

Why am I Still Here?

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Imagine, for a moment, young Jesus working with Joseph in the carpenter shop. He is busily planing and sanding; the visible surfaces receive the excellence of his detailing. Smooth to the touch, beautiful to the eye, this piece of furniture has been given our Lord's careful attention—but only the parts that are visible. He ends his work by running his strong hands over the glossy surface, and smiling, declares, "Good enough".

Unlikely, you say? Impossible, even? Certainly we can't imagine Jesus being satisfied with doing less than his best in anything he undertook. And so I ask, can we be content with a job not completed to our best? Teaching, at any level, is an incredible and amazing responsibility. Day after day, as we stand before our students, we have opportunity to affect them for eternity. So it is not surprising that our Bibles command us, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" Col. 3:23.

As Adventist teachers, we choose to teach in SDA schools for any number of reasons, but it seems to me that this, this working for the Lord, should be our greatest reason. And if that is the case, the way we approach the requirements of our jobs should change.

We all recognize those requirements are many. Planning, grading, presenting material, summer school, extracurricular activities, dealing with parents—all take huge commitment in time and effort. Many times we are tempted to say, "Good enough," and let it be. But for whom is it "good enough"? For us? For our students? For their parents? Or is it good enough for our Father? When we approach our work, do we remember the Biblical directive? I don't believe God expects us to put so much into our jobs that other priorities such as our relationship with him or with our families suffer, but I do believe he expects us to give our jobs our best. If we truly are on a journey to excellence, this must be our goal.

So, in regard to educating our students, what does this excellence look like? How do we go about providing our best without having this career consume us? This, I believe, is a learning process, in which the first step is to build relationships with our students and their families. As we build these relationships, we will have greater understanding of our students' needs and how to meet them. We can do this by spending extracurricular time with our students—lunch time conversations, after school activities, even attending their hockey games and dance recital. These small time investments will have huge benefits. A second step is to ensure that the learning we invest our time in gives us greater insight into our students' personalities and learning styles. Knowing these things will help us plan more effectively for presentation of material, in creating assignments, and in grading student work. This will not only increase student enjoyment of learning, but will also increase its effectiveness. As we build these relationships, a third step in building excellence will be realized. Our classrooms and schools will develop a different atmosphere. Our students will see us model life skills and attitudes that

will help them become better people, and as they follow our lead, the environment in which our students meet their learning challenges will be much more conducive to the excellence toward which we strive.

I believe it is time for each of us to evaluate our commitment to our careers, and to our Lord. It's time to ask ourselves if we are truly doing our best. If our answer is negative, we need to ask another question—"Why am I still here?" When we can answer the first question positively, we will know the answer to the second, and that is, we are here to work for God, and not for men. That is a job that requires our best, always.