

# The 7 Laws of the Teacher

by

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## Law #1: The Law of the Teacher

The Law of the Teacher is stated simply as this: *If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow.* The effective teacher always teaches from the overflow of a full life. You cannot impart what you do not possess. If you don't know it – truly know it – you can't give it. One thing you must always tell yourself is, "I must keep growing and changing." This means you have an attitude of always asking the question, "How can I improve?" The bottom line is this: if you want to teach others, ask God first of all to teach you. He wants to work through you, but he can't until he works *in* you. He will use you as his instrument, but he wants to sharpen and cleanse that instrument so it becomes a more effective tool in his hands. Effective teaching comes only through a changed person. The more you change, the more you become an instrument of change in the lives of others.

### A few tips... (and questions to ask yourself)

1. To strengthen your own commitment to change and development, remember that growing is something even Jesus did. Luke 2:52 says that "Jesus grew" in four areas:
  - a. He grew in **wisdom**. That's intellectual development. *Am I maintaining a consistent personal study and reading program? Am I getting to know my students in personal ways? Am I subsequently praying for those students?* **Warning:** do not use your knowledge of a student's needs to "label" that kid. Kids with enough creative energy to get into trouble can have enough drive to live highly significant lives for Jesus Christ later on.
  - b. He grew in **stature**—physical development. *Is there anything in the physical dimension of your life over which, in obedience to Christ, you do not have proper control* (that is, *is your money under control? Are your eating habits under control? How about your time? Are you in control of a healthy exercise lifestyle?*)?
  - c. He grew in **favor with God**—spiritual development. This aspect should permeate all other areas of your life. None of these developments are compartmentalized. They are a unit, and if any, especially this development, is off-balance, your life will be off-balance. The best way to develop spiritually is to seek God through the spiritual disciplines (praying, reading, meditating, celebration, silence, isolation, etc.).
  - d. He grew in **favor with men**—social and emotional development. *Who do you have in terms of friends? Are you friends with only Christian folks or do you have any friends among the unsaved* (if not, try being something other than what your position is [e.g. a Christian], and don't let it get in the way. Try being a person for a while.)? Surround yourself with solid Christian friends in your immediate proximity, but seek to hang out with non-Christian people. Jesus had 12 committed followers as his "close-in-proximity" friends, but consistently spent time with tax collectors, prostitutes, and "sinners."
2. Experience does not necessarily make you better; in fact, it tends to make you worse, unless it's *evaluated* experience. Again, the Teacher's greatest threat is satisfaction—the failure to keep asking, "How can I improve?" Don't be so busy doing things that you do not **become** someone significant.

## **Law #2: The Law of Education**

The Law of Education is stated like this: *the way people learn determines how you teach*. As an effective teacher, you must not only know that which you would teach—that is, your content—but you must also know those whom you wish to teach. This law can be further defined this way: the teacher must excite and direct the learner's self-activities, and, as a rule (though there are some exceptions, explained below), **tell the learner nothing—and do nothing for him—that he can learn or do for himself**. That means each role is very well defined: the teacher is primarily a stimulator and motivator, not the player, but the coach who excites and directs the players; the learner is primarily an investigator, a discoverer, and a doer. It is not necessarily easy for either person though. There is no growth, development, or learning without tension and failure. Tension and failure are absolutely indispensable in the process of learning.

### **A few tips... (and questions to ask yourself)**

1. *What in the world are you trying to do? Do you have clear-cut objectives for your teaching?* There are three basic goals you should have as a teacher:
  - a. **Teach people how to think.** If you want to change a person permanently, change the way he thinks, not just his behavior. Your task as a teacher is to stretch the human mind, and encourage your learners to think for themselves. If you think about it, the people you recall as the best teachers in your own life were probably those who planted seeds—and you're still reaping the harvest from them. Additionally, never get so hung up on a specific lesson that you forget this fact: good teaching—and true education—consists simply of a series of teachable *moments*.
  - b. **Teach people how to learn.** The age-old adage “Give a man a fish and you'll feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you'll feed him for his life” is a simplistic truth for the education process. A good teacher creates learners who will perpetuate the learning process for the rest of their lives. There are three steps to this. First, present the whole picture. Second, break down the big picture into parts, allowing your students to see their meaning in light of the whole. Third, put the parts back together again so that everyone leaves thinking, “Now I can understand it and use it.” Not only is the learning process exciting and logical, but it's also a discovery process. Truth is always most profitable and productive when you can see it for yourself.
  - c. **Teach people how to work.** Remember: never do anything for a student that he is capable of doing for himself. If you do, you'll make him or her an educational cripple. Never forget that your task is to develop people who are self-directed, who are disciplined, who do what they do because they choose to do it. Spend more time questioning answers than answering questions.
2. If you're going to teach students to think, to learn, and to work, then help them master four basic skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
3. Teaching is both a science and an art, but there are a few exceptions to the rule (“never do for someone something that they can do for themselves”):
  - a. **Exception #1:** the matter of saving time. There is no need to waste hours trying to reinvent the wheel. Good teaching recognizes the proper usage of time.
  - b. **Exception #2:** concerns students with special needs for encouragement and help. Your primary task as a teacher is to convincingly tell the student, “I believe in you! You're going to make it!”
  - c. **Exception #3:** when your students are so highly motivated that they'll take in everything you feed them and still want more. When the student is that hungry, tell him or her all you can. They'll naturally think and retain what you teach them.

