

Message of responsibility & attitude inspires radical change in teenagers

III donates instructor's time to middle school students and delivers a message of responsibility & attitude to inspire a radical change in teenagers

BY DAN AZNOFF, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following story is true. Some of the names have been omitted to protect the over-publicized.*

The scenario was not promising: A trainer from the world of insurance speaking to an auditorium in California filled with adolescents.

But the results have been something to get excited about. The teenagers realized the rewards from accomplishing simple tasks, while teachers and parents have noticed a positive change in the attitudes of the young people.

The epiphany began in early 2006. Inspired by the message of positive attitude she had observed in several III classes, Carmen Garcia asked her friend, an III instructor, if he would be willing to donate his time to deliver a presentation to her son's Career Day honors class at Will Rogers Middle School in suburban Sacramento, CA. He agreed to the unusual request, and since he would rather this story be about the kids and not him, we left his name out.

In addition to new analogies for his presentation, the instructor prepared for the younger audience with bags of candy to substitute for the bottles of wine he normally gives away during his interactive dialog.

"The only reason the kids were excited was because we were going to get out of class," said Carmen's son, 13-year-old Garrett Garcia. "Nobody was excited about the idea of a lecture from some guy in a suit who talks about insurance. But that changed fast."

The III instructor was not just another man in a suit. He had been a part of the institute's mission to re-introduce the word customer into the over-used phrase "customer service." Over the past eight years, III has provided continuing education and on-site education to more than 54,000 adjusters and claim professionals throughout the U.S. and Canada.

The 80-20 Rule

That "performance is made up of 80 percent attitude and 20 percent ability" hit home with Garrett and many of his classmates.

"We were all surprised when he admitted that he had lost a promotion at

his first job in the copy room at a large insurance company because of his lack of positive attitude," Garrett recalled. "He explained that our performance is a combination of 80 percent attitude and 20 percent ability, and that we should always do our best, no matter how menial the task."

In a quote directly from the same training given to claim professionals, the youngsters were told that outstanding performance means providing more than what people expect. As proof of his words, he responded individually to every one of the thank-you letters he received from students who attended the session.

"These kids are too bright to be fooled by any simple form letter. They would

OUT OF THE MOUTHS

Excerpts from the letters written by the students to III:

"I learned I can do almost anything as long as I have the right attitude" – Jeff Kurtz

"You really got me thinking about attitude and overcoming my fears" – Karla Kruegsmann

"You made me really think about my life and realize I need to be proactive about myself." – Megan Beedy

"You motivated me to conquer my fears and go for my goals in life." – Amber

"I'm not writing this for my teacher, I could care less about that. You made a difference for me." – Kyle Parker

"I really liked how you didn't bore us with an extremely long speech on 'You should always... something that we don't really care about.'" – Crystal McCoy

"Your speech motivated me in many ways and has made me determined to overcome my fears and to believe in myself." – Diva

"I have one question for you. When you are in front of millions of people, what do you think at that very moment?" – Chrysllyn

"The presentation was amazing. I think that my whole negative attitude will turn into a positive one." – Samantha Roman

"In my opinion, a lot of things will change because of your great motivational words. Your wisdom will stick to us through our lives." – Tanya Naumchuk

"I freak out when I'm in front of the class with everyone looking at me. I feel I'm going to fail or mess up and get embarrassed. But because of your speech, I feel more confident in myself." – Marisa Mollera

"I learned that you shouldn't be afraid of failing, just use that to learn something new. Your speech changed my perspective on giving presentations." – Gemma Mazzera

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have caught on to that in a minute," Will Rogers teacher Tara Larson said with a sly smile. "They were really impressed that this busy man would take the time to sit down and personally respond to each of the 46 letters he received."

Larson noted that the mentor's candor quickly created a bond between him and his young audience and added that his casual style "added integrity to his remarks." She went on to say that his recommendation to pursue advanced degrees carried more credibility because of the obstacles he had been forced to overcome in his own career.

The 80-20 rule was mentioned in several of the letters that Larson said her students wrote. Others mentioned the candy.

Larson said her students have been more responsible about finishing assignments on time, and described the overall changes in her classroom as "uncharacteristic maturity," with teenagers looking beyond themselves with an eye toward long-term goals.

"Many of the students have gone far beyond what was expected (of them) in terms of the quality and depth of their assignments," Ms. Larson remarked. "That has been a direct result of the challenge to do the unexpected given to each student."

Time Management

The honors class listened intently as the III instructor described how prioritizing tasks on a daily basis can create more time in your day, regardless of whether you are a student or a busy executive.

Carmen Garcia has heard the presentation previously but remains impressed with the fact that the instructor never uses prepared notes or videos. "Everything comes right out of his head and his heart."

"He told us that he still gets nervous. That's why he paces back and forth so much when he is talking," said Garrett. "He emphasized that overcoming your greatest fear can be your greatest accomplishment."