

HOW TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE WORLD OF WORK:

A FORUM DISCUSSION

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This forum discussion addresses the university's role and responsibilities for preparing students for all dimensions of the world of work: change, balancing, family, work and church callings, etc.

CHANGES IN THE WORKPLACE

Scott: What is your perception of the way the ethos of the workplace is changing? How do and will those changes impact our students entering the world of work and our efforts to prepare them for that shift?

Kim: In nursing, change in the workplace is largely driven by the nursing shortage and its relationship to technology and hands-on care. As there are fewer nurses and more technology, high-touch nurses may experience stress or additional burn-out. Because these major changes are happening in our profession, nurses will have to be prepared to be life-long learners, adjusting to change, change, and more change.

Bruce: A shift we see in business has to do with the attitudes in the work force. For example, there certainly seems to be a trend away from employee loyalty [to a company]. It may be because of what they observed in parents: layoffs, etc. A recent *Fortune* article explained the challenges involved with managing a generation of "I want it all now" workers. Our students are no doubt thinking that same way and may not have the patience of the previous generation who understood you had to prove worth before the rewards came. Students need to learn the importance of being innovative, proactive, and "adding value wherever they serve," to quote President Eyring.¹ They need to be able to be problem-framers, problem-solvers, and solution-finders. President Clark refers to these skills as "habits of mind."

Bob: I think a key point in every field is that there *is* change. Change is absolutely going to continue. We've got to teach maybe not so much what is going to be in tomorrow's system, but that

our students need to recognize it and adapt to it, whatever it is.

Guy: One way students can anticipate change and adapt to it is through the internship program. As you know, BYU–Idaho requires in almost every case that students complete an internship before they graduate. One of the things that we see often is students bringing back to the classroom the new perspective of that internship experience and saying to both the teacher and the fellow students, “I understand what the book says, but my experience with this company was not quite that way. It was this way.”

Ralph: Typically the key message we must communicate to each other and to our students is that things are not the way they used to be. I also think part of that message is that we have got to help our students get past the mentality of “tell me what to do” or “tell me what to do to get an A.” They must know that they’ve got to be part of the change, and we can’t tell them—as frustrating as it will be to some of them—exactly what [their roles] will be. For example, one of the things I’m seeing is that the traditional route to teacher certification is changing. Sure, some of our students complete their student teaching, and decide, “Well, maybe I don’t want to be a teacher.” But we are also finding that there are many people who realize they would like to be teachers and have never thought of it before. So education has to create alternate ways of becoming a teacher, not necessarily through the traditional college route.

THE LEARNING MODEL’S IMPACT ON OUR STUDENTS

Scott: You’re making the point that institutions as well as individuals must be adaptable. Let’s shift slightly to the relationship between change and the current campus discussion of the Learning Model. One of the purposes of the Learning Model is to help us as individual teachers as well as a university be more adaptable.

Bruce: I think that adaptability to change begins with a commitment to live the gospel no matter where students and graduates are or what they are doing. If they start with that commitment as a foundation, they will be on the right path. Living worthy lives and trusting in the Lord will put them in places and situations where the Lord can mold their lives and guide

their paths. Understanding and applying the principles of preparation and lifting others, being lifelong learners also will keep them valuable to any employer.

Bob: I think that the Learning Model is a real step forward in that it teaches us and our students that we have to be proactive; we've got to step forward and act rather than being acted upon. Employers want someone who can go forward with initiative.

Guy: The Learning Model provides an avenue for our students to be assertive. There are many students on this campus that are hesitant, who haven't been out in the work force. They may be tentative or shy. I think the Learning Model helps at least in one dimension to provide our students an additional skill set—an ability to succeed when it comes to interacting with people off this campus, not just in the classroom.

Scott: We see in the Learning Model how the principle of collaborative learning can help students reach out. Sometimes students think “*my* studying, *my* taking the test, *my* work,” but the Learning Model encourages more interaction and more team work.

Ralph: One Learning Model principle states that “learners and teachers at BYU–Idaho understand that true teaching is done by and with the Holy Ghost.” We can point out to our students how, throughout history, the Holy Ghost has prompted innovation and change: Columbus in 1492, the time of the Reformation, and leading up to the King James Bible. So much truth flows from heaven. Elder Bednar taught that inspiration from the Holy Ghost can't happen in times when we're too busy and rushed. Sometimes we need that stillness to be inspired, to invent, to create, to be productive.

TEACHING STUDENTS BALANCE

Scott: Your comment makes me think of the question of balance, very much a concern to our students and our graduates. How can we teach students to balance, being fully aware of how rigorous church callings and family responsibilities are in addition to the demands of school? If students achieve that balance and cultivate the Holy Ghost in their personal lives maybe when they go out to the workplace they can receive revelation there as well.

