

The Three-Ring Circus of Business and Teaching: Juggling the Roles of Entrepreneur and Educational Practitioner

By Katherine Abbott & Mark Lewis

As a teacher I live for those moments when a student makes a major breakthrough, grins from ear-to-ear, and leaves the classroom with a stronger self-image. In my opinion learning is most effective when it is playful. An ideal class should feel like a circus, where students have fun learning practical lessons while harnessing their potential.

As the owner of a small business I literally live by my ability to secure teaching contracts and produce demonstrated results for my clients. Teaching jobs are awarded based on a trainer's promise of enhancing the bottom line, not just boosting students' self-esteem.

So as a professional educator, how do you coordinate your dual role as business owner and dedicated teacher? To extend the metaphor, how do you clown around without dropping any of the balls?

Ladies and Gentlemen, children of all ages, please direct your attention to...

Ring Number 1: Don't Forget Who's Paying for the Show

Satisfy your client by delivering the practical instruction necessary to get the job done. Without a satisfied client, your business will disappear faster than a circus troupe in the dead of night.

Never forget why you are delivering the material. Your performance may be fun to watch, but it's still a juggling act someone has paid to see. Whether it's delivering a course, running a meeting, or managing a project, your students are in class to prepare for events that will affect the success of their company and *your* client. At times the student is the client. Either way, the principle remains the same. Make sure your material is unmistakably relevant to the world outside the Big Top. After all, you can't wear your clown make up all the time.

Ring Number 2: Send Them Home Excited

Strive to make your classes fun. Doing so will enhance student learning and performance and ultimately, it will improve your business. Don't fall prey to the notion that great customer service requires dull teaching methods. You owe it to everyone involved to show up with a big bag of tricks.

Turn professional education into personal growth. Your clients and students share the desire to strengthen the company as a result of taking your class. But the students may find a deeper motivation. Improved communications skills—no matter what their application—lead to improved interpersonal skills.

The student that makes this connection will realize the valuable opportunity your class offers them. No longer will they be expecting secret tips on surviving their upcoming class. Instead, they will be dreaming up original ways of transforming it.

Tapping into the personal motivation of your students will electrify the atmosphere of your classes. Instead of performing for an audience of timid, wide-eyed onlookers, you will find yourself coaching a bunch of tightrope walkers and lion tamers.

Ring Number 3: Summer Ain't Complete Without the Circus

If you can satisfy your client's business needs while surpassing student expectations, you will make yourself invaluable.

- The client will feel justified in paying your fee after seeing their employees return with a spring in their step and a hunger for getting down to business.
- Your students will become your sales reps when they share their excitement and demonstrate their improved skills.

Publicizing your intention to elevate students' self-esteem may not be the key to getting the initial contract. But once you have empowered your students above and beyond expectations, that extra 10% of inspiration you invest in the students might be the key to generating repeat business. It's hard to finish the juggling act without dropping the balls. But if you can do it, your fans will eagerly await your next performance.

The Grand Finale: Happy Clients, Happy Students, and a Prosperous Clown

A successful training business meets the practical needs of its clients while quietly transforming students into powerful communicators. Mastering this difficult combination will satisfy everyone involved, especially you. The marriage of excellent customer service and inspired teaching can lead to a thriving business, a job you love doing, and a great deal of respect.

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