

Quality Education News

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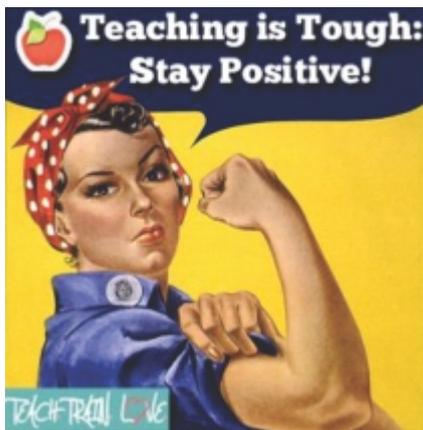
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Dear Supporter of Quality Education

Quality teachers are positive people



If you're teaching in a South African school it's tough to stay positive especially in November. In your own school you could be in the midst of exams and the marking of papers. There are the end-of-year Prize-Giving ceremonies, Valedictions and other events. Then, of course, there are the many meetings on issues such as promotions, retentions as well as timetabling for the new school year.

Remember to throw the hot summer days and the tight time deadlines into the workload mix! When folk get fractionally fractious and occasionally stressful, it's most understandable.

To stay positive can be tough. Wider issues beyond the school gates also make it difficult to walk around with a blissful Mr Bean smile on one's face. Due to lack of funding, there are thousands of overcrowded classrooms and schools. Lawlessness in wider South African society is impacting on school discipline. Incidents of defiance by students to obeying fair school rules and uniform codes are on the increase. We can all add to the list.

It's understandable to focus on what's wrong in our schools. Yet every teacher is a leader whether it be as a classroom teacher, subject specialist or principal. That leadership role has an expectation of the teacher. Ralph Marston makes the point: "Being positive in a negative situation is not naïve. It's leadership."

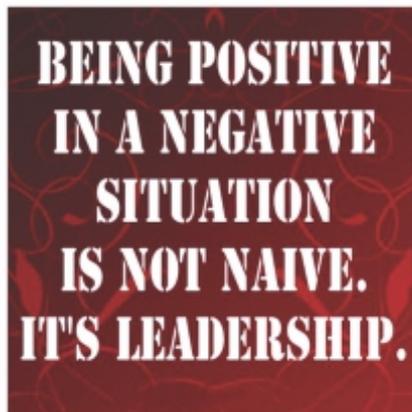
Jan Mühlfeit in his book, *The positive leader*, observes that well-meaning leaders can frequently go off-beam in how they

manage themselves and others. These leaders focus on their weaknesses and not their strengths.

In a school situation, for example, some teachers might judge themselves negatively because they're not excellent sports coaches. They view it as a weakness. Rather, teachers should focus on other strengths such as dynamic classroom teaching and strong interpersonal skills. Build and focus on 'signature strengths'.

Mühlfeit points out that so many leaders give so much time to others, that it depletes their own energy. Manage time better. Learn to say, "No" when there're too many demands. Give yourself enough time to recharge emotional, mental, physical and spiritual batteries. By so doing, you're able to stay positive.

When we entered teaching, we could have had idealistic dreams. Maybe we wanted to share our love of a particular subject or make a contribution towards creating a more humane society. On this point, Mühlfeit states that leaders must love what they do. We need to keep those dreams alive; they energise us and keep us positive. When we're positive, we add quality not only to our own lives but that of others too.



Survive with a positive smile the hectic pace of school life as the year sprints to an end! It's a little early but may your Festive Season be happy, relaxing and spiritually enriching together with family and friends.

Sincerely

Richard Hayward

Reference

Mühlfeit, J & Costi, M 2017. *The positive leader: how energy and happiness fuel top-performing teams*. New York: Pearson.



This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.