- Bruce: In my office I have an article entitled, “Balance is Bunk.” It debunks the myth that you can have it all and still have a life. It’s just not so. Elder Bednar was often asked about balance in life and he essentially said, “It’s not going to happen.” There will be times when professional demands require significant time. The same for Church assignments. The same for family commitments. The key is making the most of the time we have. My counsel to students is to focus on covenants. If we ever find that things in life become more important than keeping our covenants, it is *then* we have our lives out of balance. I think Elder Oaks offered some excellent counsel in the recent general conference on this topic. We can fool ourselves into thinking we have our family lives in balance if we have our children “anxiously engaged.” But, as Elder Oaks taught, just because something is good, does not make it better or best.
- Guy: In internships students can have an exercise in balance. When a married student goes on an internship, we encourage the spouse to accompany the intern. We want the intern to have a good 8-5 experience in the workplace, but we hope for a positive broader experience as well. We ask, “What is going on in the evening with the spouse? What about the weekends? How will you be involved in the church in that community?” We believe one way to judge the success of an internship experience lies in a spouse being able to say, “I met good neighbors and I met good Church people. Our experience was not just my spouse’s job, but we had a well-rounded experience for the entire family.”
- Scott: Are the sponsors of the internships pretty much in synch with your thinking? Are they glad to have the spouses of the interns, or do they just look at it as 8-5 responsibility?
- Guy: They want students to accept an offer, so they want a win-win situation. Part of their job depends on the retention—of turning the internship into a full-time opportunity. Involving the entire family in a balanced experience helps the hiring rate.
- Bob: The interns I train are more successful if they can have a balanced experience. If the spouse is somewhat negative or want to go somewhere else, it can become a tough situation. But if they can become acquainted [with others in the area] and no longer have the fear of the unknown, then it makes

a huge difference. If the spouse is not happy, then I can guarantee that the [intern] is not happy.

Scott: Is student teaching analogous to the internship on this point, Ralph?

Ralph: I think that's one of the strengths of our education program. Rexburg does not give a real-life student teaching experience because it's such a micro-culture that isn't replicated in other parts of the nation. But we send students to Las Vegas and Utah, which is still a larger population than Rexburg, up to Seattle and several different outposts for student teaching. [These other locations] are very positive; they're very real and the experience is sometimes very rewarding. In fact, oftentimes, our married couples want to stay in the area and not move but when they do, I think it is a positive experience.

FAMILY AND WORK: LEGITIMATE EXCUSES FOR STUDENTS?

Scott: We sometimes have students who believe or say "I expect you as a teacher to accept less than my best work because I work full time, I have three kids, and I'm an elder's quorum or relief society president." What should our attitudes and words be to such students?

Bruce: Now *this* is an interesting question! I heard much more of this kind of talk formerly than I do now. My response then, and now, would be: "I am glad you have made the good choices of marriage, children, and that you are active in the Church. However, my class has certain requirements and it would not be fair or realistic to compromise or lessen those requirements based on the individual circumstances of each class member. If the demands of my class don't fit with the demands on your time outside of school, perhaps you should consider taking my class at another time."

Now, having said that, I always try to accommodate students who have unique needs. I think of this statement from Elder Richard L. Evans:

No matter how good an excuse may be, no reason for failure or defection is ever so satisfying to ourselves or to anyone else as is actually doing what we should do, or delivering on the date that something is due. Excuses are at best a second-choice substitute....

No matter how ingenious our excuses are, they don't cancel commitments, or justify our failures, or relieve us from answering before the highest bar, unless they are founded on real, valid reasons—and not merely on our comfort or convenience.²

Ralph: I think we can show a little bit of empathy when our students are under pressure. But primarily we should teach them. When I was an undergraduate, I had a conversation with the man who invented Teflon—he was my major chemistry professor. He said, “You think you are busy now as a student. Wait until you have a real job and then you’ll find what busy is all about.” One of our principles is that learners and teachers at BYU–Idaho will love, serve, and teach one another. We have to [teach] that. That is part of what we do and we will do it all our lives. So, welcome to the world of being an adult.

Guy: Our students are competing with other students from around the country who have paid the price academically. I heard President Clark speak last week about getting into graduate school, and Sister Clark said her husband got through graduate school at Harvard by making the conscientious decision early on that he was not going to put in as a much time as some of his colleagues were but he was going to find a balance between his family and his church callings. She said the key is that he was actively engaged throughout every day and allowed the right amount of time academically to fit in with the rest of his life. We have great students here. I know they study hard, but the fact of the matter is, again, in today’s competition they are going to have to compete with others. Balancing is not easy.

Kim: We should encourage them to rise above the mark. We should require them to. All or most of us received our education while working, many full time. I believe we need to have compassion on our students, but it is my experience that students can meet high academic expectations and still have time for other responsibilities.

