6 Habits of a Highly Effective Tutor
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Introduction

Tutoring services are an integral part of the academic fabric which enables the students to excel in their studies. The best practices of tutoring services are those that provide the necessary ingredients for the student and also create a synergistic process to the learning environment. I have visited countless tutoring programs and interviewed tutors as well as students who were in the tutoring center and have synthesized these observations into the six habits of highly effective tutors. These habits include being proactive, assessing the student, developing a working alliance, modeling appropriate behavior, matching learning styles with tutor styles, and communicating effectively.

When a tutor has acquired all of these habits, the effect is amazing. The students meet or surpass their own goals, their self-esteem increases, the tutor feels a sense of pride, and these positive feelings ripple to the rest of the academic and home environments. Students feel they are successful, which is defined as a positive feeling built upon knowledge, personal interaction and a shared sense of a desire to excel.

Highly Effective Habits

The first habit is to be proactive. When a student is assigned to you, make immediate contact. Get a phone number as well as an active e-mail address. Contact the person first by phone. If the person is not there, leave a message or write them an e-mail to introduce yourself, with a call back number as well as time(s) that you can possibly meet. If the person answers either the phone or the e-mail, establish a meeting with them at a mutually convenient time. At your first meeting, introduce yourself, the subject matter, and then ask questions. As a tutor, it is more about the student and less about you, so questions are the key!

The second habit is to assess the student's academic strengths and weaknesses, specifically in the class you are tutoring. This assessment should include a learning style inventory (e.g., David A. Kolb's Learning Style Inventory), a study skills inventory (e.g., LASSI), a trait assessment inventory (e.g., Multidimensional Retention Questionnaire

– MRQ.v4), self-regulation Self-Regulatory Skills Measurement Questionnaire (SRSMQ) and finally, to determine their knowledge base regarding your particular subject. Ask the student why they are coming for tutoring. Is it remediation, supplemental instruction, the desire to just pass the class or do they have a desire to excel? This first meeting is crucial in that it will set the tone for future meetings. Future interactions, how you deliver the subject matter, and where you begin within the text, is all accomplished as a result of this first meeting.

The third habit is to develop a working relationship with the student. This relationship should be one that mutually supports the desired end product or outcome. This relationship can include: getting to know the student's likes and dislikes as well as to determine his/her self-esteem level, anxiety level, self-efficacy level and their locus of control (internal or external), all from the results of the MRQ.v4 instrument. This third habit enables the student and tutor to feel more comfortable within the tutor–tutee relationship. Both are working toward the same end—success in the particular class. This mutuality therefore supports the relationship and simultaneously enhances the learning process.

The fourth habit is to model appropriate learning behavior. This modeling is critical to the learning process. The tutor should address the subject matter in a format most conducive to the learning style of the student (again back to the second habit or assessment). I have found that students who are in an at-risk mode (not doing well academically) have higher anxiety, lower self-efficacy, lower self-esteem, and a higher external locus of control than students not at risk. The tutor who practices the fourth habit, sees a shift in the anxiety of the student. The tutor should also be aware of how the student interacts with his or her academic world through control of self-regulation. According to Franzoi (2003), this theory contends that, "through self-awareness, people compare their behavior to a standard, and if there is discrepancy, they work to reduce it, if they have good self-regulation." Yang (1993), Zimmerman (1989, 1996), and Winnie (1995) found that high regulatory students tend to learn better under learner control than under program control, while the reverse is true for low self-regulatory students. It was also found that high self-regulatory skilled students learned better than low and that high self-regulatory students are able to monitor, evaluate, or manage their learning effectively during learner-controlled instruction with embedded questions. It was also found that high self-regulatory

students manage their learning and time efficiently and that low self-regulatory students are generally poor judges of their comprehension and often end instruction prematurely.

The fifth habit of the highly effective tutor is to match their tutoring style with the students' learning style. Learning style refers to the highly individualized ways we take in, process, and organize information. Our preferred learning style is the natural channel we use to learn most quickly, easily, and effectively. According to Dunn (2000) there are four basic learning styles:
Visual: The student works best when able to see, watch, read and view the information.

Auditory: The student works best when able to hear, speak, discuss and think out loud.

Tactual / Kinesthetic: The student works best when able to move and do things – become physically involved in the activity.

When a tutor introduces the materials in the format best suited to the student learning style, learning is enhanced. If possible, the tutor should provide the information in as many learning modes as possible. Once the information is provided to the student, the tutor has an opportunity to allow the student to reflect the information back—teach the teacher. For example, once a section is completed, the tutor may ask the student to provide feedback or instruct back to the tutor (remember when one teaches, two learn). Using all facets of learning styles, it is beneficial to encourage a student to return tutoring, thereby, learning as they instruct.

The sixth habit is to communicate effectively. The old cliché of communicate, communicate and communicate is very appropriate. Students who are anxious often do not attend to instructions very well. Realizing this, the tutor must convey information through verbal and non-verbal means and also conduct a status check often. People learn through writing, speaking, reading, and listening. Over 53% of learning takes place through listening. Remember the old Native American proverb:
>   You were born with one mouth and two ears
>   so you should listen twice as much as you speak.

Speaking is not the only method of interacting with others. Body language, non-verbal interaction, is also critical to communication. When the most effective tutor communicates, he or she asks if the student understands the material and conveys interest through the use of appropriate body language. Lean in, have good eye contact, and show you are interested in the student's success. If the student replies in the affirmative (they understand the information), the tutor then should ask for feedback, such as to ask the student to apply the information to an issue or problem of their choice.

Conclusion

Tutors who exhibit these six habits experience the most success, in that their student does better academically, and that the student feels better in that they have an academic anchor within the college or university. The synergy of all six habits results in a shift in the learning milieu. Retention increases, and learning takes place. The administration is content that they have retained students who were, perhaps, in jeopardy of failing out of college, and the professor feels as though students are engaged in the learning process! Tutoring can cause a shift of negative feelings to positive feelings, providing a sense of positive personal interaction, increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-regulation! Success is achieved through the synergy of tutoring!

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