



Student Work

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Crystal Strickland

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A Note from in All things editor: Late August means 'back to school' for many parents, students, and educators across the country. While this letter, written by a Dordt M.Ed student, is great advice for first year teachers, I encourage all readers to consider this advice as it applies to your area of vocation and living. Whether you're working in education or industry, and whether work is from home, the office, or the factory floor, we hope you'll be motivated and inspired toward virtuous Christian living in all your interactions.

Dear First Year Teacher,

Congratulations! You are about to begin your professional career in education doing what God called you to do! Enjoy walking in the calling that God has for you every day! It truly is a gift. This year will be one of the most challenging and rewarding years of your life. Embrace it! Learn from it and grow. Every day you go to school is a new day. A fresh start. It will be completely different than yesterday and tomorrow. You will look back on your years spent in the classroom and be thankful for the impact each student had on you and the lessons that you learned through this profession. Be thankful in this moment and forever.

As you are getting ready to begin your first year teaching, here are a few words of advice.

Never take your influence for granted. You have the opportunity every day, every hour, every minute, and every interaction to influence others and show them God's unconditional love and grace through your example. Just as you were changed by God's grace, your student's lives can be changed through experiencing grace from you. Use their mistakes as an opportunity to show them compassion and to help them feel loved. They will never forget this!

God created each of your students uniquely. Each of them come from different places, and each day your students are walking into your class with different experiences and different baggage from the morning or the night before. Remember this when you are tempted to be rigid and see situations as 'right' or 'wrong'. Gray areas exist, and that is okay! You don't have to—and really can't—treat all students the same, and I know that seems crazy! Try your best to treat all students justly and equitably, and meet them where they are at.

Be human. You don't have to have it all together. Actually, nobody expects you to! It is okay to not know, and when you admit that, it will help those around you connect with you. Everyone

else is human too. Ask for help! You will connect with others in the moments that you show humility, even though it makes you feel uncomfortable.

Everyone makes mistakes. This includes people in leadership positions, administrators, and colleagues. Some of these mistakes are big and will forever change lives. Continue to love them. You don't need to know the details about what happened; during these times of vulnerability, be respectful of privacy and don't join the gossip. Look at them as God does, as broken children of Christ. Be the first to show them unconditional love at their lowest moments.

Listen first. Listen to people's stories. Ask questions to better understand where they are coming from. Put yourself in their shoes and try to understand why they see situations the way that they do, even when you don't agree. This is when you will grow the most. When people share their experiences with you, believe them! Take them at their word; it will help you connect with them and gain knowledge from their perspective on life.

Stop rushing! It isn't a race to see who can get the most done the fastest. Be intentional. Don't rush through conversations, don't rush through days and don't wish for the next season. Be present and enjoy every precious moment! Be in the moment with people. Put everything else down when someone comes to talk to you, even if it feels like you have to get something done. You will have time for that later. You will never get to take back conversations and redo the way that you make people feel. Be present in every moment, making sure every person you talk to feels valued.

When you see something good, say it! Whether it is a colleague, administrator, parent, student or their sibling, custodian, secretary, etc. when you appreciate something about someone or notice something in them, tell them! It takes confidence to build others up. Be that person. Everyone could use a compliment. Be the person who helps others see the good in themselves.

You can do it! Remember that God called you to this. It isn't going to be easy, but it is going to be worth it. On the hard days, remember your calling. Teaching is one of the things God created you to do, so invest in your relationship with God first. Go to him in prayer before every difficult conversation—in thanks when everything is going as planned, and in the times when you don't know what to do. Be in constant dialogue with Him throughout your day, and you will be amazed at the wisdom He gives you when you are connecting with Him.

You are amazing! You are loved! You are going to love this profession and the ways that it challenges and humbles you daily.

You Got This!

A fellow educator, beginning year 14