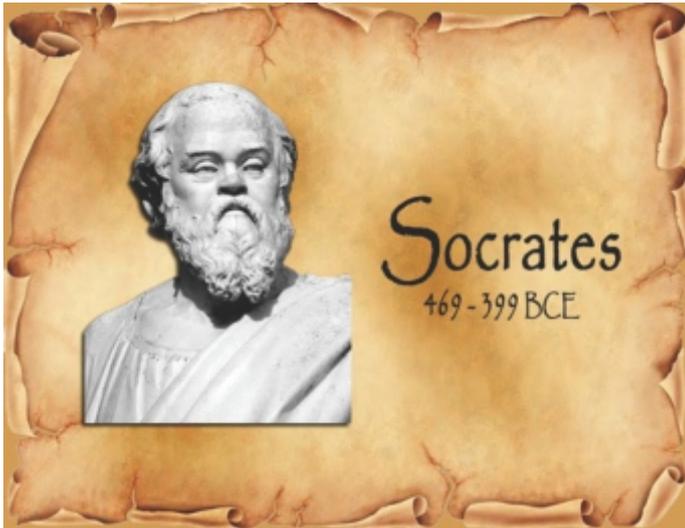


MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet
EVERY SWIPE COUNTS

Do you know who you are?

The unexamined life is not worth knowing. Socrates

Recently at a Johannesburg school, I noticed a two-word quote of Socrates. The two words were pinned on noticeboards and put on wall posters throughout the school. Those two words were, "Know thyself." The staff believed in the innate leadership potential of every learner. The starting point to nurturing that leadership was to know oneself.



When you know yourself and act accordingly, you'll be more open, empathic and influential. Mühlfeit (2017:3) suggests these areas for self-knowledge:

- What you're good at
- Your deficiencies
- Your successes
- Your mistakes
- Your motivations
- Your preferences
- Your attitudes
- Your effect on others
- The learning gaps you need to fill

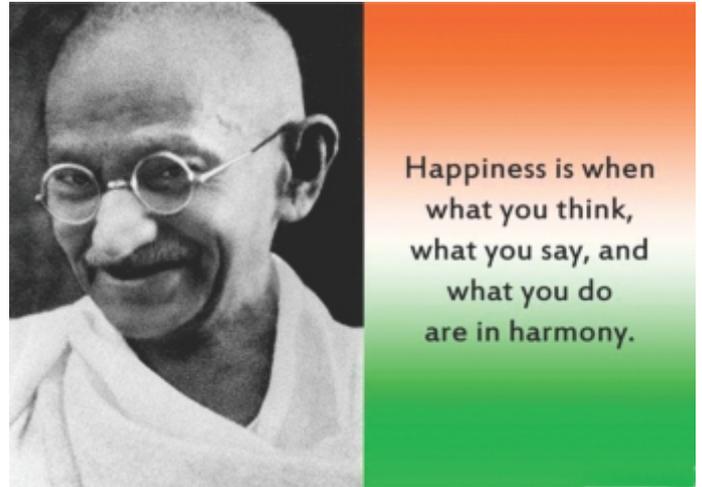
Authentic, true leaders are change agents. They believe that there are better ways of doing things. They want to lead that change. Before doing so, they should remind themselves of Mahatma Gandhi's often-quoted advice, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Too often leaders want to change the world before making the changes needed first of themselves.

The most successful leaders know their signature strengths. They focus on their strong areas which grow their sense of self-worth and positivity. Success builds on success.

Yet the same high-achieving leaders should accept that there are areas for personal growth. Leaders give them attention but not obsessively so.

Think of a school where there are five teams of a particular sporting code and five coaches. Each coach has a team and

amongst themselves they agree which coach will be best suited to manage the Open team. Lead in those areas of one's strengths; let others lead in theirs.



Such a mind frame will make you even more positive as you reach even higher levels of excellence. Colleagues will also become more positive and excel. By letting others grow in their areas of strength, you'll be creating a more enthusiastic and happier work environment.

Teachers working to their strengths

1. Look forward to going to school
2. Have more positive than negative interactions with children and colleagues
3. Treat others better
4. Tell family and friends that they're at a good school
5. Achieve more on a daily basis
6. Have more creative, innovative and positive moments

Adapted: Rath, T 2007. *StrengthsFinder 2.0* New York: Gallup Press.



