

The Excellent 11
by Ron Clark

Ron Clark is a teacher's teacher. This is the follow-up to his New York Times bestseller *The Essential 55, A Guideline for Rules in the Classroom*. In this book, Ron describes 11 qualities of excellence; enthusiasm, adventure, creativity, reflection, balance, compassion, confidence, humor, common sense, appreciation and resilience. Funny thing is that sounds like another book I read recently, Daniel Pink's *A Whole New Mind* which talks about design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meeting.

Here are a few insights that I gathered from the book:

- “When you are dealing with children, above all else you must have passion.” I think the same thing applies to when you are dealing with grown-ups. Fact is, I don't think there is much difference. Fact is, sometimes I feel like an overpaid babysitter.
- “Challenge your students to go beyond their expectations. Give them tough assignments to show that they can succeed.” The same applies to employees. Give them a tough assignment, give them support and congratulate their success.
- “A teachers and parents we need to make sure they are in an environment where they feel that they can be themselves, laugh, and be free. The best way...to do this is to lead by example...”
- “I gave you that responsibility because I know that you will do an outstanding job.” This is a statement made by a teacher to Ron when he was young. He talked about how much of an impact it had on his confidence. In my book *Victims, Villains and Heroes* we talk about coax, encourage and inspire. This is an example of encouragement.
- “...If you wait until you have enough money to travel, then you never will.” This can be said about anything. Including the various aspects of how we manage our employees. What are we waiting for?
- Concentrate on vocabulary. Ron talks about the impact it can have as readers and students. I believe it can also have an equivalent impact in the workplace. To what degree are all of your employees familiar with the lexicon in your industry? Do you have a vocabulary sheet and hold contests?
- Reflect on growth. Ron has his students do an annual collage which they end up treasuring for a lifetime. I have seen companies go through similar efforts and cannot tell you how cherished these books are. How have you reflected on your company's history? On your past employees, their challenges and their celebrations?
- “My parents always did a good job of giving realistic punishments, and when they set it, I knew they meant it. At the same time my parents never yelled or said negative things towards me.” Wouldn't we all want to have parents...and a manager like this?

- “Create an environment from day one that sets the tone in your classroom.” The same thing goes for your employees. Get very clear about the rules and how you intend to communicate. If you are an *HR That Works* user, take a look at the *Checklist of First Impressions* in the personnel forms area.
- Teach respect, and compassion by having students interview elders and others in the community. Why have your employees interview customers and clients? How does the level of service they offer affect the rest of that person’s day? What are the real challenges that our clients and customers are facing? During your meetings, take pictures of your customers and clients and put them around the workplace. And in your annual collage.
- “In order to make children to feel more comfortable it is best to do whatever it takes to refrain from showing irritation, annoyance or aggravation.” Again, the same applies to managing adults. Sure we can show somebody that we are annoyed or irritated or aggravated, but what will the impact be on that person? Will they work for us simply out of fear as opposed to being driven towards service? Does that mean you will have to be constantly irritated, annoyed or aggravated to make sure that things get done around you?
- “Students need to see their work in the hall, on the door, on bulletin boards, and all over the classroom. Their achievements need to be showcased and highlighted wherever possible.” Guess what, same goes for employees. I will never forget a formal wear manufacturer who after meeting with me realized that while he had done a good job of creating connections in his showrooms, his workforce, some of whom had been with him for 25 years, were almost completely disconnected from the work they had done. Not one of them had ever seen one of their formal pieces in action. Now he takes pictures of the clients in the formal wear, blows them up life-size and spreads it around his manufacturing plants. At the same time, you can also encourage parents to bring one or two of their kid’s fine schoolwork so it can be displayed on the wall.
- “The best way to build confidence in students is just by telling them how much ability you see in them.” Again, this is what I mean by encouragement. Find the good in them. Perhaps you can show you have more confidence in them than they do in themselves.
- “The most wasted of all days is one without laughter” by E. E. Cummings (1894-1962). Simply my favorite quote in the book.
- “Whether you are a teacher or parent, it is never a good idea to make a decision when you are angry.” And every one of us knows this. The point is to have a technique to disconnect from the upset. Take a walk, sit down, breathe deep, hum your favorite song but don’t react out of anger.”
- “At school I talk with the students about how important it is to go out of your way to show appreciation to those who help you. I point out how the custodians are working hard every day to make the school the best possible environment for them to learn in. In order to thank them, I have the students bring in drinks, chips, and covered dishes from home, and at lunch time we spread table clothes on the desk, set out the food, turn down the lights, put on some soft music and hang a banner that reads, “We appreciate you”. While we are at lunch we ask the custodians to come to our room to enjoy the special meal prepared just for them. I can not tell you how much it means to them that we would go out of our way to thank them for all that they do. Surprisingly, I find that my trashcans are emptied more often, and on several occasions I have walked in to find that night my room had been swept, mopped and cleaned. We weren’t looking for any extra treatment for our room, but it was nice to see what the custodians also thought of what we did for them that they wanted to show us gratitude in return.” A long quote, but you get the point. Instead of

waiting until the custodians strike for higher wages, complaining about how unfair circumstances are, throw them a party and acknowledge their current efforts. How do you have you employees help to acknowledge your support relationships?

- “Sometimes we have to realize that by taking on too many duties, we are hurting our students and using time that would normally be devoted to them.” One of the challenges I find that we face in our “hero roles” is the propensity to over commit. Learn to say no without feeling bad about it.
- “You have to make pit stops along the way to refuel if you want to finish the race.” Whether you are teaching students or managing employees there is no doubt about the stress involved. If you are not spending time to recharge yourself you’ll end up burned out and bitter.

Conclusion

As you may have guessed by now I see many parallels in how we teach and raise children and how we teach and manage employees. Ron’s *Excellent 11* should be considered as a resource for both work and home.