

8 CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT TEACHER

By [Worth Sharing](#) | Dec 26, 2015

What differentiates the best from the rest? There's no shortage of bodies (some dramatically misguided) attempting to solve this riddle. The answers are nebulous at best. Below is a list of traits, some of which may be familiar but many of which will never show up on any sort of performance review. What makes a teacher strong? Ian Lancaster at www.TeachThought.com shares his thoughts.

Check them out and see what you think.

1. They Demonstrate Confidence

Confidence while teaching can mean any number of things, it can range from having confidence in your knowledge of the material being learned to having confidence that your teaching acumen is second to none. Though these two (and many other) "confidences" are important the most critical confidence a teacher can have is much more general, and tougher to describe than that.

It's the confidence that you know you're in the right spot doing what you want to be doing and that no matter what transpires, having that time to spend with those young learners is going to be beneficial both for them and for yourself. It's clear to students when teachers exude this feeling. Working in schools is difficult and stressful, and also immensely rewarding. But if you're not confident that you're in the right place when you're teaching...you're probably not.

2. They Have Life Experience

Having some life experience outside the classroom and outside the realm of education is invaluable for putting learning into context and keeping school activities in perspective. Teachers who have travelled, worked in other fields, played high level sports or enjoyed any number of other life experiences bring to the profession outlooks other than "teacher". From understanding the critical importance of collaboration and teamwork, to being able to answer that ageless senior math question "when are we going to use this?", educators who have spent significant time and energy on alternate pursuits come to the profession with a deep understanding of where school fits into the bigger picture of life.

3. They Understand Each Student's Motivation

Just as each student has a different set of interests, every student will have a correspondingly different set of motivators. Many (or most) students will be able to reconcile their own outlook and ambitions with what's happening in the class and take motivation from that relationship. Unfortunately some students will rely simply on external motivators, but worse, we've all run into students who really can't find a relationship between what makes them tick and what's happening in the classroom around them.

These students run the risk of disengaging altogether. This is where the master teacher knows each of her students and helps them to contextualize the work they're doing to allow the student to make a connection with something in his realm of interest. Teachers who can't help students make this connection need to rethink what's going on. After all, what IS the point of work in which a student finds no interest and for which he can make no connection?

4. They're People, Not Heroes.

Yes, all teachers are heroes. Now let's move beyond the platitude to what this really means. Some teachers still have trouble showing any sort of vulnerability or fallibility. These teachers will expend immense amounts of energy hiding the fact they're frustrated at something, that they're upset or perhaps even angry. Why? Other teachers get tied into logical knots to avoid admitting "I have no idea what the answer to your question is." But teachers who genuinely connect with students are the ones who aren't afraid to show emotions in class, who can admit that they aren't in fact the repository of all knowledge.

Of course nobody want to be a wallowing, blubbing mess in class, but what better way to teach empathy than to give the students someone to empathize with when we're having a bad day? What better way to foster collaboration and to teach that it's okay not to know something than to say "I don't know, let's find that out!"?

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