### Law #3: The Law of Activity

Christian education today is entirely too passive, whereas it should be the most revolutionary force on the planet. Churches and the Christians with any sort of voice often resist the very changes that they are meant to bring about. If we wish to see true change in our churches and in our world, we must implement the Law of Activity, which tells us that *maximum learning is always the result of maximum involvement*, with one condition: the activity in which the learner is involved must be meaningful. Activity in learning is never an end in itself. It must have a place in your overall purpose and objective. The higher the learner's involvement, the greater his potential for learning. Finally, studying the life of the Savior, the greatest Teacher, makes it clear that he didn't cram a lot of heads full of a collection of theological facts. No, he involved his disciples in the process so that later the pagan world was compelled to testify, "These are they who have turned the world upside down."

#### A few tips... (and questions to ask yourself)

1. Practice does not make perfect; it makes permanent. A truer statement would be: Well-guided practice makes perfect. *So are you guiding well those you are trying to teach? Are you encouraging them to practice under guidance?*
2. Experience is not necessarily the best teacher. Properly evaluated experience is the best teacher. *How are you helping your students evaluate their experiences?*
3. We certainly learn by doing, but we must be doing the right things. Sometimes we learn by doing the wrong things, but those things can easily end up being destructive instead of constructive. *What right things are you encouraging your students to engage in?*
4. Psychologists say that humans retain 10% of what we hear. If we add seeing (visual aids) to our hearing, we can potentially retain 50% of that information. If we add *doing* to *seeing* and *hearing*, psychologists say we can potentially remember 90% of that information. *How are you/How can you incorporate doing, seeing, and hearing in your teaching to maximize your students' ability to remember the material?* (Dylan's advice: always use 2 pictures/visuals when you teach)
5. The name of the game in Christian education is not knowledge—it's **active obedience**. *How are your students actively obeying Christ?*
6. Not all forms of activity are meaningful. Here are five forms of meaningful activity that are available to you to practice the Law of Activity:
  - a. Activity that provides direction without dictatorship. You must provide your students with a sphere of freedom. They are learning for themselves, not for you. The ultimate question to the learner is, "What do *you* want?" not "What does the teacher want?"
  - b. Activity that stresses function and application. You must provide your students with activity that immediately lets the learner put to use everything that's just been taught.
  - c. Activity with a planned purpose. Forget "busywork" and entertainment. Remember your objectives. If your planned activities don't encourage your objectives or purpose, choose a different activity.
  - d. Activity that is concerned with the process as well as the product. This is so that students not only know **what** they believe, but **why** (why is far more important). In our churches, we are settling for the wrong things. We are settling for words. Christians know all the right words to get into Heaven, but they're missing out on the experience to live **now** for Jesus.
  - e. Realistic activity that includes problem-solving situations. Students seek answers to their own questions. Find out where your students are, what they are struggling with, and talk and teach about those things in real ways.

## **Law #4: The Law of Communication**

Of all the Laws discussed so far, this is the most practical. Teachers are in the business of communication. Communication is the reason for our existence. However, it is also our number one teaching problem. There are many people who could be excellent teachers but because they cannot communicate their message well, they are sub-par. The Law of Communication compels a process of bridge building: *to truly impart information requires the building of relationships with the people you are trying to communicate with.* You must spend time with your students, and ultimately earn the right to communicate with them. Your students are not parrots who simply spill out exactly what you have told them. Your job as a communicator, as a teacher, is to help them understand, just as you have understood; help them feel deeply about it, as you have felt; and ultimately, show them how to let the truth affect their actions in a significant way, just as you are doing.

