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Commitment in University Students: *Generator of Successful Professionals*

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Introduction

From its origins, the University has promoted the enactment of values, human rights, gender equality, and other elements that enrich its community life. From this experience of personal development, work and study atmospheres sprout. It is in those atmospheres that respect and collaboration prevail. Nonetheless, and in spite of a long tradition of respect and collaboration, it is clear that social, economic, and political change take a toll on the communities and some adjustments and reinforcements to the social fabric are occasionally required.

The aim of this text is to contribute to the reinforcement of the existing values in university students. I will solely address commitment in this article since the array of values is vast and space is limited. I will try to define commitment, its characteristics and implications, as well as the way in which powerful reasons to embrace commitment as a value can be spread from person to person by means of individual and collective reflection. The goal is to change that which prevents improvement. Commitment is to own our ideas and we must carry them through to achieve our every objective.

The University in the Modern World

How is the University affected by the modern world? What are the advantages and disadvantages to the university educational field? The range of possible answers spans every aspect of university life: teaching methods, learning styles, technological innovation, human development, and more. It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the teaching learning processes of the curriculum or assess whether the impact of technology on education is positive. Our purpose here is to invite the reader to think about some invisible but very real aspects that may significantly improve the personal development of university students: values. In particular, we will discuss commitment as a value. Commitment can enable the improvement of students, and as a consequence, their professional lives as well. He who commits himself improves,

works better, takes responsibility, inspires trust all around, and ignites passion for his profession.

A Professor's Task

An essential task in university classrooms is to transform—through knowledge—love and perseverance that human beings have inside of them. The ultimate goal of this transformative task is for students to develop skills to make their professional formation easier. Such skills should also be lasting and have great effect upon their personal lives and professional careers. It is important to notice that teachers must understand that knowledge acquired in class will not only guide students in pursuing their subject areas, but also will enable them to face and solve real world problems. It is equally important to keep in mind that among the knowledge we strive to pass on, there is a set of qualities and values that can determine the degree of success and happiness a person might achieve in her lifetime.

Since we, as university teachers, are responsible for university education, we must incorporate values into our daily labor. It is a task of teachers to instill values; it cannot be left aside if formation is to be whole. Professors at universities get to know thousands of young adults during their tenure. Professors know their manners, experiences, expressions, desires, joys, and sorrows. They are fully conversant with these youth and are thus able to motivate them to be better people. But wait a second! It might not be entirely true to affirm such a statement. It is no easy thing to convince students that the University will make them more integral and complete human beings. Students inquire knowingly, and question that such might be the case. Today, it is not enough to point to the syllabus and tell them to learn that because it is the relevant thing to learn. Today, university students question the reading material, workload, assignments, projects, and exams. Today, they do not feel like doing what a piece of paper or a professor says. Today, students enter universities because it is the next logical step and something has to be done. Today, motivation is lacking. Today, students demand to be motivated. Today, students do not feel like learning; they want to be entertained. Today, university professors are unable to empathize and have lost touch.

It is truly necessary to persuade them of the effect a university education will have on them. They do not believe a university education can make them more complete, less complicated, or happier people whenever their chosen path is defined by commitment to themselves and responsibility to the duties that a university education entails. Their professors will surely tell them it will be like that, but students find it hard to believe. Students react in different ways to such well-meaning attention. Some students will smile kindly and switch the topic; others will question every word seeking to demolish even the soundest logical edifice. Still, others will not even be drawn into the conversation; they are there, fill space, and think they know what is necessary.

It is precisely when all hope begins to vanish from the hearts of those well-meaning beings — teachers — that they will come upon a pair of keen eyes, and then a second pair reveals interest in the conversation, and further behind someone nods in assent. There will always be a group of enthusiasts, positive people interested in everything; those who reach their goals, who demand achievement of themselves and nothing

less. There is a group of people who dare to dream and demand dreams do come true and are willing to fight and struggle to make it happen. There is a name for such people: these students are, of course, the committed ones.

What is Commitment?

What is this commitment? What does it entail? What is a committed person like? What needs to be done so that students assume themselves as committed individuals in the course of their professional formation and beyond? Let us begin by giving some definitions of the word, "commitment":¹

1. The trait of sincere and steadfast fixity of purpose: "A man of energy and commitment."
2. The act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action: "His long commitment to public service"; "They felt no loyalty to a losing team."
3. An engagement by contract involving financial obligation: "His business commitments took him to London."
4. A message that makes a pledge.
5. The official act of consigning a person to confinement (as in a prison or mental hospital).
6. Promise: "He made a commitment to stay at that job for another year."
7. Dedication: "Her strong commitment to women's rights made her determined to continue."
8. Engagement: "The band has a commitment for Friday night."

