

INFLUENCE AND IMPACTS:

BY DAVID WW JONES

At the national conferences for the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) and National Association of Agricultural Educators—held in Las Vegas, Nevada, last December—I asked a room of potential association leaders if they had ever thought about how they got to be where they are today. Seldom do we take the time to sit, think and reflect about our lives and all that is happening within them. As we discussed the various reasons for becoming a professional educator, it became clear that the main reason individuals entered into the education profession was that someone in their lives had influenced them in such an extreme manner that it led them to enter the vocation of education.

It is evident that there are leaders within our profession. Individuals have proven their leadership ability by involvement in their schools, churches, local community organizations and national affiliations. These same individuals have shown their passion for their profession as we can see from the students they serve. The question becomes: what next? Is settling for the status quo acceptable? Is it okay to be a good teacher within the confines of the classroom and nothing more? Is it acceptable to be active and involved in your school and community but nothing more? As each of us reflects upon how we got to where we are today, it becomes evident that the reason for our success is due in large part to the influence and impact of people in our past.

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Do You Know Yours?

As the discussion unfolded in the Las Vegas conference room, these leaders noted that people in their lives at one point or another had seen in them potential, and had encouraged their involvement in clubs and organizations that would promote their budding skills. This encouragement was just the push or nudge needed for these individuals to explore a potential career in education. The group pointed out that several of them had entered the education profession because they had been told they didn't have what it took to be an educator. Negative influencers in our lives are often just as motivational or powerful as positive ones.

Reflecting on the Influence, Impact You Have on Lives

It is important to think about our influence and impact on the lives of others. Who have we influenced in our lives so far, what impact have we made, and what about the impacts made by the people we have influenced? As professional educators, where does our impact begin? Is it that moment we step into the classroom and begin the activity? Is it when grades are assigned at the end of the term? Or is it graduation day when we send our students out into the "real" world? Or does our influence begin the moment we wake up in the morning? Does each moment possess the opportunity to influence and impact the lives we come into contact with—whether it is our students, our own children, spouses or significant others? Where does our influence end? Is it pos-

sible to see the end? As each of us reflects upon the students we have taught, we can think about the success stories. We know about the students who were told by other teachers that they would never succeed. We know about the students who had failed over and over and finally found a place to be successful within *our* classroom walls. Each of us has had a student who experienced for the first time the realization that he or she can achieve. Now each of these students is out in the world influencing and impacting others. They are now doing for others what you have done for them. Your influence and impact continues.

As one thinks about influence and impacts, it is often thought about in grandiose terms. Questions such as, "How can I change the world?" or "What difference can I make?" come to mind. But what about the simpler questions? Questions like:

- What would one more day in July mean to a child getting ready to go back to school?
- What does one kiss mean to a bride on her wedding day?
- What would one more minute mean to a person who just missed his or her ride?
- What would one sentence like, "I Love You," mean to a World Trade Center Survivor, or to the family of someone who didn't survive?
- If we each made a new acquaintance a day for one year, we would have 365 more contacts, so how would this

relate to six degrees of separation?

- What would one thank-you card mean to someone I appreciate?
- Is what I'm doing what's best for our students?

Have you thought about the power you possess over your daily life or the lives of others? Each of us has the power and ability to determine what kind of day we will have. But something we seldom realize is that we can also determine what kind of day others may have. We influence and impact all individuals we come into contact with every day.

Make an Impact: Become a Leader!

As educational professionals, we ask our students to get involved. We push our students to take on leadership roles and to step out of their comfort zone and take risks. However, do we take our own advice? Professional education organizations are in dire need of individuals to take on leadership roles. ACTE recently formed a Leadership Development Task Force to address this need. ACTE is not alone. Organizations at the local, state and national levels are all concerned about the future leadership of their organizations. We push our students to get involved in leadership roles, yet we don't do it ourselves. It is imperative for the future success of our organizations that we take the opportunities presented to us and step up to serve our organizations. As influencers, we must ourselves model the behavior that we expect of our students.

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Service to our organizations can be demonstrated in a myriad of ways; involvement in committees, executive boards as well as officer positions are a few examples of how a person could take a leadership role. Isn’t what is good for our students good for us as well? It is time to develop our leaders of tomorrow today. It is time to remember how the people in our lives have influenced and impacted us and how we have the opportunity to do the same. It is our time to make a dif-

ference. It is our turn to give back to the profession. It is our turn to do for someone what someone once did for us.

As we are continuously reminded that the United States is in a global competition with other countries regarding education, research and technology, we must not forget that success is not only measured in numbers of patents attained or test results; we must realize that success can be measured in many different ways. We influence not only our students’ cognitive thinking, but we also promote their creativity, imagination and ingenuity. One’s greatest strength is the ability to influence and impact the lives of others. The challenge we face is to have a positive influence and impact on those lives. As we become the leaders of tomorrow today, we must realize it is important for us to take on the task of becoming influential and

impactful to others. We must strive to support and embrace the “spirit” of our students. As we assist our 21st century students in becoming strategic thinkers with an ever-changing knowledge base, it is also important to build relationships with our students that foster and promote an “I can” attitude. That is why we became educators. That is what we do! **T**

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About the author:

Vicki Wiederkehr brings over 11 years of educational experience and entrepreneurship passion to the audience of educators. She successfully runs her own e-commerce business, cardinalsellingservices.com, and writes books to young adult audiences and adult audiences as well. “Cardinal Rules” of being entrepreneurial is not only used in high schools but also in workforce development programs. It is also available through ACTE’s online bookstore.

“This book is a ‘must read’ for students and young adults who are approaching decisions on their future education choices and how to pay for them. Besides providing a roadmap for starting and succeeding in an e-bay business, it provides thoughtful guidance on how to acquire the necessary life skills which are so essential to success in any business or career.” - James D Edwards, Member of Indiana State Board of Education

“Vicki, this information is GOLD to our students. Thank you!” - Isaac Dorrell, CT Teacher, Wawasee High School, Indiana

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