

*Your son walks in test paper in hand. You glance over and wince, seeing the big “60” in red ink at the top.*

*“Don’t worry,” he says, “I did good on this test.”*

*You ignore the faulty grammar. One problem at a time, you think, mulling over in your mind just how long you will ground him.*

*“No, really,” he persists, “you should have seen the other scores. Mine was really good!”*

*“Good,” you think out loud, “how can you call a sixty good?”*

*“Check it out,” he calls out over his shoulder as he walks away, “you’ll see.”*

*He’s seeming confident, and he may have a point, so you call the teacher. After all, without knowing more about the class and the test, how can you really know?*

*After the call, you head to the family room, where you find your son on the couch, legs propped up while he’s staring at the tube.*

*“I’ve got good news and bad news,” you begin. “The good news is that you did, indeed, get the highest score in the class. Congratulations. The bad news is that you all flunked!”*

What does this little parent’s nightmare have to do with apologetics? Well, the young man in this story bears a strong resemblance to many people you will encounter today. They have a strong intuitive notion that they’re doing pretty “good” on this little test called life, so if there is a God – and they’re not granting there is, mind you – well, they’re just not that worried about it. After all, they think they’re not doing anything bad, like killing people or stealing, and more importantly, they’re just like the rest of the “class” – all their role models, their friends, their acquaintances. Each of them can think of a gazillion others who would be much worse than themselves.

If you are trying to present the Good News of salvation to such a person, you might find them a bit less than interested in hearing what you have to say. Even if you are presenting an intellectually solid case, you may not get much traction. After all, you are in essence offering to tutor him when he thinks he’s already getting an A. Or, more precisely, you’re asking him to study harder, maybe do some extra credit homework, when he thinks he is simply auditing the class, or that everyone passes. He doesn’t *need* your answers, your solution to the problem, until he first begins to realize that he may well be “flunking” the class. This analogy, and others like it, can be a starting point to get the modern-day person thinking about what he may not have thought about before:

*Just where did you get this notion that you will be graded on a curve?*

The answer, no doubt, is that grading on a curve is particularly common in today’s culture. If it works for school – indeed, if it forms a part of the upbringing of most young people today – then why wouldn’t it also apply to life generally, and to the consideration of not just the next test but life’s *ultimate* test?

Let's consider for a moment what lies behind such thinking. Generally, a teacher who grades on a curve is taking into consideration the difficulty of the subject matter and adjusting downward the grading scale. If most of the class gets a 60 on the test, and if the test is particularly difficult, then what would otherwise be an F might, in fact, become an A. This downward adjustment in grading seems to be increasingly common these days; it's called "grade inflation." We can also see it in children's sports, where an increasing number of kids receive trophies simply for showing up; where games that can only be won or lost by totaling up the points earned are no longer being scored; where, in short, young people are given the impression that holding themselves to a standard of excellence is not only unimportant, but it also isn't even necessary. The focus has shifted from building skills and judging outcomes to shoring up what are believed to be fragile egos always in need of enhanced self-esteem.

But on a deeper level, this readjustment of what constitutes a "good" outcome has an intuitive appeal to most people. After all, we are not perfect, so why should we expect ourselves to live up to perfect expectations? Isn't that just a recipe for disappointment, depression, and despair? Isn't it better instead to just be happy with ourselves regardless of what we accomplish with our time here on Earth?

Now I'm not saying that this way of thinking is always wrong. Being overly focused on success can be detrimental, both to the person who sets unrealistic goals of perfection for himself and for those with whom he collides in his effort to "be the best." The issue, really, is to figure out which situation is which.

Consider: there are indeed some settings in life in which grade inflation makes no sense, in which a moment's reflection should make us thankful that it does not. The Navy runs a nuclear power school for its next generation of officers who will handle one of the most dangerous activities known to man. If a particular class of students just isn't up to snuff, flunking them and starting fresh with a new class makes perfect sense. Similarly, would anyone want to fly with a pilot, or be operated upon by a surgeon, who really didn't master the subject matter but got an A anyway? In these areas, even if no one in the class can perform up to what is required, wouldn't common sense still dictate that grading on a curve would be a very bad idea?

Next:

Feelings, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion

Goals: To be the Best but Being Realistic. Not everyone has the skills to be a professional athlete or doctor but realistically what can you excel at or be included in and to feel good about yourself or what can you do to be the best at something, such as the game of life! Being the best school in the State? Why not? Read your school's Mission Statement. Are we accomplishing all the goals in it? If not, why? Maybe the Mission Statement should be redone to obtain easier goals. Maybe you feel all the goals in the Mission Statement are being met. If so, strive to be better until you feel you are the best. Not a handful of staff, but all the staff needs to feel this way daily, not on occasion.

## The Use of Persuasion:

Dr. Douglas Spear, Dean of Students, Political Science, Eastern Oregon State College  
My First Week at College: Meeting my college guidance instructor for the first time.

## Advice and Persuasion.

I had an appointment during my first week of college to meet my advisor and develop what I thought was my first-year class schedule. Anxious but extremely nervous I walked into Dr. Spear's office and was greeted by a short, balding elderly round figured man who reminded me of an Umpa-Lumpa character from Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. After shaking my hand, he instructed me to sit down and be comfortable and then promptly asked me, "how on earth did you get your name"? "I haven't had a student named Elmer since the sixties and that was only one, I recall." He asked, "were you named after your grandfather or someone in your family history"? I was fascinated that he knew or guessed that I was indeed named after my grandfather, as I was born on his birthday. Mom and Dad had no choice. Within minutes of our first encounter, I felt comfortable talking with Dr. Spear, and my anxiety and nervousness went away. The conversation continued.

Dr. Spear: So, you want to be a Social Studies and P.E. teacher. I understand you are also here to play baseball.

Me: Yes, absolutely, I've always enjoyed reading and learning about history and geography and want to continue being involved in sports as a teacher.

Dr. Spear: Social Studies and P.E. teachers are a dime a dozen; I suggest you dump the P.E. and enter the business education program and keep social studies as a hobby.

Me: Business Education, what is that? My mind is now wandering and I'm starting to get nervous again.

Dr. Spear: Well, it's teaching typing, accounting, shorthand, business math and such.

Me: Now I'm starting to sweat. Well, I took a semester of typing in high school only because it was required and got a "D". My high school didn't offer accounting and only girls took shorthand, which I thought was a foreign language. I don't even know what business math is other than counting money. No, I think I'm better suited as a P.E. teacher.

Dr. Spear: Well, suit yourself but here at Eastern there is currently only one boy in the business education program and the rest are girls.

Me: After a brief pause, Sign Me Up!

The Art of Advice and Persuasion. Work on the things that matter and will get your students attention. Try it, it may change your student's life. Hopefully for the better. It did for me.