As can be seen, our word can allude to widely different spheres: legal, moral, religious, military, medical, etcetera, but in all cases a sense of fulfillment, achievement, duty, honor, and truthfulness is imbued. Even far removed from the educational field, commitment demands growth, discipline, and integrity. It always involves performing out of internal duty or external obligation. Commitment demands doing something either based upon true inner desire or inexcusable duty. When a task is accomplished and a goal achieved, action and individual actualize the potential from within.

Since it is impossible to constrain the full meaning of commitment to a single definition, let us look at the understanding of commitment different people have expressed. Even people with very little common background have come to express some shared features of commitment. All of them stress the absolute freedom of the individual and point out the intent to make a difference. Acting out of commitment has nothing idle about it; committed people work from a pledge and towards a dream in order to see a plan become a reality. In commitment, responsibility is paramount and full responsibility is undertaken for oneself, one's words, one's ideas, and one's acts. This uncompromised display of responsibility shines on those around the committed individual; it points unwaveringly toward the true north, guiding not only the individual but also those around her for we are social entities and cannot act in a vacuum. The following quotes, given by famous and anonymous characters, scholars, actors, comedians, singers, and sportsmen reflect the reach of commitment or the way in

¹ Based on WordNet 3.0, Farlex clipart collection. © 2003-2012 Princeton University, Farlex Inc., and Copyright © 2014 WordReference.com.

which each of them understands what commitment is. While it is true that they are personal thoughts and opinions, each of them reflect upon personal experience and particular circumstances, it is no less true that a universal truth comes across them that can be recognized by everyone:

- ***Commitment is a word that needs a lot of bravery to be pronounced.***
—Luis Gabriel Carrillo Navas, author
- ***A total commitment is paramount to reaching the ultimate in performance.***
—Tom Flores, American football player and coach
- ***Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes... but no plans.***
—Peter Drucker, educator, author, businessman
- ***The uncommitted life isn't worth living.***
—Marshall Fishwick, professor and author
- ***Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.***
—Vince Lombardi, American football coach
- ***If you deny yourself commitment, what can you do with your life?***
—Harvey Feinstein, actor and director
- ***What one has, one ought to use: and whatever he does he should do with all his might.***
—Marcus Tullius Cicero, lawyer, politician, and philosopher
- ***No commitment is possible to others if there is no prior commitment to oneself.***
—Jorge Yarce, leadership speaker
- ***It takes a deep commitment to change and an even deeper commitment to grow.***
—Ralph Ellison, author and teacher
- ***The fact that you are in love and committed with what you do is important to be true.***
—Lila Downs, singer

Some of these quotes move others to reach deeply into their souls; others more cause doubt. But all can serve as a starting point to consider the elements of which success consists and what is required to be fulfilled and content. These quotes are here because they converge from every walk of life, but share success as a common destination. For every one of these people, commitment was the keystone needed to succeed in each particular field. They are precious nuggets of experience shared freely with the world. Every person should treasure them and embrace commitment as the lodestar of his or her journey. There is a thin line that divides those who survive in a craft from those who transform the task itself. It is up to us to choose on which side of the line we want to be.

A definition of commitment that can be shared with university students to motivate them to adopt an attitude of dedication that may very well be unknown to them is the following (Yarce, 2014):

It is commitment that turns a promise into a reality. It is the brave voice of our intent. It is the deed more powerful than any speech. It is the time stolen to the night. It is the pledge kept in the face of adversity. It is the steel of character to turn the tide of events. It is the daily victory of integrity over skepticism.

Conclusion

It may seem difficult to teach values. When a teacher criticizes her students because they are not committed to their labor, she will often express annoyance but rarely will she offer guidance as to what to do to change and improve. What would happen if teachers shared the concept of commitment with their students on the very first day of class? The analysis and discussion that would ensue would be an invitation to start living in a committed manner for a value that is lived by, practiced daily, fuels initiative, encourages creativity, engenders processes, and improves results.

University teachers, besides their teaching duties, should commit to their labor and to those for whom it is performed. This commitment includes instilling in their students the idea of changing and living in a committed manner. Students must be made aware of the effort and tenacity commitment demands. They will accumulate experiences and realize the positive influence of commitment in their lives. They will soon notice that commitment makes them more efficient and productive. It is possible that the professor who dares to promote such change will be labeled a fundamentalist given the frivolous times we live in; it is a risk worth taking. It is far preferable to do it and do it very well than to do nothing and watch how our students curtail their performance, wander aimlessly, and execute their duties halfheartedly and perfunctorily —just because it is required of them or because exertion seems to be something trivial.

Figuerola (2009) summarizes what commitment entails. It is well worth reading his work closely and determine the way to convey the message to the students with whom we work. Let us commit to assess its value and find a way to share it effectively as quickly as possible:

[...] a life without commitment is the existence of an automaton, instinctual, because it is the pressing commitment what makes a person and enables the person to develop a truly fulfilling life. A life branded by liberty as a destiny ... opens transcending realities that the human reason alone can reach.

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About the Author

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