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# 25 Things Successful Teachers Do Differently

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*Editor's Note: We often look at the qualities and characteristics of good teaching and learning, including the recent following pieces:*

## How A Good Teacher Becomes Great

## What You Owe Your Students

## Ten Secrets To Surviving As A Teacher

## The Characteristics Of A Highly Effective Learning Environment

## How To Be A Mediocre Teacher

*So it made sense to take a look at the characteristics of a successful educator, which Julie DuNeen does below.*

### 25 Things Successful Teachers Do Differently

by Julie DuNeen

If you ask a student what makes him or her successful in school, you probably won't hear about some fantastic new book or video lecture series. Most likely you will hear something like, "It was all Mr. Jones. He just never gave up on me."

What students take away from a successful education usually centers on a personal connection with a teacher who instilled passion and inspiration for their subject. It's difficult to measure success, and in the world of academia, educators are continually re-evaluating how to quantify learning. But the first and most important question to ask is:

Are teachers reaching their students? Here are 25 things successful educators do differently.

### 25 Things Successful Teachers Do Differently

#### 1. Successful teachers have clear objectives

How do you know if you are driving the right way when you are traveling somewhere new? You use the road signs and a map (although nowadays it might

somewhere new. You use the road signs and a map (although nowadays it might be SIRI or a GPS). In the world of education, your objectives for your students act as road signs to your destination. Your plan is the map. Making a plan does not suggest a lack of creativity in your curriculum but rather, gives creativity a framework in which to flourish.

## **2. Successful teachers have a sense of purpose**

We can't all be blessed with "epic" workdays all the time. Sometimes, life is just mundane and tedious. Teachers with a sense of purpose that are able to see the big picture can ride above the hard and boring days because their eye is on something further down the road.

## **3. Successful teachers are able to live without immediate feedback**

There is nothing worse than sweating over a lesson plan only to have your students walk out of class without so much as a smile or a, "Great job teach!" It's hard to give 100% and not see immediate results. Teachers who rely on that instant gratification will get burned out and disillusioned. Learning, relationships, and education are a messy endeavor, much like nurturing a garden. It takes time, and some dirt, to grow.

## **4. Successful teachers know when to listen to students and when to ignore them**

Right on the heels of the above tip is the concept of discernment with student feedback. A teacher who never listens to his/her students will ultimately fail. A teacher who always listens to his/her students will ultimately fail. It is no simple endeavor to know when to listen and adapt, and when to say, "No- we're going this way because I am the teacher and I see the long term picture."

## **5. Successful teachers have a positive attitude**

Negative energy zaps creativity and it makes a nice breeding ground for fear of failure. Good teachers have an upbeat mood, a sense of vitality and energy, and see past momentary setbacks to the end goal. Positivity breeds creativity.

## **6. Successful teachers expect their students to succeed**

## **6. Successful teachers expect their students to succeed**

This concept is similar for parents as well. Students need someone to believe in them. They need a wiser and older person to put stock in their abilities. Set the bar high and then create an environment where it's okay to fail. This will motivate your students to keep trying until they reach the expectation you've set for them.

## **7. Successful teachers have a sense of humor**

Humor and wit make a lasting impression. It reduces stress and frustration, and gives people a chance to look at their circumstances from another point of view. If you interviewed 1000 students about their favorite teacher, I'll bet 95% of them were hysterical.

## **8. Successful teachers use praise authentically**

Students need encouragement yes, but real encouragement. It does no good to praise their work when you know it is only 50% of what they are capable of. You don't want to create an environment where there is no praise or recognition; you want to create one where the praise that you offer is valuable BECAUSE you use it judiciously.

## **9. Successful teachers know how to take risks**

There is a wise saying that reads, "Those who go just a little bit too far are the ones who know just how far one can go." Risk-taking is a part of the successful formula. Your students need to see you try new things in the classroom and they will watch closely how you handle failure in your risk-taking. This is as important as what you are teaching.

## **10. Successful teachers are consistent**

Consistency is not to be confused with "stuck." Consistency means that you do what you say you will do, you don't change your rules based on your mood, and your students can rely on you when they are in need. Teachers who are stuck in their outdated methods may boast consistency, when in fact it is cleverly-masked

stubbornness.

