

Four Critical Questions

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Ellen G. White, in the concluding paragraphs of her book *Education*, penned one of the most compelling statements on Christian service: “In our life here, earthly, sin-restricted though it is, the greatest joy and the highest education are in service. And in the future state, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, it is in service that our greatest joy and our highest education will be found...”¹



In light of the above statement, each of us as educators should ask ourselves these four critical questions: a) Do I love what I do? b) Am I good at what I do? c) Am I passionate about what I do? and d) Can I become better at what I do? Answers to these questions will determine the impact of our contribution as teachers and school administrators.

The first question . . . do I love what I do . . . is directly correlated to job satisfaction. Job satisfaction describes how content one is with one’s job. It is influenced by a variety of factors such as the quality of the physical environment in which one works, and the nature of the job itself. According to Edwin Locke, professor emeritus of management and psychology at the University of Maryland, the prerequisite of finding happiness in the workplace is to really enjoy the kind of work you are doing.²

Unfortunately, research has demonstrated that in America (and this applies to Canada as well) the decline in job satisfaction is widespread among workers of all ages and across all income brackets. Although half of all Americans say they are satisfied with their jobs, only 14 percent say that they are “very satisfied.”³ This may be the result of a combination of factors, but the fact remains that an unhappy worker is not the most productive.

The second question . . . am I good at what I do . . . is directly related to job performance. The more knowledgeable and skilful one is, the more productive one is likely to be. An outstanding employee demonstrates exceptional knowledge and skills in the most complex aspects of the job. Most people agree that there are two prerequisites for a good teacher. First is an unshakable belief in children's capacity to learn, and second is a sound knowledge of one’s subject field.

Research on teacher efficacy by statistician William Sanders has shown that the higher the grade, the more closely student achievement correlates to a teacher's expertise in his/her field. In spite of this, the study revealed that nearly 30% of middle- and high school classes in Math, English, Science and Social Studies were taught by teachers who didn't major in a subject closely related to the one they were teaching.⁴ How can teachers be effective in the classroom without a sound knowledge of their subject field?

The third question . . . am I passionate about what I do . . . has to do with connecting with students in an engaging, dynamic way. Holding the interest of students and motivating them to learn is the essence of teaching. It is creating a fire within them for learning, so that in time they may become self-motivated learners. A passion for learning means discovering new approaches to learning, being creative in lesson planning and delivery, and connecting each

lesson with a story that captivates the imagination of children. Regardless of what we teach, if we package it with enthusiasm, a sense of humour, and good storytelling, we will have a captive audience in our students.

The fourth question . . . can I become better at what I do . . . addresses the issue of staying current, relevant, and effective. Change is inevitable and therefore we must embrace change in order to remain on the cutting edge. A school system's most important asset is its teaching force, and, therefore, the most important investment a school board, administrators, and parents can make in a school system is to ensure that teachers continue to learn and grow. Continuous, high-quality professional development is essential to our goal of high standards of learning for every child.

As we serve God and humanity in our various roles, let us reflect on these four questions and do a critical self-evaluation. And let us be resolved to do whatever is necessary to remain on the cutting edge of our profession so that we can render quality service to produce the best possible result.

¹ White, Ellen G., *Education*. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1952, p. 309.

² Salerno, Christina, "What Does It Take to Be Happy at Work."
<http://www.thirdage.com/news/articles/ALT04/07/09/10/ALT04070910-01.html>

³ "U.S. Job Satisfaction Keeps falling, The Conference Board Reports Today," (Feb. 28, 2005).
http://www.conference-board.org/utilities/pressDetail.cfm?press_ID=2582

⁴ Wallis, Claudia, "How to Make Great Teachers," (Feb. 10, 2008).
<http://normsnotes2.blogspot.com/2008/02/how-to-make-great-teachers.html>