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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

The Pedagogical Seminary

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vzps20>

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Clarence C. Church

Published online: 30 Aug 2012.

To cite this article: Clarence C. Church (1919) Success-Making Traits in College Teachers, The Pedagogical Seminary, 26:1, 41-48, DOI: [10.1080/08919402.1919.10532621](https://doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1919.10532621)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1919.10532621>

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SUCCESS-MAKING TRAITS IN COLLEGE TEACHERS

By CLARENCE C. CHURCH

It needs but slight powers of observation coupled with some little experience in various college lecture and class rooms to teach how great a variety there is in successful college teachers. In physique inspiring teachers vary from insignificant and even puny men to herculean-like males. In bodily conformation a few are excellent, a few are ugly, the rest somewhere intermediate. A professor is sometimes described as handsome, perhaps more commonly he is described as somewhat queer. Most teachers, in college at least, possess so-called mannerisms, noticeable peculiarities of posture, gesture, speech, or ways of talking. *Once in a while* one sees a superb lecturer of classic type, who unperturbed runs smoothly along with his periodic sentences and artistic rhetoric, getting to the logical end of his subject just at the end of the hour. The degree and sort of discipline maintained by those who are successful in putting over their subject-matter and habits of thought is different with almost every instructor. Moral, intellectual, and social habits present no uniformity in the different individuals of a college or university community. Finally it must be admitted by observing pedagogues that every man has his own method, or way in which he tries to run the learning processes of his pupils.

Let not undersized intellectual youth be discouraged lest they cannot succeed in college teaching; just as the short-of-stature Napoleon was a great general, so some of the most popular and successful teachers of today are men whose intellectual and inspirational magnitude is in inverse proportion to their frail frame and small avoirdupois. Standards of attractiveness in men are never very well established in the popular judgments, but there are always men who, casual observers contend, make an unfortunate appearance, yet some of these in college chairs are remembered gratefully by many devoted former students. Some men of the most notorious ugliness of body have been obliged to flee, for efficiency's sake, from their numerous women admirers; if ugliness may not be a handicap with the favorable attentions of the other sex, should it be badly feared in the less personal and quite calm associations of the college class?

Mannerisms are generally a bug-bear in the apprehensions of those who aspire to public or professional popularity, and doubtless, other circumstances equal, they often injure, yet they are, notwithstanding, sometimes adopted along with a pose and become secrets of popularity. Some admired teachers are always awkward, not knowing, for instance, where to keep their hands or being able to stand except on one leg, and though this may be annoying to those who first sit in the lecture hall, perhaps later it comes to be part of the expected and appreciated formal behavior of the men so facile with thought. The old-time professor might neglect to change his tie for weeks or he might wear the wrong suit to class; if proprieties are more rigorous nowadays they do not preclude a certain amount of neglect of personal appearance by men whose thoughts are on time and eternity, or germs and electrons; whose business it is to know, and to vend truth and science. Especially in teachers of the humanities an artfully quaint appearance may be at a premium—if only one's quaintness happens to hit the right cord in the foibles of possible admirers. It does a man little harm to be gently smiled at because of his eccentric ways, if only other redeeming qualities save him from being thought ridiculous. A conventional appearance saves a teacher worry for fear that some superficial mind will rate him for unfavorable non-essentials, but at the same time mild unconventionalities may be appraised as salt and flavor by the same superficial appraisers.

There are successful teachers who gesture with their whole body, or who contort it more or less into an unnatural position as they talk. A wise look or an unmeaningful smile when adopted as a pose are not generally interpreted as conceit or hypocrisy, rather they seem the expression of a good personality.

The so-called nervousness of those who cannot keep hands still or face straight, who laugh without much excuse, whose bodily unquiet impresses others as evidence of uneasiness may irritate students or side track their attentions, but usually only for a time at first acquaintance, and in time the man who is unconsciously so handicapped, if he has something worthwhile, gets appreciation.

Whether a marble-like excellent of posture is better than unsteadiness and useless self-activity before a class would in the past have been answered quite affirmatively; the classic performance of mental and physical rigor was deemed of itself an art of high intrinsic value. But granting excellent oratorical ability to accompany such placid personal habits, there are spokesmen for the unstable lecturer. The beauty of

his delivery does not get monotonous, while the student of any college capacity is not easily decoyed to attending specifically to the fretful behavior of the men who cannot make his professional into one of a classical mould. There certainly are successful "nervous" teachers.

And old idea of discipline for school children forbade all motions in the room except the speech movements of the teacher and the reciting pupils. Some college ideals are still a good deal like this. And there are successful teachers who without using a particle of force or threat rule order with an iron hand. How the personal tactics and air of the quiet disciplinarians succeed as they do, apparently without any attention, is the despair of those who have tried to run classes with never a whisper and hardly a smile, and failed. Those who succeed unquestionably get glorious results not unfrequently.