Marva: I think it’s important to keep high academic standards and to require students to perform. Sometimes, in our efforts to be helpful and kind, we tend to coddle a little bit. I think that one of the best things we can do is to have a standard and require them to measure up to that standard. I love that the university leadership is insisting that students come to class prepared, not knowing if they’re going to be called on or

have to participate in some way. It is important for students to take responsibility for how they come to class and for their own learning.

Scott: Conventional wisdom suggests that there's only so much time and if you have to split it three ways—among school, church, and family—there won't be enough time. But there's another way of thinking about this. As the bishop of a married student ward, I told my members that I believe if they will take care of their church and family responsibilities they will be empowered academically by the Holy Ghost. I believe that somehow the Spirit can stretch time to help the worthy.

Bob: I've asked a lot of very successful CEOs who have visited classes on campus about balance. In most cases there was sacrifice made by the wife and the family, particularly in the beginning, to get where they were going. I think a lot of kids shy away from the fact that they're going to have to work 12 or 14 hours a day to begin with to get where they need to be. They just say, "Well, I'm not going to do that." I think in some job opportunities you are going to have to do that in the beginning because you are going to have to make the sacrifice. I think that most people who are successful have paid the price.

Guy: You will not be able to achieve perfect balance every day. You may have to look at overall balance, over a year, over two- or three-year period, maybe even over ten years.

Ralph: They need to feel inspired by the Holy Ghost about which sacrifices can be made, and we need to have faith that the sacrifice is worth making. I think that's part of what we need to give students is the faith that certain sacrifices are worth making.

Marva: I think we need to train, in some ways, our female students what it means to be supportive of their husbands. If they are allowed the privilege of being home with family, they need to take on a lot of responsibility and to be sharp and able to be a real asset to their husbands rather than a liability. And if [a married couple] will work together and the woman can share those responsibilities heavily, it does make it possible for the couple to accomplish their goals.

WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE AND EDUCATION

Scott: Does this go back to our question about the changing of the ethos? What about the women who want to go into the workplace?

Ralph: My classes are filled with young women and very few young men. When I look at the statistics in education of how many students are educated and prepare to be teachers [compared to] the job placement rate it could be pretty discouraging. Not many actually go into the workforce [compared to the number] we educate; they choose to be mothers. I'm fine with educating as many young women as we possibly can. Brigham Young said if he had a choice between educating a son or daughter he would educate his daughters because they're going to teach the children and it's critically important. [Our female students] need to have the confidence to know that they can contribute [if required to] at some point—sometimes before children or after children. They find satisfaction in contributing in the workforce. But it also gives them the confidence and the understanding of, particularly if at some point in their lives they've been in the world of work, how to support their husbands. They understand what work is all about and they deal with the pressures that a husband's going through better. So, I think there are wonderful aspects and important aspects to having an educated population among women.

Guy: It helps a spouse, whatever the gender, get through his or her education. [At times] those roles may be reversed and that's all part of a long-standing balance that you try to find. My father died at a young age and my mother had to work and support a family. Well, she got a teaching degree and was able to get a job. I know some of these young people on campus don't think that way, but it may be needed, as we hear so often, later on in life. President Hinckley says gain as much education as you possibly can. He doesn't say it only to the men and that women shouldn't worry about it. It's for everybody.

Marva: The opportunity is not just for employment either. The better educated the wife and mother the more of an asset she can be in the family.

NECESSARY SKILLS OUTSIDE CONTENT AREAS

- Scott: And in the community and in the church and in every other way, isn't it? We try at the university to give our students certain content and skills in our given areas. What skills beyond our academic expertise and training will be necessary to possess as they enter the world of work?
- Marva: Anything we can do to help them change and experience a paradigm shift from child to adult. That's probably what needs to take place more than anything else. We also need to help students take responsibility and see their class work as a job, as their responsibility. This really will make a difference in how they succeed in the business world—if they learn now how to succeed in the classroom.
- Scott: I would extend that link to success in the family, church, and community as well. One of the virtues of having a parallel church structure here on campus is that when you move to a new ward you are called to serve. I think those callings parallel or supplement this flexibility in shifting paradigms.
- Guy: There's evidence that success in the classroom is benefiting BYU–Idaho students who go on internships. First of all, more and more companies, corporations, business entities, are looking to hire from an internship pool because the young talent is there for them to draw from. The national average of hires based on an internship experience is about 50 percent. BYU–Idaho is a little over 60 percent.
- Scott: Do employers indicate the qualities they like about a certain intern and the reason they offered a job?
- Guy: We get that feedback on a regular basis. Students have to have a certain skill set to be effective whatever their area of expertise. Hiring managers, supervisors, directors, people who are decision makers really want someone who has a good work ethic, who is honest, who is dedicated, who they can trust, who wants to be here, who has a good disposition, someone who is teachable. Those are the kinds of things outside of the [academic] skill set that I hear more frequently. [Employers indicate,] “We can teach them what they need to know as long as they have the base to work from. What we really want is someone who is hard working, honest, and trustworthy.”