### **11. Successful teachers are reflective**

In order to avoid becoming the stuck and stubborn teacher, successful educators take time to reflect on their methods, their delivery, and the way they connect with their students. Reflection is necessary to uncover those weaknesses that can be strengthened with a bit of resolve and understanding.

### **12. Successful teachers seek out mentors of their own**

Reflective teachers can easily get disheartened if they don't have someone a bit older and wiser offering support. You are never too old or wise for a mentor. Mentors can be that voice that says, "Yes your reflections are correct," or "No, you are off because...." and provide you with a different perspective.

### **13. Successful teachers communicate with parents**

Collaboration between parents and teachers is absolutely crucial to a student's success. Create an open path of communication so parents can come to you with concerns and you can do the same. When a teacher and parents present a united front, there is a lower chance that your student will fall through the cracks.

### **14. Successful teachers enjoy their work**

It is easy to spot a teacher who loves their work. They seem to emanate contagious energy. Even if it on a subject like advanced calculus, the subject comes alive. If you don't love your work or your subject, it will come through in your teaching. Try to figure out why you feel so unmotivated and uninspired. It might have nothing to do with the subject, but your expectations. Adjust them a bit and you might find your love of teaching come flooding back.

### **15. Successful teachers adapt to student needs**

Classrooms are like an ever-evolving dynamic organism. Depending on the day, the attendance roster, and the phase of the moon, you might have to change up

your plans or your schedule to accommodate your students. As they grow and change, your methods might have to as well. If your goal is to promote a curriculum or method, it will feel like a personal insult when you have to modify it. Make connecting with your student your goal and you'll have no trouble changing it up as time moves on.

## **16. Successful teachers welcome change in the classroom**

This relates to the above tip, but in a slightly different way. Have you ever been so bored with your house or your bedroom, only to rearrange it and have it feel like a new room? Change ignites the brain with excitement and adventure. Change your classroom to keep your students on their toes. Simple changes like rearranging desks and routines can breathe new life in the middle of a long year.

## **17. Successful teachers take time to explore new tools**

With the advance of technology, there are fresh new resources and tools that can add great functionality to your classroom and curriculum. There is no doubt that the students you are teaching (far younger than you) probably already use technologies you haven't tapped into yet. Don't be afraid to push for technology in the classroom. It is often an underfunded area but in this current world and climate, your students will be growing up in a world where technology is everywhere. Give them a headstart and use technology in your classroom.

## **18. Successful teachers give their students emotional support**

There are days when your students will need your emotional support more than a piece of information. Connecting to your students on an emotional level makes it more likely that they will listen to your counsel and take your advice to heart. Students need mentors as much as they need teachers.

## **19. Successful teachers are comfortable with the unknown**

It's difficult to teach in an environment where you don't know the future of your classroom budget, the involvement of your student's parents, or the outcome of all your hard work. On a more philosophical level, educators who teach the higher

grades are tasked with teaching students principles that have a lot of unknowns (i.e. physics). How comfortable are you with not having all the answers? Good teachers are able to function without everything tied up neatly in a bow.

## **20. Successful teachers are not threatened by parent advocacy**

Unfortunately, parents and teachers are sometimes threatened by one another. A teacher who is insecure will see parent advocacy as a threat. While there are plenty of over-involved helicopter parents waiting to point out a teacher's mistakes, most parents just want what's best for their child. Successful educators are confident in their abilities and not threatened when parents want to get into the classroom and make their opinions known. Good teachers also know they don't have to follow what the parent recommends!

## **21. Successful teachers bring fun into the classroom**

Don't be too serious. Some days, "fun" should be the goal. When students feel and see your humanness, it builds a foundation of trust and respect. Fun and educational aren't mutually exclusive either. Using humor can make even the most mundane topic more interesting.

## **22. Successful teachers teach holistically**

Learning does not happen in a vacuum. Depression, anxiety, and mental stress have a severe impact on the educational process. It's crucial that educators (and the educational model) take the whole person into account. You can have the funniest and most innovative lesson on algebra, but if your student has just been told his parents are getting a divorce, you will not reach him.