### **A few tips... (and questions to ask yourself)**

1. Communication is a process, and one that you are going to have to study in order to master, to make it your own property.
  - a. Whatever you want to communicate to another individual involves:
    - i. **Something you know.** Not only must you know the content, but you must know why the content is important.
    - ii. **Something you feel.** Most of us settle for communicating the message with the intellectual component only. We rely too heavily on words. *What do you get excited about? If you really believe and feel your message, it will show.*
    - iii. **Something you are doing.** What you know and what you feel are irrelevant if they don't change your behavior. *What difference does this knowledge make in my own life, and how do I want it to make a real difference in their lives?*
  - b. If you know something thoroughly, feel it deeply, and are doing it consistently, you have great potential for being an excellent communicator. All three components must be present for excellent communication.
  - c. Every time you teach, ask yourself:
    - i. *What do I know—and what do I want these students to know?*
    - ii. *What do I feel—and what do I want them to feel?*
    - iii. *What do I do—and what do I want them to do?*
2. The next step is taking this process of knowledge-feeling-action and translating it into words.
  - a. Make sure you **properly prepare**. Your communication must include: a hooking introduction (don't ramble; capture their attention); illustrations and actual visual aids within your spoken message; and a conclusion (land the plane). (Dylan's advice: A good rule to practice is KISS: Keep It Simple, Sir. Any lesson that is not discussion-based needs to be completely covered in 20 minutes or less, with time for them to ask questions or express they understand.)
  - b. Make sure you **practice your presentation**. Work on enunciation, volume of voice, emphases, and pitch and speed.
    - i. You cannot prepare for most distractions. They happen, and you must adjust as needed. However, some distractions can be utilized for the advantage of your teaching purpose. Use or eliminate as many of those distractions as possible.
3. Finally, **get feedback**. Ask questions like, "Do you understand?" or "Do you have any questions?"

## **Law #5: The Law of the Heart**

If teaching were solely the content, then teaching would be the easiest task in the world. However, true teaching involves much more than just content. It involves heart, an almost indefinable element that every good teacher has. The Law of the Heart is this: *teaching that impacts is not head to head, but heart to heart*. To the Hebrews, *heart* embraced the totality of human personality—one's intellect, one's emotions, one's will. So the process of teaching is that of one total personality transformed by the supernatural grace of God, reaching out to transform other personalities by the same grace. Again, understand that who you are is far more important than what you say or do, because it *determines* what you say and do. Your emotions must run in the direction of your actions. Finally, your content must be reflected in who you are. For example, when God wanted to communicate with us, he wrapped his message in a person. That's exactly what he calls us to do. The greatest communicators are the people who have great heart. They communicate *as* a total person, and they communicate *to* the total person of their hearers. Your goal is to totally impact your students.

### **A few tips... (and questions to ask yourself)**

1. The teacher's *character* is what produces the learner's *confidence*. The "trust factor" you have with your students is your greatest asset in communication. All effective communication emanates from within. *What kind of person am I?*
2. It's your *compassion* that produces the learner's *motivation*. *Can your students tell that you care about them?* People are drawn to a person who loves them and cares about their real needs.
3. It's your *content* that produces the learner's *perception*. *Am I effectively showing my students what I have seen/helping them understand what I have understood?* Your content must be woven into the fabric of your life.
4. All learning begins at the feeling level. No one cares what you know until they know that you care. *Are your students truly receptive to your teaching?* If not, you might need to demonstrate that you care about them.
5. Heart is more important than content, but content is not unimportant. It makes all the difference in the world what you believe, because what you believe determines how you behave. Until the mind has been changed, and the emotions have been changed, and the will has been changed, biblical teaching and learning has not taken place. *What do I believe? Have my beliefs changed my thinking/emotions/actions?*
6. You can impress people at a distance. But you can impact them only up close. If you want to be a person of impact, do these three things:
  - a. **Know your students.** The more you know of their needs, the better able you are to meet them. Good teaching has a price tag: you've got to be willing to pour out your life. This means getting personally involved with your students, formally and informally. The closer you are to them, the greater and more permanent the impact.
  - b. **Earn the right to be heard.** Credibility always precedes communication.
  - c. **Be willing to become vulnerable before your students.** They need to see that you are a real person with real struggles, real problems, real hurts, and that you are cut from the same cloth as they are. It is easier to identify with struggles than with successes.

*Dylan's advice:* This is the most abstract of the Seven Laws. The best understanding I can offer is this: teaching must stem out of who you are. Be yourself. Don't become someone different when you teach than when you spend time with people. Also, be perceptive to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes he will have you change something. For example, I once tossed a devotional book at a student and had her teach our small group because I "felt in my heart" that that's what needed to happen. That small group time was the best we had all weekend.

## **Law #6: The Law of Encouragement**

Most of our teaching encourages people to have high IQ levels. However, more important is their MQ, or motivation quotient, level. The number one problem in education today is the failure to motivate learners—to get them off the dime and into action. The Law of Encouragement is this: *teaching tends to be most effective when the learner is properly motivated*. Proper motivation includes things like ownership, curiosity, meeting needs, usefulness, challenge, recognition, and approval. As a teacher, you are a motivator, and you want to help people develop into self-starters. This comes through extrinsic (external) motivation, where you work on the outside to get something to happen on the inside of your students. Ultimately, much of your method in teaching should be exposing your students to real-life experiences.

