

-VIEWPOINT-

Once upon a time, in the land of Mythia, students attending The University received a high quality education. They enjoyed a close relationship with their faculty and administration. The emphasis was placed upon helping the students learn not just facts--but a way of living--and the necessary tools to adapt themselves to their society. The faculty were available to students for counsel, encouragement, and just plain conversation. The administrators of The University were also in close touch with both students and faculty; they knew their faculty closely and were concerned about their problems. A member of the faculty knew he could sit down and talk over his problems with them, and they would actually consider what he had to say.

The University was concerned with upgrading its standards, and so it sought to encourage its faculty to pursue further studies. Incentives were given to complete graduate work, and earn the Magical Degree. Although the primary emphasis was upon teaching, incentives and recognition were also given to the instructor who performed well in research and public service.

The administrators were concerned about keeping up the high degree of morale the faculty enjoyed. Capable leaders were placed over the various departments; these leaders were able to instill into their faculties a sense of accomplishment, direction, and fulfillment. The various departments

enjoyed feelings of unity and harmony as they worked together towards their common goals. If a person was selected as a leader who could not lead, he was replaced with one who could. Mythia wanted leaders who believed in faculty; who sought not to motivate faculty through external control and threats of punishment, but who believed that work is as natural as play and rest; who believed that faculty would exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which they were committed; who believed that the average person learns under proper conditions not only to accept but to seek responsibility; who believed that the capacity to help solve problems is widely distributed in the population and that decision making should be based upon messages from all levels of the organization.¹

But then one day something happened. The land of Mythia decided it was not getting its money's worth out of The University. So they created controlling boards to control The University, and controlling boards to control the controlling boards. They invented numerous forms, which faculty and administrators spent weeks completing, and which were filed away in obscure corners of the controlling boards' offices. Yes, even the record held by the Internal Revenue Service for most forms generated seemed to be in danger.

The land of Mythia could continue to spend enormous amounts of money on non-essential items, but it decreed that

teachers were getting too much. Someone, somewhere, (or so it is rumored--all records are not clear) discovered a textbook which he had used thirty years before when he was attending school, and on the basis of his revelation he was able to devise 4,762 productivity charts designed to weed out the "waste" in education. From henceforth, classes must be larger, and each faculty member must teach more classes while some faculty must be terminated. Instructors holding the Magical Degree (which was no longer magical) must be replaced when possible with instructors who possessed no magic.

So the faculty had less time for the students; the students were no longer encouraged to really learn, but to digest facts, assertions, and other bland statements to "parrot" them back, and be awarded a diploma. Administrators no longer were in close touch with the faculty, but spent their time trying to hold the line against the "economic crunch." Committees were invented to keep dissident faculty busy; these committees had no authority of course; they were "advisory." The committee on determining the authority of an advisory committee was disbanded after many long hours of work, because they could not determine what their authority was. Leadership no longer became a criterion for holding an administrative position over a department; the more important standard was to maintain the official party line. Faculty members who questioned the qualifications of

such people were either replaced or ignored. To enhance the insecurity of faculty members not holding tenure, a super-structure was invented composed of sixty-four roadblocks, any one of which could prevent a person's achieving tenure. To pass one of these roadblocks was not an accomplishment; to fail to pass one was disaster.

Since revenue was based upon students enrolled in a university, administrators threatened departments that unless they increased enrollment to meet The Formula (which was changed periodically so no one would ever really understand it), they would lose faculty members and even major programs. (The amazing development was that these economic conditions had little or no effect upon the number of administrators--this number continued to grow.) Since the departments had these ultimatums, "grade inflation" became an everyday event. Amazingly, students who had earned "C's" in the past became "B" students. (Perhaps this is an overstatement; perhaps actually the instructors became better teachers, as it was discovered that instructors who started giving higher grades also began to be evaluated considerably higher by the students on the students' evaluations of instructors.)

And so the land of Mythia produced students with higher academic averages than ever, but who amazingly did not perform as well on the job. The managers failed to manage, the

managed failed to produce, and someone began to complain that for some reason the quality of education had declined and that it was all the fault of those over-indulged teachers. And then one day Mythia died.

