

Teacher Performance Revisited

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Since the late 1980s, there have been repeated and increasing reports of an education system in crisis, teacher apathy and delinquency, and even a withdrawal of enthusiasm on the part of our teachers. Most of us have been swift to conclude that, unlike teachers of the past, our current crop of teachers seem not to be worth the salaries handed to them.

From time to time, psychologists, human resource management specialists, and personnel officers have argued that there are no simple or straightforward answers to this problem. Indeed, many suggest that motivation theories may give insight into the issue, but never a complete understanding.

Some researchers in work motivation, however, insist that human beings work for essentially four reasons: 1) an economic motive, 2) the pleasure they obtain from working and associating with their peers, 3) to exploit their potential, or 4) a combination of these and other factors.

There is also the school of thought which submits that conditions of work—the work environment, the prevailing leadership style, and concern for the welfare of workers projected by the system and the manager or leader—can all have a significant impact on an individual's approach to work.

Of course, we cannot omit the cultural values of the society, that is, the extent to which a high work ethic is valued in the society. As a result, some of us advocate that since standards and values in the wider society have greatly declined, it should not be surprising that teachers have been found to be performing in less than acceptable modes.

Despite the foregoing, I am increasingly beginning to believe that there has to be a dominant explanation for the apparent lack of zeal among our teachers. Indeed, on the basis of research I have conducted in our schools, I submit that many of our teachers do not extend themselves, because of one or a combination of the following reasons:

- Teaching does not represent interesting work to them
- Their peers, parents, the society as a whole, their principals, and the Ministry of Education, through its representatives, unwittingly fail to demonstrate appreciation for the good work they may have done
- More often than not, they become alienated because they have been left out of major policy decisions at school and in the system
- The Ministry never seems to be interested in providing opportunities for promotion and growth in the system
- They continue to be suspicious of the good faith of the government to its employees, that is, they believe that the government does not care for them

Perhaps we need to examine our approach to teacher recruitment as well as the type of individuals we recruit into teaching. Already many local educators have been calling for the use of personality profiles and psychological tests in the recruitment of teachers.

It is possible that for improved performance more attention will have to be paid to how we inspire or motivate our teachers. I am sure that good salaries are not all that is required, since I have heard many teachers declare that any increase they may have received is only compensation for the frustrations endured in the classroom. To my mind, what is necessary is the cultivation and dissemination of a new ideology for our teachers—an ideology that helps all concerned to understand that teaching is a duty, privilege, and imperative, which is critical to nation building. Also for quality assurance, an effective performance appraisal and management system has to be introduced as early as possible.

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