Knowing our character strengths and personalities

People who have the opportunity to use their strengths at work are not only more materially successful in terms of productivity and performance; they're happier and healthier too.

Jan Mühlfeit

Have you ever been in a situation where you've been so absorbed that time seems to fly? When this happens, we're highly energised and working at peak performance. We're working in our areas of personal strengths. These times of high positive energy have been described by psychologists as being in the "flow".

The more that we work in areas of our personal strengths, the more we will experience "flow". We'll perform that much better.

Ways to measure our strengths and personality profiles are to use self-assessment tools. Two famous ones are:

1 VIA (Values in Action) survey

The VIA (Values in Action) survey is a free assessment tool that focuses on your main character strengths rather than your skills or interests. It focuses on your core personality characteristics that energise you to become involved. This survey is the only survey on personal strengths that's free, online and is psychometrically valid.

More than four million people worldwide have done the survey which takes about 10 to 15 minutes. The classification was created by the internationally renowned psychologists Martin Seligman and the late Christopher Peterson. The survey looks at 24 character traits.

The 24 character traits fit into these six core values:

- Courage
- Humanity
- Justice
- Temperance
- Transcendence
- Wisdom

Once the survey has been done, the free three-page report findings can be downloaded. If you would like to get an anonymous, free and scientifically-validated ranking of your own character strengths, I personally did the survey and recommend it.

The questionnaire is set in simple, straight-forward English. Yet you might prefer answering in another language. The survey has been translated into more than thirty languages including Afrikaans. Sadly it has not been translated into any African languages.

There are two formats of the questionnaire: one for adults and one for young people (ages 10 to 17).

For more information, go to www.viacharacter.org

2 The Big Five Personality Traits

Modern-day psychology describes a person's personality according to five broad traits. There's no judgement as to which end of the continuum is better. Also, it's unlikely that anybody is at the extreme of any of the scales. Most people are most likely to fit in somewhere between the two polar ends.

the Big Five

extraverted-----introverted
open to new experiences-----closed-minded
conscientious-----disorganized
agreeable-----disagreeable
neuroticism-----emotional stability

understanding the five-factor model
of personality assessment

There have been many theories on our personality dimensions. Gordon Allport, the famous North American psychologist, had a list of 4000 personality traits. Yet the 'Big Five' personality-factor theory has received worldwide recognition. Research done in more than 50 cultures has proved the validity of 'The Big Five' in describing personality.

Here are bullet point descriptions of each of the dimensions of personality:

1 Extraverted vs introverted

People who rate high on **extraversion** tend to:

- Like being the centre of attention
- Have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances
- Feel energised by being around others
- Inclined to speak before they think

People who rate high on **introversion** tend to:

- Dislike being the centre of attention
- Prefer solitude
- Feel energised by working on their own
- Dislike making small talk
- Think carefully before speaking

2 Open vs closed

People who score high on **openness** tend to:

- Be very creative
- Enjoy and seek opportunities for change and variety
- Focus on tackling new challenges

People who score high on being closed tend to:

- Resist new ideas
- Dislike change
- Do not enjoy new things

3 Conscientious vs disorganised

People who are rated as being **conscientious** tend to:

- Pay attention to details
- Spend time preparing
- Like working to set schedules
- Finish important tasks right away

People who are rated as being **disorganised** tend to:

- Dislike structure and schedules
- Procrastinate on doing important tasks
- Fail to complete tasks on time

4 Agreeable vs disagreeable

People who score high on being **agreeable** tend to:

- Care for others
- Feel empathy and concern for others
- Show affection and are interested in other people

People who are seen as being **disagreeable** tend to:

- Take little interest in others
- Don't care about the feelings of others
- Are unconcerned about raising issues that may upset relationships
- Insult and belittle others

5 Neuroticism vs emotionally stable

People who are high in **neuroticism** tend to:

- Be very stressed
- Get upset easily
- Experience dramatic mood swings
- Feel anxious

People who are high in **emotional stability** tend to:

- Be very relaxed
- Rarely feel depressed or sad
- Deal well with stress
- Don't worry too much



Which Mix of the Big Five Personality Traits Are You?