Ralph: A committee was set up of teachers in all fields who sought to determine the most basic skills they hoped all educated people would have. They came up with six things:

- Ability to learn
- Ability to expand and integrate knowledge
- Ability to communicate
- Ability to think and reason
- Possession of inter-personal skills
- A sense of social responsibility

I wrote my doctoral dissertation comparing these qualities in American and Finnish students. What I decided from that experience was that there's no substitute for good academic preparation because it gives the discipline needed to be honest, dependable, trustworthy, and productive in the workforce. When we talk about what the students can learn from the content knowledge or what skills they can add to it, I think we need to maintain a high academic standard.

Scott: What I hear you say is that the academics is important in itself, but it is also a means by which these extra skills are developed. Additional skills are good to have, but academic knowledge is absolutely central.

Bob: Here at BYU-Idaho we do well in allowing students to have hands-on experience. Academics is important, but if they can apply principles practically to real problems, I think that makes a huge difference. I teach interns and in the community we have major business projects that they work on. They have to deal with a specific problem that they've learned about in school; now they have to apply that problem and that principle to a specific, real business.

Scott: In speaking of the relationship between school and the workplace there is probably no such thing as "purely academic." But I believe I hear a consensus saying that we should not be so busy rushing them to internships and developing practical skills that we forget that they need to have basic knowledge that must be acquired first.

Guy: We are learning the central role of academic knowledge in the internship program. In the last few years we've had interns in over half of the Fortune 500 companies. For those opportunities you cannot substitute any other traits for poor academics. For the top jobs with big companies our students are competing against top schools in the country. We have

to prepare the students academically. They have to be able to perform well in the classroom and show that on tests or in other ways. Granted, students can find a low-end internship or job just on the fact that they can communicate and have a minimal set of skills, but for positions with top companies, students need a good balance between academic skills and positive personal attributes.

REMINDE STUDENTS THEY CAN SUCCEED

Scott: As we conclude, what points come to your mind?

Bob: I come back to the theme of change. I think that every teacher on this campus needs to ask every day “Am I continuing to adapt to the needs of the world as far as teaching is concerned?” I think President Clark has tried to set that mandate right now that we need to continue to change. We need to continue to improve in order to become more effective teachers and then let the students become more effective in learning and teaching one another.

Guy: The biggest challenge I’m faced with in internships and career services, with all due respect to the wonderful opportunities and people that live in southeast Idaho and on the Wasatch Front, is to push our students away from those areas. The world of work may be a long way from home, sometimes a long way from where you think you would like to live.

Scott: When Elder Quentin L. Cook was asked at the press conference after his sustaining how he would be able to help govern a world-wide church having grown up in Cache Valley, Utah, he said he and his wife had decided to go to school in California, fully intending to come back to Utah. But the Lord had something else in mind, and they stayed in California for 33 years. Additionally, as a missionary and as a Seventy he has spent considerable time overseas. There’s the pattern that you can go out from the Wasatch Front if you have requisite skills and perform well anywhere.

Bob: One of my favorite stories is about an intern from the business department who is from Sugar City. He went back to New York to interview for an analyst job with Morgan Stanley Chase. About half way through the interview, the interviewer looked at him and said, “You’re over qualified for what I’m asking you to do.” It really took the intern aback.

In telling the story, he said, “I just kind of stammered and stuttered because I didn’t know what to say.” I think that we at BYU–Idaho underestimate the students and their capabilities, whether it’s in New York or anywhere else. As we teach these students well, we need to reassure them that they are well qualified and that they can compete anywhere in the country. It’s important that we keep the expectations very high but then also let them know that they are meeting those expectations.

Scott: Telling success stories is important. A former student, a cowboy from Ashton, attended Columbia law school and is now a partner with Baker Botts law firm in Dallas, one of the largest and most prestigious law firms in the country. We could all tell stories of the achievements of our former students. Letting our current students know of the success of those who have gone before them certainly will help prepare them for the world of work. ☺

SUMMARY IDEAS

1. Teach students to deal with change.
2. The principles of the Learning Model can be applied everywhere.
3. Balance is tricky and may need to be defined closely, whereas what passes for balance can be achieved.
4. There is no substitute for attaining the academic knowledge and skills needed in the workplace.
5. Additional skills, often related to character and work ethic, are important.
6. We need to maintain high standards of performance.
7. Telling stories of those who have succeeded can be an inspiration.

NOTES

- 1 Elder Henry B. Eyring, “A Steady Upward Course.” (BYU-Idaho Devotional Address, September 18, 2001.)
- 2 Richard L. Evans, *From the Crossroads* (New York: Harper, 1955), 20.