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**Constantly changing hats,
educators must be mindful
of improvement**

Vocational teachers and staff development

By Thomas O. Harris

Today's vocational education instructor must possess the qualities of leadership, human relations, public relations, resourcefulness, the desire to teach and enthusiasm, just to name a few. Constantly changing hats, the vocational instructor must be ever mindful of personal development in all these areas, not to mention the ever present process of updating in the technical speciality, the effects of computer technology, new legislation, etc. In other words, staff development is a big job for the vocational classroom teacher.

The classroom teacher is the focal point of staff development. This is what it is all about, making the classroom teacher more efficient. In the final analysis, it is the teacher who decides what to teach, what in-service courses to take, what professional association to join, what a professional development plan will consist of; no one else can do it for the teacher. It cannot be taken for granted that the vocational instructor knows how to do these things. A college degree, a workshop or a few courses does not guarantee that the new vocational instructor can do anything. But, when that teacher makes

the decision to do something about becoming a good teacher, then there is a starting place.

Professional in Every Sense

Masterful vocational teachers must be highly competent in their field of expertise, but they must be more than that.

Vocational teachers must possess pedagogical competence, i.e., competence in the art and science of teaching. A teacher who is highly knowledgeable and skilled in his or her technical area, but who does not possess a high level of pedagogical competence is fulfilling only part of the prerequisites for a good teacher. A teacher must be both technically and pedagogically **competent**.¹

The efficient and effective vocational instructor strives to become a professional in every sense of the word.

Professionals are prepared.

They do not think that lesson plans, for example, are a waste of time. They realize that, "those who fail to prepare, prepare to fail," and that the preparation must be done by themselves. They soon realize that those college courses of analysis, methods of teaching, preparation of instructional materials and student evaluation all come together in the lesson plan.

Professionals do not punch clocks.

The professional teacher does not beat the students out the door at quitting time. The teacher is getting ready for tomorrow, and next week, and next year. The teacher puts in as much time as is necessary to do a good job, realizing that some of that time may be known as "free time" to others. The professional teacher's job is done when the job is done.

Professionals make it better.

The true professional is eager to find a better way. When a better way is found, tested, and compared, it is written about for all to read. The professional associations are constantly seeking articles for publication in their journals which are written by classroom teachers. As a consequence, everybody benefits.

Professionals are current.

Vocational instructors realize that the minute they step out of industry and into the classroom, the ease with which they maintain their knowledge of the technical speciality is vastly diminished. University workshops, industry-sponsored seminars, special return-to-work contracts all speak distinctly to this problem. The professional vocational instructor subscribes to trade journals, gains access to various house organizations and is actively involved in local, state, and national professional organizations for the purpose of keeping updated.

Professionals are creative.

Every vocational instructor sooner or later realizes that everything they want will not be available in their classroom or laboratory. These teachers learn to be resourceful and creative in order to do a good job of teaching. In the parlance of the street, it is called "scrounging." We all do it . . . we've had to in order to survive. Some teachers are just better at it than others. Resourcefulness is the ability to make do with what is available. If that is not good enough, creativity comes into play and the effective teacher makes it better.

Community-Oriented

Professional vocational instructors are community-oriented. They are aware that the local school system is a highly coordinated function of the entire community. These teachers assist the community and the community assists them. Many instructors promote community involvement for their students by means of the vocational student organizations (VSO). Most of the VSO's now have some type of program which integrates the VSO activity into the curriculum and makes the two virtually impossible to separate. These VSO activities almost always include a certain amount of involvement in the activities of the community. Such things as ushering at civic events, helping with the American Dental Education Week, promoting safety in the home and workplace, working on firearm safety projects, participating in drug abuse programs, developing career days at elementary schools, and working with handicapped children are a few of the growing list of activities.

The teacher educators support the efforts of the local instructor by sowing the seeds of the VSO into the professional courses at the university and creating an involvement-attitude among the would be teachers by using the involvement method (or role-playing method) in their own classes. The innovation methods creating involvement in the learning process have allowed students to learn and have fun at the same time.

Today's vocational educator is also rediscovering the little-known fact that they do not have to do all the teaching in their class. Because the VSO's encourage public speaking, the vocational instructors are beginning to let the students do some of the lecture/demonstration activities in class. Of course, the teacher must do a little extra work to make it all come out right in the end. For example, the teacher could assign the topic, show the student how to research it, illustrate how to write a speech outline, model how to give the demonstration and describe how to remain poised in front of a group. Then the teacher, after discussing the evaluation process, could have the class critique the presentation. Since all students would be giving presentations and be critiqued sometime during the year, they will quickly learn to look for areas needing improvement and provide constructive criticism. Does this process sound familiar? Sounds a lot like judging a speaking contest doesn't it? The procedure is exactly the same and is an excellent teaching tool.

The VSO's also encourage a basic knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Many instructors, not only vocational instructors, throw up their hands when those "nasty" words "parliamentary procedure" are used. What these teachers fail to realize is that they have been using the process of parliamentary procedure, ever since they were youngsters. However, they just didn't call it parliamentary procedure; rather they called it "rules and regulations." Parliamentary procedure is nothing more than a set of rules by which a group (class) conducts its business. Once the student and/or instructor master the terminology, they quickly see the reasons behind the process. For example, when the instructor requires the students to raise their hands and be recognized before speaking, it is the same as "gaining recognition from the chair" in parliamentary language. Once the relationship is understood, the whole process becomes simple. This knowledge carries over into adult life and is useful in many situations. As a consequence, the whole community benefits from better meetings . . . civic, social and educational.

Conclusion

Staff development is ultimately the responsibility of the vocational classroom teacher. Commitment, diligence, creativity and community-oriented strategies earmark quality staff development activities necessary for effective vocational educators.

The rewards of self-directed professional development in vocational education were very aptly summarized by Miller and Rose in 1975:

One of the most satisfying experiences a person can have is to know that through their efforts someone has become more competent, developed a better self image, become a better human being and more useful as a citizen. Through the application of your skill as an instructor you can bring new opportunities to others.²

FOOTNOTES

1. Newcomb, L.H., *Vocational Instruction*, 1980 Yearbook, American Vocational Association, 2020 N. 14th St., Arlington, Virginia, p. 17.
2. Miller, W.R., and H.C. Rose, *Instructors and Their Jobs*, Third edition, American Technical Society, Chicago, 1975, p. 10.