### **A few tips... (and questions to ask yourself)**

1. You motivate people by correctly structuring their training experience. This involves four major stages:
  - a. **The telling stage.** Put your content in multiple forms. If you teach primarily by speaking, then print out your main points so your students can revisit the material later.
  - b. **The showing stage.** Provide a model for your students. What does \_\_\_\_ look like? Flesh it out. Relate the truth to real life.
  - c. **Do it in a controlled situation.** You learn to swim by swimming. *Would you rather your students lose in here and win out there or win in here and lose out there?* Too many of our students are winning inside the church but losing like crazy in the real world.
  - d. **Do it in uncontrolled, real-life situations.**
2. Another mark of good training is giving people responsibility with accountability. Our problem in church is that we don't do that. The more you put into something, the more you appreciate it. The greater the investment, the greater the interest. *Am I giving my students responsibility? Am I keeping them accountable to that responsibility?*
3. When your teaching has the learner's name written all over it—when he sees that, in effect, his name occurs throughout the Book, and it's *personal*—it will make a big difference in his level of motivation. *How am I making my teaching personal to my students?*
4. Remember and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit develop in you an incurable confidence in his ability to change people. The Spirit of God wants to use you as his motivational tool working externally upon the learner, while he is at work internally. *Am I letting the Spirit use me to motivate my students? Do I pray regularly that he would work internally in them? Am I "incurably confident" that the Holy Spirit really can change me/them?*
5. Since God motivates people in different ways, we need to be creative, and to use a variety of different methods. One of the things that should most disturb us about our evangelical community is our tendency to kill all creativity. The creativity is available, but we aren't providing outlets for it. *How can I provide my students the opportunities to creatively express themselves/what they've learned? Am I being creative in my teaching, using all possible methods in order to most effectively teach?*
6. *Are you motivated?* So many people in our churches have never become impassioned about the only thing ultimately worth getting impassioned about. So if it's exciting, get excited!

## **Law #7: The Law of Readiness**

“Many teachers go to their work either partly prepared or wholly unprepared. They are life messengers without a message. They lack entirely the power and enthusiasm necessary to produce the fruits which we have a right to look for from their efforts.” This quote by John Milton Gregory captures perfectly the Law of Readiness: *the teaching-learning process will be most effective when both student and teacher are adequately prepared*. Do not think that the beginning of the class time, sermon, or other designated lesson time is the starting point for building interest in your subject. Instead, move the starting point back, so that by the time you get together, you are continuing to develop momentum. Enacting this Law will prepare your students just as you are prepared, and will allow for maximum engagement with the material.

### **A few tips... (and questions to ask yourself)**

1. The Law of Readiness provides the philosophical basis for assignments. There are three direct benefits of giving assignments to your students:
  - a. **They precipitate thinking.** Assignments are the mental warmup. They urge your students to engage before the lesson begins.
  - b. **They provide a background.** Without an assignment, you have no foundation on which to build. Assignments allow for questions to surface and curiosity to be aroused.
  - c. **They develop habits of independent study.** This is the most important benefit of good assignments. They encourage people to be not simply under God’s word, but in it for themselves.
2. There are also characteristics of good assignments. First, they must be **creative**, not simply busy-work. Second, they must be **thought-provoking**. You have to stretch the learner’s mind. Finally, assignments must be **doable**.
3. If your students haven’t done the assignment prior to the lesson time, there are a couple options. First, you could do an assignment in class, right then and there. An example of this would be to raise the question first, then read the passage so that they know what they’re looking for. Another approach would be to tap their experiences, get them talking about their real-life problems.
4. There is a direct correlation between *predictability* and *impact*. The higher your predictability, the lower your impact. Inversely, the lower your predictability, the greater your impact. Consider Jesus. The people in his day could never figure him out. Jesus was far too unpredictable to be boring. *Are you predictable? How can you “change it up”?*
5. The key to any study, especially Bible study, is to teach people what to look for, and then they can find it themselves. If your students are reluctant to participate, one of your best approaches is to (1) encourage them to participate and (2) affirm them when they do. When they do participate, *celebrate* what they say. Make a hero out of anyone who contributes.
6. *What do you do if you’re asked a question you can’t answer?* The absolute worst thing you can do is make something up. If you don’t know it, simply say, “I don’t know.” It is not embarrassing to not have all the answers. Try saying, “That’s a terrific question, thank you! I don’t have an answer for that but I’ll try to get you one.”