What factors determine our personality? Two are identified: biological and environmental. Biological factors would include hereditary factors such as the genes received from our parents. Our physical appearance and physique impacts on how others see us. Having good motor skills in sport and strong intellectual abilities impact positively not only on yourself but also the way that others see you.

Environmental factors impact hugely on our personality. Our family and friends influence our behaviour. The level of education that we receive and our socio-economic status affect our personality.

A South African example would be the two-parent home where both parents have a tertiary education and send their children to first-world

schools. Compare this to a home where granny stopped going to school in Grade Seven and single-handedly brings up her grandchildren. They all live in a shack in an informal settlement where the children attend a poorly-resourced, overcrowded school. Such starkly different life experiences for the two sets of children would impact on their personalities.

Longitudinal studies have proven that our five big personality traits tend to remain the same over most of our adulthood. Yet Kendra Cherry makes the interesting observation, "As people age, they tend to become less extraverted, less neurotic and less open to experience. Agreeableness and conscientiousness, on the other hand, tend to increase as people grow older."

Free assessments can be done online. Google 'Big Five Personality Test'. One such site is <http://www.truity.com>. A three-page result report can be downloaded.

Any assessment report is not to be viewed in absolute terms. The report only gives a 'big picture' snapshot of one's personality. Life experiences can, for example, make huge changes to one's personality. Gordon Allport makes the important statement, "Any theory that regards personality as stable, fixed or invariable is wrong."

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Poole, J 2011. *Leadership: discover techniques to suit your personality*. Warwickshire: In easy steps.

<https://www.truity.com/personality-test>



Back numbers of Quality Education News (QEN) can be downloaded at either www.saqi.co.za (click on 'Quality Education') or www.MySchool.co.za (click on 'Beneficiaries').

Dr Richard Hayward, the editor, is a former headmaster of two public schools. He does school leadership and management workshops across the country. Eleven of the workshops are SACE-endorsed and earn CPTD points. For more details, kindly contact him on 011 888 3262 or rdhayward@yahoo.com



One day in 2006 I made a phone call to the South African Quality Institute (SAQI) in Pretoria. I was somewhat nervous about making the call. Yet I reassured myself by saying that the worse that could happen is someone telling me, "No thanks" or more gently, "We'll be in contact with you" and you never hear from them again.

My humble request was that SAQI sponsor a quarterly newsletter with a focus on how to promote quality education in South Africa. I was delighted with the immediate positive response. The management team at the time consisted of Dr Michael Carruthers, Rosaria de Peniche and Vuyi Segooa.

The newsletter would be titled *Quality Education News*. Woolworths kindly agreed to be a social responsibility partner in this project. The first issue went out in 2006. The distribution was a few hundred and most readers were from Gauteng.

This issue of QEN will reach thousands and we still have our faithful Gauteng readers. Yet we also readers across South Africa, Africa and

around the world. I thank our readers for their ongoing support and those folk who put the newsletters onto their various websites for cascade distribution.

A big Thank You goes to Damien Kelly at Woolworths for the ongoing support and putting QEN on their MySchool website.

Your editor is 'graphic-design' challenged. Fortunately, Aubrey Jansen is a highly regarded graphic designer who does an outstanding professional job with each issue. Vanessa du Toit at the SAQI head office does many administrative tasks for each issue. She's forever friendly and always calm no matter what the mini-crisis might be!

Paul Harding is the Executive Director of SAQI. His ongoing contribution towards spreading the Quality Education message in South Africa but also internationally, is exceptional. Without his support, this publication wouldn't exist. My immense gratitude goes to you, Paul. To you, the reader, thanks for being a Supporter of Quality Education.