## **23. Successful teachers never stop learning**

Good teachers find time in their schedule to learn themselves. Not only does it help bolster your knowledge in a certain subject matter, it also puts you in the position of student. This gives you a perspective about the learning process that you can easily forget when you're always in teaching mode.

## 24. Successful teachers break out of the box

It may be a self-made box. “Oh I could never do that,” you say to yourself. Perhaps you promised you’d never become the teacher who would let students grade each other (maybe you had a bad experience as a kid). Sometimes the biggest obstacle to growth is us. Have you built a box around your teaching methods? Good teachers know when it’s time to break out of it.

## 25. Successful teachers are masters of their subject

Good teachers need to know their craft. In addition to the methodology of “teaching”, you need to master your subject area. Learn, learn, and never stop learning. Successful educators stay curious.

*This is a cross-post from [opencolleges.edu.au](http://opencolleges.edu.au); image attribution flickr user nwabr;  
30 Habits Of Highly Effective Teachers*

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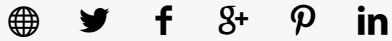
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Written By

## TeachThought Staff

TeachThought is an organization dedicated to innovation in education through the growth of outstanding teachers.



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46 Comments



**Rachel Rendle**

April 16, 2013 at 11:26 pm

Good read. So true.

[Log in to Reply](#)



**Shalen Rucker**

April 17, 2013 at 3:04 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Excellent stuff... we could benefit from more teachers implementing these philosophies in their instruction/personal outlook.

---



**MrG\_English\_Teacher**

July 16, 2013 at 12:24 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

As a teacher that strives to use many of the techniques mentioned, the article is greatly appreciated. However, please take a closer look at #18's title. Plural vs possessive.

---



**Terry Heick**

July 16, 2013 at 8:49 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Indeed!

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**Newbie**

July 26, 2013 at 9:41 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Oooooohhhh you are such a teacher..... Good catch!

---



**terryheick**

November 3, 2013 at 6:41 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Maybe we meant it was a sentence fragment, and...well. You're right. You win. I fixed it.

---



**English teacher**

July 24, 2014 at 6:32 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

As long as we are being picky, first sentence should be "as a teacher who strives..." Just saying...

---



**Cynthia Sanico**

[Log in to Reply](#)



August 10, 2013 at 6:58 am

Very informative, inspiring, and at the same time challenging!

---



**Sue Severson Bray**

[Log in to Reply](#)

August 23, 2013 at 6:43 pm

Isn't this what distinguished teachers are in the new eVAL in Washington State? I was pleased to actually see I do about half of these consistently. The rest something to aspire to! I've posted this on our Association FB page.

---



**Dr. Barbara Rousseau**

[Log in to Reply](#)

August 24, 2013 at 3:40 pm

Teachers, "Know thy SELF" and you will have both an effective and a transformative classroom! <http://bookstore.balboapress.com/Products/SKU-000651106/Your-Conscious-Classroom.aspx>

---



**Marissa Casbadillo Almarez**

[Log in to Reply](#)

September 23, 2013 at 8:01 am

thank you for those inspiring words/quotes ..this will help more for some new Teacher like me...tnx

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**Rita Santo**

[Log in to Reply](#)

October 5, 2013 at 5:47 pm

I'll translate from English into Portuguese.

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**deserteacher**

[Log in to Reply](#)

November 3, 2013 at 6:21 pm

Very clear article with a helpful attitude. I'm putting up a blog on [Mzteachuh.blogspot.com](http://Mzteachuh.blogspot.com) called "Yes! I Expect To Learn!" with links to various theories of learning and teaching and I'd be proud to include a link to this article.

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**terryheick**

November 3, 2013 at 6:40 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Please do!

