This is a letter written to all teachers.

Dear ‘Cher

Between the two of us, we have over 60 years of teaching experience and definitely not one experience repeated 55 times. We’ve enjoyed our work tremendously but of course, there are the occasional hiccups and frustrations. But that’s what makes work more pleasurable because after every “storm” comes a calm for reflection and hopefully, we grow a little more in wisdom.

We are aware that advice is cheap and most people resent those who dispense such “words of wisdom”. But at this stage of our career, we feel very privileged to be able to look back. We would like to share our thoughts as we believe that being able to look back and learn from them helps to prevent heartaches. We are not imposing but simply sharing three things: Promotion, Attitude and Passion, hence the title of this paper, the PAP of teaching.

Promotion

One sensitive issue is related to promotion as it frequently upsets people and they would rather not talk about it. Yes, promotions, performance bonus, incremental credits, accelerated increments and so on are important, especially when they are deemed as the management’s recognition of workers’ performance. We know it hurts when one is not promoted. What’s more worrying however, is when one becomes de-motivated and moody. We understand. We have good friends who missed out on promotions too, and to us, they are so ‘promotable’.

Work is to be enjoyed. Work can be ‘shiok’. Advice from the get-rich guru, Robert Kiyosaki (2001) on ‘How to get a rich life’ includes ‘Make your day job what is truest to yourself. Have fun while you are at it but make sure the fun is legal, ethical and does not harm anyone’ (The Straits Times, May 6, 2001, p. 14). A natural consequence of enjoyment will lead to an ‘everything is beautiful’ syndrome. Happiness, less stress, a willingness to share, cheerfulness, cooperation, light heartedness, and fun will also result. If we have a “back to the grind” mentality on Monday morning and every end of the week is a TGIF (Thank God It’s Friday) then we are cheating ourselves of the best time of our lives and the best hours of each day! The push and pull tension of dragging ourselves to school, to the classroom may cause us to ‘waste’ a lot of energy. Here, we are talking about more than 1,000 hours a year of teaching.
Some people say that if you are not tired out by Tuesday, it means you have not worked hard enough! The belief that people should enjoy work, either doing things they like or actually learning to like what they do, is becoming a common phenomenon today. Truly, work can be enjoyable and as adults we need to unlearn many things which our parents taught us such as:

No pain no gain;
Work so that you can enjoy;
Work and fun don't belong together.

Indeed, some management gurus have told us that "The key to personal progress, profit and productivity is enjoyment!" and Mark Twain stated that "The higher the pay in enjoyment the worker gets out of his labour, the higher shall be his pay in money also." To many people, work is play. Robbins (1986) asked a pertinent question, "Do you know anyone who has achieved massive success by doing what he hates?" Twain (in Robbins, 1986) again stated that "The secret of success is making your vocation your vacation." One of the reasons why the Pike Place Fish stall in Seattle became famous is because the fishmongers play at work. They enjoy their work.

We were told that there was a team of insurance agents who got together and decided that for a month, when they met clients, they would focus on enjoying the interaction with them and not on closing a sale. And you know what, they sold more policies in that month than in any other months! So enjoy your work, enjoy your children, enjoy your colleagues and enjoy the subject you teach. Connect with the subject you teach, your children, your colleagues and yourself. Make each day an enjoyable day. Incidentally, bosses are unlikely to make your work enjoyable, you have to make it enjoyable yourself.

If you are not promoted, don't be upset. If you attach a lot of importance to the promotion you may end up disappointed, when you are not promoted. Some even become bitter. Unhappiness and a souring of their relationships with their reporting officers often results. Perception of what is productive and good work, differs tremendously among individuals. There is no objective or accurate measurement of what is deserving or undeserving. It has to do with perception and that is also influenced by an individuals' mental interpretation of the adjectives.

Promotion does not make one rich. If you want to get rich, then you are in the wrong line. Teaching should be a 'calling' and 'callings' cannot be satisfied by dollars and cents. Promotion only gives satisfaction to the fact that your work 'caught the eye' of a reporting officer, or a group of decision makers. Should we be upset because of promotion, awards, and competition? Need their recognition be held with such high regard that when we don't get promoted, we are depressed, bitter, suffer from low self-esteem, and become grouchy?
When work is enjoyed for its sake, then only can we be 'free' to conduct ourselves as professionals. We are not afraid to speak up and out. We dare to disagree. We need not be fearful and meek. We need not dodge. We need not rub the right side of people's shoulders. Of course, we should not deliberately rub them on the wrong side either. We need not be intimidated by people's opinion of us. We will have the 'abundant mentality' in us.

