

Teaching For Success Faculty Success Center

Success Insights

Seeker, Solver, or Avoider?

~Out of intense complexities, intense simplicities emerge.

—Winston Churchill

Teaching, learning and the improvement of either are complex problems. Experience in transferring successful ideas from one educational institution to another shows that a solution that works for a teacher in one situation must sometimes be modified to work successfully in another course or at another institution.

The need to constantly modify and invent new solutions to teaching and learning problems challenges you to be a superior problem solver and decision maker. The ability to foresee problems, determine the best solutions, and implement the decisions that lead to an effective solution are examples of implicit leadership, one of the six Critical Success Factors of good teaching.

According to Patrick Montana, Ph.D., Management, there are three types of decision makers each acting out a unique strategy: avoiding, solving, and seeking. With the problem avoider, his or her goal is to maintain the status quo. This person is actually a fearful, doubtful thinker and worries that any changes made could lead to a mistake. He or she doesn't realize that errors and failures are as natural as potholes in spring on the road to success.

For the problem solver, "He confronts the problem, reacts to it, and makes those changes necessary to solve it," states Dr. Montana. This person's strategy always leaves him or her one step behind, constantly reacting, and not in control. The problem seeker is one who actively looks at situations, searches for or anticipates problems so that corrective action may be taken before the problem grows. This describes the educator possessing mature wisdom who accepts that problems are life's master teachers and are necessary for growth.

In addition, problem seekers develop sound effective personal strategies for anticipating and coping with problems and, then, producing workable solutions. Creating a successful educational problem-solving strategy requires careful observations, intuition, logical thought, accurate listening skills, accurate analysis and the courage to risk implementing untried solutions.

As Confucius wrote, "The superior man makes the difficulty...his first interest; success comes only later." If you choose to be a problem seeker, you're already on the path to great success.

~John H. (Jack) Shrawder, Exec. Director,
Teaching For Success, Faculty Success Center.