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**Wendy DeVries**

November 28, 2013 at 6:09 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

What a great list! As a public school educator for 13+ years, I can honestly say that I fully embraced the 25 characteristics listed. Don't misunderstand! Embracing the characteristics & actually fulfilling all 25 every single day are two different things! 😊 I do, however, take pride in the fact that I was able to genuinely connect with students other teachers labeled "lazy" or "unmotivated." As I reflect back, one memory still brings me "warm fuzzies." A particular student, known for his troubled life/lack of self-esteem/tough guy status, walked into my classroom as I was teaching and told me that he was awarded a scholarship I'd pushed (and pushed and pushed) him to apply for. He never dreamed he would actually GET the scholarship, but I believed in him and refused to allow him to give up his dreams without even trying! He walked over to me, hugged me and (in front of everyone) stated, "I love you!" That was such a HUGE thing for him to do/say!! He finally felt valued, successful and comfortable showing his emotions. I will always treasure that moment!

---



**claudia**

December 3, 2013 at 3:16 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

love it!!!!

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**Safety Officer**

December 9, 2013 at 11:09 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

Back many years ago when I was in High School, I had just ONE teacher that got through to me and really cared. She exhibited many of these qualities. I have since tracked her down on facebook and thanked her. Still a great and caring lady. I think the Navy's old slogan fits here...."Teaching... it's not just a job, it's an adventure!"

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**Dave**

[Log in to Reply](#)



**Dave**

March 3, 2014 at 3:36 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

You failed to list the most important one of all. The one thing the BEST teachers have in their classrooms is DISCIPLINE. Neutering teachers so they are incapable of providing discipline in the classroom is the greatest failing of American schools. Go look at how the real successful countries teach, and bring home those techniques, why don't ya.

---



**Robert E**

May 27, 2014 at 4:40 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

A teacher who can do most of the things on this list very well most probably won't have any disciplinary issues in his/here classroom.

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**Cristina**

June 2, 2014 at 3:13 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

Robert E, I don't know about that. I think no matter how effective a teacher is, some children will choose to behave inappropriately. But with an effective teacher the misbehavior is corrected in a way that the learning can continue. Just my 2 cents.

---



**Patti**

June 5, 2014 at 11:30 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

I think the word management is more appropriate than discipline, but I agree with Robert E with most of these things in place, behavior problems will be few 😊

---



**Beth**

July 28, 2014 at 8:29 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

People always treat "discipline" like it's a dirty word. In it's truest form, it comes from the Latin word for "teaching" and means "training or conditions imposed for the improvement of physical powers, self-control, etc." Which, I think, is what many people need more of in our society, people exercising more self-control.

"Management" implies someone is acting over another / managing

management implies someone is acting over another (managing another—an early sense meant a “governing body”). Discipline implies training someone to manage themselves.

With most of these things in place, behavioral problems do go down, but don’t disappear. When I first started teaching, I thought if I had “perfect classroom management” and followed all the “right” things, I wouldn’t have a single behavioral problem. Granted, I have very few, but I still deal with students who cheat or lie or want to derail a lesson. Discipline is still necessary, but in a way that 1. Teaches the student to exercise control over himself/herself and 2. Does not impact or distract the other student.



**lucascott**

[Log in to Reply](#)

August 8, 2014 at 7:58 pm

When I was in school there was never a discipline issue. Because we were taught how to control ourselves.

Perhaps its cause my schools were military base schools that it was part of the system. At school and at home



**MrsEllis212**

[Log in to Reply](#)

August 17, 2014 at 11:32 pm

“An effective teacher manages a classroom. An ineffective teacher disciplines a classroom.” – Harry Wong. I agree! Discipline is the wrong attitude to go in with – you must have a plan in place to manage your class and teach kids the processes you want them to follow and be consistent! Manage – NOT discipline.



**kzobes**

[Log in to Reply](#)

September 8, 2014 at 6:39 pm

Discipline is not the same as punishment. EVERYONE needs discipline in their lives, which hopefully helps them become better at self-regulation so they don’t end up getting punished due to poor behavior. Discipline is a win!



**ackeeegr1**

November 15, 2014 at 10:52 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

How old is that book? Harry Wong did not meet today's children. Heard about the one that was going to stab the teacher with the scissors and the police called in? I witnessed one throwing a chair at the classroom window trying to bust in the class to fight a student and then fought the police who tried to handcuff him. Took three grown men to hold him down with difficulty. We have serious problems that some schools never see.

