? Are there any issues that are impacting their personal life that may affect their classroom performance?

Laugh when they laugh and cry when they cry. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). Children need our willingness to listen as much as they need our knowledge. If we don't listen to them when they want to tell us about what's happening in their lives, they aren't going to listen to us when we want to tell them that "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son." (John 3:16, NKJV) All of these elements impact on student classroom behavior and academic readiness and willingness to perform well in school.

Discipline

Be firm and fair. List a few classroom rules (children can make them). Post them and review them regularly. Christian educator Henrietta Mears had a redemptive attitude toward discipline. Only in the most extreme case would she suspend a child and ask for administrative intervention. "Incorrigible is not necessarily impossible," she says. "The most incorrigible students make the best ministers."

Self Evaluate

What worked – What didn't? Learn from mistakes – and don't repeat them. God deserves our excellence. Nothing less will do.

Think Beyond The Classroom

Get to know your students – write postcards to them, send your students birthday cards (email cards are free!), phone them, attend their activities at church/special events of their lives, and "hang out with them." Be that difference maker in the life of each student in your classroom. Our mission as Seventh-day Adventist teachers is "to see in every pupil the handiwork of God – a candidate for immortal honors. The teachers should seek to educate, train, and discipline the youth that each may reach the high standard of excellence to which God calls him/her. (*Counsels To Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 229.) Someone once said, "Chances are good that a few of those students I look at today will become teachers themselves; it is my duty to give them a standard to emulate." An unforgettable teacher finds the spark that ignites not only the mind of each student – but also the *heart*, the *imagination*, and the *spirit*.

A Final Word

Remember, you teach little by what you say. You teach most by who you are – and through the Holy Spirit working daily in your life – you can be an unforgettable teacher!

Useful Resources

Habenicht, D. (2000). *10 Christian Values Every Kid Should Know: A How-To Guide for Families*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Habenicht, D., & Burton, L. D. (2004). *Teaching the Faith: An Essential Guide for Building Faith-Shaped Kids*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Roy, J. (2005). *Soul Shapers: A Better Plan for Parents and Educators*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

Samaan, P. (1990). *Christ's Way of Reaching People*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.