Perhaps Mythia is not so far off; this may be exactly what we see in our educational system today. We may casually say that there is really nothing that can be done, but perhaps this is because educators have traditionally been too content with simply taking what is given them. We have compromised with basic academic philosophy.

Jacques Barzun, in his Teacher in America, writes:

Consequently, the whole aim of teaching is to turn the young learner, by nature a little copycat, into an independent, self-propelling creature, who cannot merely learn but study--that is, work as his own boss to the limit of his powers. This is to turn pupils into students, and it can be done on any rung of the ladder of learning.²

This writer subscribes wholeheartedly to this point of view. A good sound education must be centered around helping the person help himself; it must also teach the student not to be content with less than his full potential. We live in an age where too many people are satisfied with mediocrity--the "gentleman's C" (or as grade inflation has often changed the expression, the "gentleman's B"). The educator must disturb the student so he will not be satisfied with the mediocre.

We must demand more of our political leaders. Will we continue to be content with living under an inflation rate in excess of 12% only to be told that the average raise for state employees will be 6%? Will we continue to be content

to be governed by mushrooming bureaucracies that tell us we must follow numerous forms and formulas to prove our abilities? Will we continue to be content to listen to the prophets of gloom who tell us we must cut back on faculties because someday enrollment will experience a severe drop. (The years for these projections are periodically revised; we are already in a time period when we were told that enrollments would be down. But the facts compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that college enrollment is up 2.4 per cent over last fall. Furthermore, the prophets of gloom fail to consider that the migration southward into the Sunbelt States, of which Tennessee is one, will help the enrollment of all levels of education in this state.)

We must be more concerned with electing and supporting public officials who are truly sympathetic with education's needs, and who will do more than utter glib campaign statements saying that they understand education's needs. We must be more concerned with being actively involved in processes which will change these conditions.

We must demand more of our academic leaders. They should be expected to be leaders first, rather than chart-manufacturers and paper-pushers. The academic leader must be one who is willing and able

1. To inspire his faculty positively (as opposed to negative motivation via ominous sounds and threats

of possible firings, etc.); he should inspire his faculty to believe in themselves, to inspire their students, and to do their best work. Any type of faculty evaluation should be improvement-centered, rather than becoming one of sixty-four roadblocks which can be filed and used as justification for failing to tenure or promote the instructor.

2. To show himself by example to be a leader. Administration is no excuse to retire from scholarship into the books of regulations. He should continue to be a writer, a leader in professional organizations. If he has to dictate to his faculty greater teaching loads, he should be willing to show that he is assuming a greater load himself. Even if he has a position that does not require classroom teaching, he should consider returning to the classroom for at least one course; this would keep him somewhat in touch with students and the difficulties imposed upon faculties by large sections, teacher evaluations, and other signs of the past decade.
3. To be available to his faculty. He should be willing and able to create an environment where it is possible to discuss academic and personal concerns without the faculty member feeling threatened; this environment should be one in which the parties feel comfortable

as people. Furthermore, the parties should feel that something really tangible can develop as a result of these conversations.

4. To be a spokesperson for those under him. He must be willing, when policies are being discussed, before they are finally promulgated, to not be just a "Yes-man" who is afraid to have confrontations with his superiors. While he has responsibilities in carrying out policies of superiors, he must also remember that he is the major spokesperson--in fact, sometimes the only human spokesperson allowed by the academic superstructure--of his faculty, and he must be responsive to faculty concerns.

How can this be achieved? The answer is not an easy one, but it cannot come about from our withdrawing into our ivory towers and saying that nothing can be done to change anything.

Jesse Stuart once wrote in his book, To Teach, to Love; "Love, a spirit of adventure and excitement, a sense of mission has to get back into the classroom. Without it our schools--and our country--will die." Let's work to get these goals back into teaching.

- David Walker

NOTES

¹Adapted from Gerald M. Goldhaber, Organizational Communication, pp. 78-79.

²P. 24.

³P. 8.