---



**Paul Parker**

April 23, 2015 at 1:28 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

It sounds like what you are referring to is situations and not norms. When researchers share best practices it is for the majority or as we refer to as Tier 1 students. There will always be exceptions

---



**ackeeegr1**

November 15, 2014 at 10:48 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Go look at how the real successful countries live and how their lifestyles and system are so vastly different and bring home those techniques, why don't ya..... I've lived on three continents, Europe, Asia and north America..... compared with the rest of the world and their (best homogenous, racist, status oriented, wealth comes first) systems you have no clue what you are talking about.....just so you know, American journalists are reporting false, unverified information and comparing high IQ level schools scores with average American school scores and the unsuspecting American readers believe it. It is a hoax. Education is a money making business and if it is not broke, no more money will be spent on it. Wake up people. Follow the money trail.

---



**TJsThings**

March 19, 2014 at 10:52 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

This is so true. There are so many wonderful teachers who embody this list. I am thankful for the ones I have encountered.



**George Machenerii**

May 17, 2014 at 5:51 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

Great .Wwell thought out.

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**Povestitorul**

May 29, 2014 at 8:39 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Missed the most important one... Teachers know their students. Everything else is secondary.

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**MrsEllis212**

August 17, 2014 at 11:34 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

True

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**Mandy**

July 28, 2014 at 2:02 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

I completely agree with number 7: laughter is such a key element to a class. I think many of us forget this. Thanks for the list!

---



**Hiren P Bhatt**

July 30, 2014 at 12:45 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Great article. Such each point is very important and very helpful. amazing work thanks for sharing. Government Job

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**Jeeves**

July 31, 2014 at 5:44 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

"humanness"...lol

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**lucascott**

[Log in to Reply](#)

August 8, 2014 at 7:57 pm

Number 8 really stands out to me. I'm not a teacher but I take care of my nephews a lot since their father is deployed and my sister in law often needs a little help. So I'm the backup dad to the kids, especially the twins. I've noticed lately that their school is falling into that whole 'give all the kids a blue ribbon even if their project is half assed' and 'lets not keep score cause it makes the losing team feel bad' mentality. And one of their classmates was promoted to the next grade, including in reading, which is NOT good for him. He has a reading issue and literally couldn't keep up all year in the grade appropriate level. He should have been in a remedial reading program and wasn't. And he should be this next year. But the school didn't want to make him feel bad. I found out about this cause the boys said this kid was being teased in class because when they have to read outside the kid is really slow and gets most of the words wrong. Thankfully his parents are really cool and they didn't get insulted when I mentioned it to them (he's on the same soccer team as 'my' boys). They have had him in a summer program trying to get him caught up. But a good teacher would have dealt with the issue properly rather than praising his 'effort' and moving him on to let it get worse year after year.

---

## Transparent

[Log in to Reply](#)

August 13, 2014 at 1:35 am

I am embracing the thought as a reminder to continue doing much of what I am already doing and seek to improve on the things that have become a challenge.

---

## Stella Hlad

[Log in to Reply](#)

September 7, 2014 at 9:19 am

All of that has been employed in my teaching.....Nicely put.....



## juel rahman

[Log in to Reply](#)

December 10, 2014 at 7:32 pm

Above points are essential for successful teachers

---

## Susan MacLellan

[Log in to Reply](#)

January 10, 2015 at 8:25 am

Great list...I'm an administrator but was a teacher for 20 years and these are traits I wanted and still want for my teachers to strive for...it's all about relationships and enthusiasm for what we teach and do.

---



**Paul Parker**

April 23, 2015 at 1:31 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

CORRECT!!!!

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**snow**

March 4, 2015 at 12:13 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

barney

---



**terryheick**

March 7, 2015 at 1:45 am

[Log in to Reply](#)

He is purple.

---



**Lola B**

April 13, 2015 at 6:03 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

Love the list! It makes up realize what you are doing and how to improve on what you are not!

---



**LAL GURNANI**

July 20, 2015 at 4:55 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

most of college professors in India are lacking above points.

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**Mohamed Hussein Ali**

August 18, 2015 at 7:41 pm

[Log in to Reply](#)

i appreciate your post

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