

Thoughts on Professional Practice and Education

Article 14: Philosophy of Educating Students Beyond Course Content

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This is the fourteenth article I have prepared. In this article I will offer thoughts regarding my approach to teaching students beyond the course topic and perhaps reveal one of many character flaws I possess – at least according to some students. I might point out for the sake of the reader, that I share these flaws with many employers in these modern times.

As a faculty member, I stand in the cross roads where many individuals leave pampered or sheltered home lives and must soon work in a profession where the employer expects to make a profit from the graduate's endeavors and the client expects to receive quality service for a reasonable fee. I have been challenged many times attempting to adjust student attitudes. I am often disliked by students for my efforts. I believe my efforts are appreciated by employers. The reader may judge for themselves after reading this article.

I will begin by crediting three sources for my belief that attitude adjustment is part of any learning process. First, I will credit my father who had a strong belief that his three boys must earn their keep on his dairy farm. Two weeks after graduation from high school, I left the farm to become a U.S. Marine. The Marines are well known for attitude adjustment. The third source is the court system. I challenge anyone to appear before a judge with an attitude contrary to what the judge expects.

For the thirty plus years I have taught at college, I have attempted to introduce students not only to surveying knowledge but also to expose the student to the realities they will face when employed in surveying practice. Better the students understand life's foibles and harsh realities sooner rather than later. I would prefer they frustrate me rather than frustrate employers and dismay clients. My attempts at attitude adjustment have not always been well received by students nor have I always been successful in restructuring attitude.

The following are my goals for attitude adjustment among students.

Education or employment is not to be treated as an inconvenience in personal priorities. Mark Twain said, "*To change your life, you need to change your priorities.*" Many students find it difficult to change their priorities from themselves to clients and employers. Some students want to socialize, party, do on-line gaming, and so on. Some students consider this a sacred right. A full-time employee owes the employer and client 40 plus hours of satisfactory work a week without personal distractions affecting their efforts. This means that social sites should remain unused during working hours. I expect students to put in the necessary hours of class, study, and effort without distraction with personal pursuits.

When planning board meetings and property closings are routinely rescheduled to accommodate a survey employee's personal life, I will reconsider this policy.

Examples: *"I'm in intramural volleyball. We have a game during the test time. Can I take the exam next week? ... Can I take the exam early so I can start my break earlier? I already have my tickets to fly home. ... I was given a one-week cruise in the Caribbean for my birthday. Can I hand in my homework when I return?"*

Standards are established by the instructor or employer, not the individual. I suppose it is to be expected when growing up in a society where everyone gets a trophy that students expect to be accommodated when they believe they have made a good faith attempt even though they failed to achieve anything notable with the attempt. I often have to remind students that in practice, there may be twenty proposals submitted to a prospective client but only one proposal is accepted. All other proposals fail. No matter how hard a surveyor tries, unless services are delivered fully to the client per the contract, the surveyor is not paid in full.

When employers are compensated for unsuccessful proposals or fully compensated for unfinished services, I will reconsider this policy.

Examples of Conflict: *"I spent a lot of time on this assignment, I should get more points ... I really studied hard. How can you fail me? I was only an hour late with my homework submission, you should grade it! ... This is my last semester. You can't fail me now."*

Bad events for a student (employee) will be confined to the individual and not affect the class (business). Many students think that a problem they believe they are not responsible for is sufficient justification for special accommodations for the class. I acknowledge that bad things happen to good people; yet, real life cannot stop or even allow for adjustments for the student at the expense of the class. Therefore, in my class, if a student has an emergency, class tests are not rescheduled, homework dates are not adjusted, and expectations not relaxed. Life must go on.

I will change my policy when an employee can have additional vacation days because bad things happen after they have used all their vacation time for that year already.

Examples of Conflict: *"Evenings for me are not a good time for testing, can you move tests to another night. I don't think I should have to look at examples to determine what I did wrong. You should provide individual feedback."*

Lack of planning on the student's (employee's) part will not become an emergency on my (the employer's) part. Some students believe that their lack of planning requires me to compensate as a result. Some individuals seem unable

to plan and are very offended that I will not alleviate the situation caused by their poor planning.

My policy will change when employers allow employees to set their own work schedule and production outputs.