We are happy. We will not 'count'. We will not expect. We do not claim 'rights'. We can regard them as privileges. We won't demand. We can request and appeal. We are respectful of individual differences. We can overlook differences. We will not be 'blackmailed' into doing things that are in conflict with our beliefs and values. We can make an exit graciously and gracefully. We need not compromise but can come to an agreement on ethics, and honesty. We will work for the good of our clients and not because of any hidden agenda. We dare to be transparent.

**Attitude**

Attitude is very, very important. Indeed it is attitude, not ability, that determines how far we go in life. Can attitudes be taught or is it caught? We were told by learned professors that attitude can be taught. We are told that attitude is an internal state of an individual's behaviour, a learned capability that affects the individual's choice of doing something, an action towards a person, an event or an object. Many things in life may be out of our control but we have control over our reaction to those things. A curt memo may be given to you and your attitude will determine if you're going to be a winner or not! You could sulk the whole day and avoid the person for the whole week and what good would that do?

Some of us were hurt by our principals or HODs and we live with the 'serious internal injuries' all our lives refusing to be healed. Why become so embittered? (Incidentally no one can hurt us, we allow ourselves to be hurt.) Life really isn't about what happens to us but it is about how we see and react to what happens to us. The crux is how we choose to react? Ineffective people often say "Why me?" Effective people ask a different question "What can I learn from this?"

We have met people who are so angry or hurt by others that they live in the past. It's as if life stopped for them way back when they were hurt. Forget it. Let's move on. Remember we are created unique and no two people on earth are the same. Science is constantly showing us where we differ from each other. George Sheehan, a marathon runner who ran countless marathons even when he was in his seventies, was quoted as saying that our parents can make love a million times and they will never produce another 'us'. We are created winners! Think about it, we are one out of 40 million sperms that survived!
As someone has said, attitudes are like the little hinges that attach doors to the frame and big doors swing on them. Hinges play a crucial role, for without them, there will be no door. The wrong attitude brings about unnecessary wear and tear, which finally brings the door crashing down. You choose your attitude.

**Passion**

So, besides not working for promotion and enjoying your work, what else? Robert Kiyosaki (2001) advised people to 'work to learn, not to make money' and to 'beware of being so busy at work that you end up being lazy about the other parts of life that matter' (The Strait Times, p. L4). So, be passionate about something. You could be passionate about your CCA/ECA, the subjects you teach, or be passionate about working with children. When you are passionate, you lose all sense of time. Passion gives you the quickening of your heart and pushes you on and on. With passion comes boundless energy and excitement. We have seen "dead woods" suddenly sprouting out with life because something touches them and they become passionate. Incidentally, passion is not obsession or 'workaholism'. In the past many people think of the 2Ps – Pay and Pension. in truth, these do not push us on. It is passion that will push us on. It is passion that got people like Mahatma Ghandi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King and Mandela to work the way they did. It is the same passion that enabled Singaporeans like Miss Teresa Hsu, who at 102 years old, still serves other old folks who are much younger than herself. That same passion drove her to part with her money to build an old folks' home.

So, if you are just drifting along, maybe stop and discover your passion, you may have buried your passion. Ask yourself, what moves you? If you are passionate about something and find it difficult to achieve it, then get others excited, enlist their help and together, achieve what you want to do. Passion to us is contagious and it means to PASS-I-ON (to pass whatever I am excited about on!)

See yourself as a gift to the children. Care about your work until your work becomes a gift of yourself. Cromwell, the 16th Century religious leader, mentioned two little powerful words "Think and thank" (TT). Yes, we need to think of all the things we've been given and to thank God. We need to keep counting our blessings, and when we do, we will truly be amazed at what we have been given.
Sometimes, we think we are helpless, that we can’t do much. We have no control in the school and so on. Actually, we have lots more control than we can imagine. We have control over the way we deliver the lesson. We can control how we will relate to the children, our colleagues or the parents and above all, we have control over ourselves. Someone once said that we live in a world where our smallest act can make a profound impact.

Well, we have written a long letter to you and we really must stop. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

We remain your self-appointed mentors.

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