And while no one has yet been found to impute a pedagogic value to a lecture room constituted of visiting parties, correspondents, candy-eaters and tobacco users, it is evident that interested students may without harm pass an occasional relevant word about subject matter, relax their bodies for easier inception of ideas, and get into a breezy mental contact with the instructor. A successful teacher always maintains respect from his classes but he does not necessarily maintain silence. Some of the best teachers receive many volunteered illustrations and instances or even general thoughts in the course of a lecture. Strange as it may sound, a certain small amount of relaxed activity in the college class room prevents students from having lapses of attention. The ideal advanced class, graduate class in particular, is of course a Socratic circle. And the Socratic method perfectly applied remains the supremely excellent technic of class management.

Successful college teachers do not necessarily have to set a standard of unflagging intellectual effort. Those who do this create respect for their industry and maybe get credit for more brilliance than they possess. But a halo of worth goes about the man who is brilliant without studying, and if he does not so much inspire admiring students to lives of rarified intellect, he at least is apt to command efficient work. The grind in American college faculties has to win his status by his scholarly efficiency; the careless genius may get his rating largely through extra-scholarly activities, the interest in which will perhaps make more efficacious his professional teaching.

When looking for types of social behavior in college faculties we certainly discover the following: there is the human ice-berg who always knows what to say in his class room and

when he has on a dress suit, and refrains from saying anything at other times. His etiquette is unimpeachable, his grammar perfect, his smiles unwasted. He associates with his students, and with most other people, across a frigid social gulf, and as students never come to him except on business his college work is ended when his classes are over, unless there are formal evening entertainments. The caste of such a man is generally high, and if he handles indelicate subjects it protects him.

At the other extreme in sociability is the informal social democrat, always approachable, always intelligently talkative, humanly wise, ready to receive any communications and sympathize with any heartaches. His manners are apt to be careless, and formal receptions bore him until he disturbs or avoids them. He makes a less grand figure, but he is especially attractive as a companion to the more individuated and refined students. Much of his time is likely to be consumed by visits, some of which are not very profitable to any one. Though likable, he is in danger of losing caste, yet this will generally revive when his human character gets better known.

There is also the rather formal but nevertheless very adjustable type of professor, the one who is always into everything, a stock committeeman, interested in athletics and social service, an attendant at church, and at college dances and a good sportsman as well. He always knows everyone, but rather superficially so. He is a "good scout," not a spiritual adviser.

Besides these three types of social characters there are very numerous mutants and blends of them. All are represented among good teachers. And all, of course, have some times failed to get much favorable recognition. There is no indispensable social quality in a teacher.

Even in the morals of good teachers relativity prevails. It is true that great latitude is allowed only in a few large universities, and there an open breach of sexual morality, if it becomes public, may mean immediate professional downfall, though as several recent instances show, not great loss of standing with former pupils. The old standard which laid out a single straight and narrow path for teachers has crumbled almost everywhere, and it is recognized by appreciative pupils and colleagues that there are different ways to be good, and, even, that once in a while a heroic defiance of certain existing mores is as redeeming as unerring commonplace goodness. Devotion to moral ideals is a great asset in those who would be beloved teachers—witness noted current instances,—but despite this, several teachers who are now exert-

ing really the maximum possible influence and have the greatest bodies of devoted disciples, have shown devotion to the truth ideal only, disclaiming all moral concern. It is true that this type seems to require a rather specially prepared social medium, i. e. a large university before it can find nourishment.

As the scientific ideal has come to reign, and it has been thought better to consult fact than to give advice, there has arisen some popular dislike for preachers. Hence there are numerous college teachers who *do not preach*, but confine themselves to teaching and investigating.

For a long time method has been the object of both scientific inquiry and speculation. And with the multitude of different species of method there has been much experimentation. Therefore, one uninformed might imagine that proper specific methods for particular student groups have been discovered. This does not appear to be true for elementary education, and it certainly is not true for collegiate education. No one can say in a given case that some particular method is the only one to use. Given any actual class there appear always to be various procedures by which the learning process can be encouraged to start and continue.

One man will make a success of deduction, of texts and lectures which proceeded from fundamental theory to its concrete implications; another's expositions proceed in reverse order to this; each inculcating good habits of inquiry and thought, as well as a respectable store of ideas. Sometimes a systematic teacher is regarded as brilliant, and he makes good students; a teacher who has no system is also regarded as brilliant, and he has good students. Some teachers lay off their subject matter elegantly with complete inattention to the particular mental contents of the learners, while others think that in college as elsewhere some attention should be given to the *appreceptionmasse*, or to the background of ideas, in the students. Both may get good results. There are lucid instructors who use abundant concrete illustrations and there are obscure, if profound, instructors who deal in abstractions. The former makes fewer demands on thinking and associative powers, but both disseminate their notions. Some lecture, some use texts; some require careful notes, some furnish them beforehand typewritten. And so the multiplicity of working methods prevails.