Examples of Conflict: *“My ex just dropped off my children for me to watch. I will have to take the test tomorrow. ... I forgot to set my alarm so I missed the exam. I will need to take a makeup.”*

An instructor (the employer is) not your mother. Students often come to college ill prepared to handle stress and crisis. The student expects faculty and employers to show the same empathy, support, and consolation for any and all stress and personal crises that they once received from their mother. I am not the student's mother. Some students have taken great umbrage with me because I don't react in the same empathetic manner their mother did by immediately changing my life and course requirements to best suit their emotional needs.

When survey firms hire emotional support counselors, I'll rethink this policy.

Examples of Conflict: *“I just broke up with a girl I've been dating for four years, since I was in 9th grade. I can't study or handle an exam right now. ... I can't believe that Trump won the election. I need some time off from class to deal with my distress.”*

Murphy's Law can strike more than once or bad luck often accompanies habitual faulters. I am not surprised that some students encounter more than their fair share of unfortunate happenstances. These students are often the marginally motivated or the habitually ill-prepared students.

Employers don't usually keep these individuals as long-term employees. The employees I am referring to tend to get sick only on Fridays or Mondays and have alarm clocks that never seem to work or ring loud enough.

When employers promote underachieving employees, I will change my policy.

Example of Conflict: *“My internet went down with the storm. I couldn't take the test. I know you said in the syllabus that you will drop the lowest test score. However, I had to miss a test already because my car had a flat tire on my way home from work. My spare was flat as well.”*

A student should not fertilize and water problems they have at the instructor's (the employer's) expense. Individuals often exasperate their problems by demanding more accommodations than practical or required by law. We can all admire someone that achieves great success with disabilities. Increasingly, there are people experiencing difficulties that they believe should be treated as

protected disabilities. They demand accommodations without demonstrating an effort to overcome their 'disability'.

I will relax this policy when employers allow employees to stay in the survey vehicle rather than leave and go into the field because the bugs are particularly bad or they saw a snake while unloading the survey equipment.

Example of Conflict: *"I can't handle cold temperatures. I won't be able to do lab this week unless we move inside where the temperature is warmer."*

When your bucket is full, you can't fill the instructor's (employer's). Individuals often exasperate their problems by taking on more than they should handle. Rather than step back, regroup, and try again, they demand accommodations and blame me for pointing out a solution that doesn't require I bend over backwards and provide accommodations.

I will change my policy when employers routinely loan their employees money because the employee runs short of funds between paychecks.

Example of Conflict: *"I'm taking care of my mother and trying to complete my coursework from last semester. I need to delay taking the first exam. ... What do you mean I can't? You are not being considerate in helping me deal with this problem. ... No, I won't drop the course until my personal crisis is resolved. I don't want to wait until next year to take this class."*

I should point out these remonstrations I have presented should not be a surprise to students. I make these rules known to students before the course begins using a document available to them. The document is titled: 'Rules for the Course.' It is available for viewing on my publication web site. This document is given to every student at the start of the course and cause some students to immediately complain about rigid rules and heavy-handed ways. Apparently, similar rules were not applied in high school or other college courses.

I am encouraged in my attitude adjustment attempts by feedback from employers. I had one employer explain to me about interviews he has with seniors that apply for employment with his firm. The employer will ask the senior what the senior thought of me as their instructor. If the senior complained I was unfair or had similar negative sentiments toward me, the firm did not hire that person. The firm believed if the senior found it difficult to work within my rules, they would not work well within the constraints of the employment rules set by the surveying firm.

I suppose fairness allows that disgruntled students have a say about me. Perhaps the reader of this article may wish to give me some nasty criticism that arose from reading this article. Maybe the reader is a former student and has kept their angst bottled up since the time they were a student in my class. Fortunately, some enterprising fellows set up a web site called

RateMyProfessors.com where strangers, students, and a great many almost-students can voice their opinions about faculty anywhere, at any time, including criticizing me (or complimenting me).

This is an unofficial web site. Official university evaluations can only be completed by students that have actually taken a college course and finished the course. The unofficial web site I just mentioned will allow anyone to comment about an instructor regardless if the individual was in the course, dropped the course, or even took a course. (I have never taught some of the courses cited on this website that students claim I taught.) Consider adding your own opinion. Having taught over 5000 students and close to that many licensed surveyors in seminars during my career, this web site is a chance to vent or make your thoughts known.

† Other books and articles by Knud can be found at <https://umaine.edu/svt/faculty/hermansen-articles/>