

## The Return of Bill Jasper

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As Bill Jasper left his office and walked down the hall toward his classroom, he found it hard to believe that only a few months earlier he had begun teaching his first class at University College. A wistful smile played at the corners of his mouth as he thought back to that enlightening, but somewhat unsettling, experience. "I was greener than a spring apple," he muttered. "I wish I had known then what I know now."

Bill walked into his classroom, turned on the lights, and noting that it was a bit stuffy, opened a window. Nothing in the room took Bill by surprise. He had checked it out a few days earlier to make sure it suited his particular teaching needs. "Yes, this will do nicely," he thought. "The chairs are easy to move around, there's plenty of board space, and the lighting is good. It has a nice feel to it, too. I'm set."

Bill glanced at his watch again. He had wanted to give himself plenty of time to set up, and he noted with satisfaction that he still had about fifteen minutes before starting time. Remembering that last term two students had taken seats in his classroom by mistake, Jasper picked up a piece of chalk and printed his name, the number and title of his course, his office number and hours, and home telephone number on the board, just as he had presented this information on the first page of his syllabus. He then set up a small tape player to record his presentation so students signing up late might hear the session in its entirety. Finally, he walked over to the overhead projector and turned it on, just to make certain it was in good working order.

"Just in time," thought Jasper as the students began filing in. Bill smiled, welcomed them to "Productivity and Quality Control," and then stood by the door, greeting them warmly, and handing each a syllabus as he or she entered. He chuckled to himself as he noticed the looks of pleasant surprise on their faces.

During last term's first class period, Bill had taken roll in conventional fashion, simply reading down the roster list. This time around he wanted to

take a more personal approach. Explaining to his students that he wanted the class to become a true learning community, he asked them to introduce themselves, sharing a little information about their personal and academic interests. Knowing some might feel more at ease if he started the process, Bill told them a little about himself, first describing his educational background and then explaining why he had gone into his field and what he liked most about teaching.

Jasper was pleasantly surprised by how warmly the students responded. One even observed, "You know, Mr. Jasper, it's nice being treated like a human being, rather than just a number and name on a roster." Bill now felt even more comfortable carrying out his preplanned second step toward getting to know his students. Passing out some half sheets of paper, he asked his class to jot down answers to a short list of questions. Among other things, he asked them about their reading background, their reasons for taking the course, and their concerns about it. Finally, he asked them to describe as concretely as possible the teaching-learning approaches, styles, and techniques which they felt helped them learn.

After Jasper collected the responses, he asked the class to take a closer look at the course syllabus, a thorough and handsome document into which he had put a great deal of time, thought, and effort. His own experience and a workshop on syllabus building had convinced him of the vital importance of this teaching tool, and he wanted to share his thoughts about it with his students. He began by discussing the syllabus as contract, but ended on a softer, more personal note, referring to it as a kind of "covenant" (but not of the "Lost Ark" he quipped)—a promise between student and teacher, teacher and student, demanding a joint effort toward fulfilling course objectives.

Bill had remembered from the first term how concerned his students had been about assignments, examinations, grade determination and other such practical nuts-and-bolts concerns, so he spent plenty of time going over these items, encouraging questions, and responding to them with sensitivity, patience, and thoroughness.

But Bill Jasper did not stop there. He also shared his teaching philosophy, candidly noting that only during the past term had he taken the time to actually think the subject through and come up with a kind of credo. Last term, Bill had discovered quite by accident that his students responded more enthusiastically to his assignments (and even seemed to do better on them) when he explained the teaching principles underlying them. This term Bill was going to tell them even more about his pedagogical approach, and the first class period seemed the perfect place to start.

Bill glanced at his watch. He had planned to spend about fifty minutes

of his two-hour session on introductions and the syllabus, and that was just about as long as it had taken. "Time for a fifteen-minute break," Jasper told the class. "And be sure to see me if you have any questions."

During the break, Jasper fielded three or four questions, did a little visiting with a couple of other students, and then put his second-hour "teaching road map" on the board. About half way through the first term a senior colleague had mentioned this technique to Bill, and he had decided to try it. Much to his delight, he found that it not only helped students follow his presentation, but also kept him on track.

The outline reflected many hours of work on Jasper's part. He had rehearsed his material carefully, remembering with chagrin last term's first-class fiasco when he had to let his students out forty-five minutes early after running out of things to say. This time around he not only had good presentation notes but a list of questions he planned to ask his students as he went along. He was determined to get feedback early and regularly. Then, too, he wanted to establish an active learning mode at the very outset. He wanted to demonstrate immediately what subsequent classes were going to be like. He felt strongly that students ought to be given a chance to get the real flavor of his teaching style as soon as possible.

The second hour went as well as the first. Bill's practice and confidence paid dividends, and students seemed eager to respond when he asked them questions. Maybe it was just the particular chemistry of the group, but a comfortable atmosphere seemed to be forming and there was little of the stiffness and formality often associated with first meetings.

Bill brought the session to a close with a "One Minute Quiz," a simple, but effective device he had read about in a teaching handbook. "Please take out a sheet of paper," he said to his class, "and briefly respond to these two questions: (1) What was the most important point or theme of today's presentation? and (2) What was the most important point left unanswered?"

Bill collected the papers, pointing out he would not grade them, but would read them carefully and return them with brief written comments. He then reminded his students of their first assignment, and thanked them for their attentiveness, making sure he did not go overtime.

As Bill drove home, he had a good feeling about his first meeting. "One thing's for sure," he thought. "It went a lot smoother than my first class last term." Bill Jasper knew he still had a great deal to learn about teaching, but he also knew he had come a long way in a few short months. "Who said you can't teach an old dog new tricks!" he exclaimed to himself as he confidently moved through a starlit night rich with promise.