We have proceeded far and comprehensively enough to give a good portrayal of the variety of traits found in successful advanced teachers. Anyone who wishes further data can get it by visiting college lecture halls.

It cannot be said, offhand, that any particular trait, habit or art is the cause of a teacher's success. He may be successful only in spite of, not successful through or because of it. It is often hard to determine whether a trait is an asset or a handicap. But such a doubt does not alter the frequent fact that the in some ways unpromising teacher succeeds, and often in a marked measure. It can safely be said that a man can hardly be cursed with any particular apparent defect or variation but that *somewhere*, granting other redeeming qualities, he can become an inspiring teacher.

The question arises, however, whether for a certain community and school there is not an ideal combination of personal and professional traits, which when possessed by a man guarantee the greatest measure of success. We assume that no one will take the next speculative step and ask whether there is such a thing as an ideal teacher, suitable for *any* community. Of course there are personal traits and habits and ideals which would splendidly fit in certain communities, especially rather provincial ones, but would not be assets in many other places.

But it is an open question whether one can describe an ideal professor for a given college class, say nothing about a college. Furthermore, individual students may be potentially adjustable in the happiest way to a number of types of men—indeed, is this not often the case, where a student likes all the members of the faculty for their different qualities and finds the variety valuable? There are, on the other hand, always some students who can not get into sympathy or cooperation with certain teachers. Everyone finds certain persons in life who are not agreeable, and a variety of others who are each in his or her own way congenial. And it is a misfortune to students when they get in the class of a man whom they “cannot get,” do “not like,” or have strong prejudices against. They may learn from him whether they like him or not, but they are in a poor state of mind to do so, if they remain hostile. Of course they may eventually, by self-adaptation, learn to like him.

The spirit of a class and community count for much in questions of popularity, and professional adjustment. If a man comes well recommended and with the right affiliations, his caste is good, and it obscures his defects to potential detesters. The favorable opinion of a majority of the students may be contagious with the reluctant minority, and a leader may swing a whole class in either direction, sometimes. A favorable tradition once established protects a man in large degree. Accidents and luck, uncalculable circumstances, always count for much as to how a man shall be liked; if by an unwitting

accident or mistake he antagonizes a few sensitive students, or faculty members, he may have a nest of enemies who will capitalize any behavior that would anywhere be considered as erring, and use this as tools with which to undermine him. Some persons take a feral delight in exerting their power and skill for destroying another man, especially if he be in any sense a rival.

In every community there are particular standards or customs or ideals which lend a man prestige and appreciation when he subscribes heartily and sincerely to them. It may be that a combination of orthodox church-going, amateur dramatics, giving good advice, and palid conversation are as a group in vogue. If a man will make himself enthusiastic about one or two of these and be tender but inactive about the others he will stand a good chance of "being in well." Whatever one's defects are these do not hinder him from lending his support to some of the group of popular activities. But if he pursues his own tastes to the entire exclusion of the popular ones his way is likely to be hard. In another community altogether a new group of activities may be in vogue. And in a large university the matter of being popular in the community at large does not appreciably count,—that is, only the exigencies of his teaching and student and faculty associations militate for or against a man's security.

It stands to reason and observation, also that a teacher may be undone in a particular position, and in some succeeding ones, by a single powerful enemy. He may be dismissed on a trumped up charge, and find it hard to get a position again. As fortune will have it the gifted man sometimes goes under with these circumstances; the handicapped one may by tact and favor succeed.

There are doubtless men of high intellect and ability who can never succeed as teachers, who always fail to interest and inspire students. One of these may try twenty universities, and if he does not kill his chances by lack of tact, some agency eliminates him because of some trait that has seemed to it, in its authority, unlikely. But there are few men so forsaken of academic charms as to make their uprooting anywhere a matter of destiny. Most would succeed if they could try long enough—some of course much easier than others. Finally, most popular men would be in a degree unpopular under certain new circumstances but slightly different from their present ones, but a few adaptable ones would make their way in many different environments with comparative ease.

In conclusion: success making popularity in college teachers, like popularity in persons elsewhere, is really a subtle

thing, and very complicated. But it is not such a phenomenon but that most mentally capable persons could not succeed in attaining it, were they able to make a fair number of trials. Traits and methods which are generally supposed to work unfavorably, also, often work favorably as conspicuous cases show.

This paper has dealt with success-making in college teachers. The same principles must apply to secondary and grade schools, but probably with less latitude. Greater *relative* conventionality is required in the lower schools, but there is still room for variation.

In the schools of a democracy teachers need not be all of the same mould. Success is liberal to the variant.