

The Power of a Tip

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The maxim, “A tip is a reward for service well done,” caught my attention sometime ago when my husband and I visited a restaurant overseas. This adage was beautifully carved in a mahogany plaque and placed on the west wall close to the entrance. We placed our orders and waited to be served. It was a long wait. From the kitchen we could hear a shouting match between the staff. This was accompanied by the occasional *crash* and *bang* of pots and pans. I wanted to leave, but my husband suggested we stay and register our disapproval by not tipping.



In August 2009, as I travelled with colleagues on a shuttle bus from the Fort Lauderdale Airport to the Port of Miami to begin our SDACC sponsored cruise-convention, I made an interesting observation. The bus driver outdid himself as he announced historical facts and features of the region, adding other minutiae and humor to keep our attention. As we neared our destination he said, “Folks, it was a pleasure having you as passengers. If you appreciate my service, please let me know by leaving a tip on your way out.” For the duration of that educational cruise between Dodge Island, Florida, and Cozumel, Mexico, I just couldn’t get the driver’s appeal out of my mind. His ordinary words served as a powerful reminder of three of the important practices I believe educators should adhere to:

Acknowledge the positive things our students do and show them our appreciation. Every passenger who dropped a tip in the receptacle got a heartfelt “thank you” from the spirited driver. He did not take our kindness for granted. As drivers in the field of education, we can take a page from his book and thank our students for their efforts. But let’s not stop there. Let’s acknowledge life-long values such as respect, faith, compassion, good citizenship, and perseverance that they exhibit. We are privileged to share in the success of our students. Let’s create a paradigm shift and express appreciation for what the Lord through us has enabled them to achieve.

Go the extra mile with courtesy. When our ship docked in Cozumel, I went out to shop and meet the locals. On my way back to the ship, I took a taxicab. Even though the driver was standing beside my door, he did not extend the chivalry of opening it for me. Keep in mind that my hands were full with shopping bags. Notwithstanding, the driver and I had a pleasant conversation back to the pier, and I thought he deserved a *pourboire*—redemption. When I paid him, he thanked me in his limited English and started to count the handful of small notes. Simultaneously, I gathered my shopping bags and was about to let myself out when he raced from behind the wheel and quickly opened the door for me. He was smiling. It’s no guess—the tip had caused him to go the extra mile.

Our students ought to be courteous to us, but the reverse is also true. It is imperative, then, that we shun the praxis of using confrontational language, negative tone of voice, sarcasm, and other negative verbal and non-verbal clues when we’re communicating with them. Instead, let us reward them by offering genuine compliments: “Good job on your science test!” “Thanks for offering to set up the projector.” “Congratulations on your student government election!”

“You’re a good team player!” And when we must correct or reprimand them, let’s choose our words wisely. Barbara Foster and Wendy Ehrensberger were on the ball when they wrote: “When teachers are cognizant of their choice of words and manner of interaction, they can empower students to develop a sense of who they are, what they are capable of doing, and why they behave the way they do.”¹

Work so that we will be worthy of the pay. 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us that as workers we should present our best to the Lord so that we will not be ashamed of our effort. Therefore, even if we receive one-talent students, we cannot cast them aside. We have to unearth their latent talents and motivate them to change their “I-can’t-attitude” to “I think I can,” and ultimately to “Yes, I can!” Being aware that “the work of education and redemption is one,”² let us embrace the call to be meritorious workers fully aware that we will be greatly rewarded.

¹<http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol1/iss6/art4/>

²White, Ellen G. *True Education*, page 21.