

## The Sup is right: teaching begins with relationships

Let me start with a lie. I witnessed two separate meetings this week of teachers taking their best shots at addressing students who were out of line. I couldn't believe what I saw.

At the first meeting, the student had already done something wrong, and had gathered up his courage to talk to the teacher. It was one particular action that led to one particular consequence and in the student's introduction it was obvious the student was ready to expand the talk beyond the one incident and one consequence. The student listed out a few reasons why things were bad and getting worse.

The teacher responded by asking the student if the kid was really doing his best job. The answer was yes, to which the teacher responded with a long laundry list of accusations. The teacher offered a few specific examples (something was late, something was wrong, another student had reported something, etc.). But the teacher also sprinkled in all kinds of character assault. (Others complain about you, you always argue, I wish you weren't like this, etc.) By the time the teacher was done, the student had about a dozen accusations dropped in his lap. Some were current. Some were old. Some were concrete. Some were vague. So, what did the kid do? He responded as best he could, grabbing from bits and pieces of the presentation. And then the teacher got to talking over the kid. And then they were both flustered and talking away, and neither seemed to care nor realized that they weren't getting anywhere except making a necessary reconciliation that much harder down the road.

What did Dan, Dan, the union man do? Well, I let it go a bit. And then I turned to the teacher – the one who was supposed to be the authority figure -- the one who was allegedly the adult – and suggested she list out her concerns on an old fashioned sheet of paper. She needed to get herself organized before resuming the meeting. She needed to say the biggest concerns while trying to filter out the character assault. Then, maybe she could resume the meeting and actually get to something constructive.

The meeting ended. Within an hour the teacher presented the student with a note that said something like, "The meeting is over. You're not getting back what you requested." And that was that.

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Soon after, I witnessed another disaster. A teacher called in a student for a general chewing out. There were comments like, "You seem to think the rules aren't for you," and "I know you don't like it here," and, "I have to do what I have to do because you don't follow the rules." And then there were things like, "Here's the negative things others say about you," and "if you don't like it at this school, you might just have to transfer to another school."

Like the first meeting, it was a person in authority just laying into a general character assault of a subordinate. I tried to help, because I'm just too stupid to stay out of things. I helped the kid organize the thoughts presented. We found there were maybe 4 main things presented by the teacher. We made an action plan for improvement. I had the teacher nodding her head after a bit, as if to agree, Yes, Yes, those are good ideas to start for improvement. I only hoped that somewhere I modeled for the teacher how to present concerns. She's just not going to make it in this field until she learns to give of herself and work with people she's trying to improve.

Come on, character assault? Just laying into someone with a laundry list of personal flaws? Dropping down rules and consequences without any encouragement? Heck, I could live without the encouragement – but how about presenting concerns with some sort of organization and action plan for improvement? Do they teach this in Viera?

What I witnessed in those separate meetings was little more than someone in authority roughing up someone out of power. Without any prior thought to the presentation, the meetings were rather ineffective. Without sticking to concrete facts and offering solutions, I don't know how the person in power thought anything good could come of the meetings.

I said in the first paragraph I was going to start with a lie. Let me fess up. This won't be much of a shock, but the "teachers" in my anecdotes were really "principals." And the "students" in my stories were really "teachers."

Yes, I saw two really non-people-people principals swing wildly at teachers, just throwing mud to see what would stick. Was it their goal to break the spirit of their teachers? Did they begin with any plan to improve anything?

One meeting will advance through the grievance process. That principal who thinks it is over – well, no it isn't. We don't drop consequences without just cause. And just cause isn't just cause I am mad. The other meeting ended sort of peacefully. I'm sure both the principal and teacher will never be happy in the same room. I doubt either cares. I did something, I hope, to help them work better together. Who knows?

It is a good thing for our schools that change has come to Viera. Dr. Blackburn says our business begins with relationships. He's right.