

Promoting Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

GIVEN NAMES

When NOT to Use Them and when TO Use Them

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What 's in a name?

*That which we call a rose by any other name would **not** smell as sweet.*

Romeo and Juliet. Act ii. Sc. 2. 1

(**Bold** added--with respect to William Shakespeare)

Most teachers have a desire to establish good relations with their students. To achieve this objective, young teachers new to the profession often suggest that students call them by their first name.

This is a natural tendency, especially since American society has taken to addressing others by given names, rather than by surnames.

I enjoy knowing the name of the server who helps me when I dine in a restaurant. Not too long ago when I asked the server for her name, she responded by asking me for my name. Natural, isn't it? If I ask a server for his/her name why shouldn't the server, in return, call me by my given name?

There are no longer demarcations in society. Everyone is equal. Therefore, isn't everyone on the same level?

If parents call children by their given names, shouldn't children also call parents by their given names? Aren't parents and children equal AND on the same level? If you believe there is no distinction between a parent and a child, then you may fall prey to the mistaken idea that there is no difference between a teacher and a student. After all, since they are both equal they must also be ON THE SAME LEVEL.

Just as it is inappropriate for a server to ask the customer for his/her given name, so it is inappropriate for a student to be encouraged to call a teacher by the teacher's given name. The practice clouds the relationship. After all, I call my friends by their first names. Isn't my teacher my friend? Aren't we all on the same level?

(Primary teachers who have their students address them with a title, e.g. Miss Joyce, have already established a level of differentiation.)

A prime reason to have students address a teacher by the teacher's given name ("Call me Joyce") is in an attempt to establish positive relationships. Basically, it is an attempt to have students like the teacher. The approach is misguided.

When teaching at Dorsey High School in Los Angeles, my room was next to that of the oldest teacher I had ever seen. (Perhaps my perception was due to my youth.) When I became instructional coordinator at the school, I had an opportunity to see this teacher in action, and I discovered why her students loved her. I also understood why so many of them came back to visit her.

Her "secret" was that she empowered her students. She regularly and consistently brought to their attention the progress they had made and encouraged them by focusing on their successes. She taught by the concept that an ounce of encouragement after a failure was worth more than a pound of praise after a success.

It is a given that all students will not be attracted to all teachers. It is also a given that respect, rather than being liked, is the hallmark of great teachers. But chances of achieving both are far greater through **encouragement** and **empowerment** than by saying, "Call me by my first name."

Let's look at another aspect of using first names.

I do not recall many situations in recent years where I have been addressed as Mr. Marshall. Rather, I am addressed by my given name. The most common occurrence comes when I get e-mail directed to "Marvin" or a telephone call where the caller asks to speak to "Marvin."

Although the intentions of calling me by my first name may be politically correct, the result is counterproductive because I prefer "Marv" to "Marvin. " Addressing me as "Marvin," rather than "Marv," is an immediate turnoff to me.

I am not sure I know the reason for this. Perhaps it is related to why my friend prefers to be called Al rather than Alvin or another friend of

mind prefers Al rather than Albert. I have yet to see a marquee showing a headline with Melvin Gibson as the star. Charlie Rose conducts wonderful interviews on PBS, yet no one refers to him as Charles. Funny that I have seen television programs starring Andrew Griffith and Mervyn Griffin, but I don't recall their being called by those names. Last night in my Houston Hotel room, I watched an old Archibald Bunker program, but that was not what they called the character Carroll O'Connor portrayed. Why not? It was his name.

Perhaps you can add to your own list of people who use their given names solely to sign their signatures. Here is a list of just some of my friends whose preferences popped up immediately:

Bart	Bartholomew
Chris	Christopher
Irv	Irving
Joe	Joseph
Lew	Lewis
Mort	Mortimer
Nat	Nathaniel
Norm	Norman
Sam	Samuel
Stan	Stanley
Tim	Timothy
Welly	Wellington

I have a friend whose given name is Regina and whose middle name is Linda. She intensely dislikes her first name but loves her middle name. I think her first name is beautiful. **Whose opinion should I use--hers or mine?**

Tony Alessandra (Why not Anthony!) has written a wonderful book, *The Platinum Rule*. The theme of the book applies here. The "*Golden Rule*" is commonly quoted as, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." More colloquially, it would be stated, "Treat others as you would like to be treated." The theme of ***The Platinum Rule*** is simply, "Do unto others as **they would like** done unto them," or more colloquially to my point, "Call others what they would like to be called."

In Dale Carnegie's classic book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People," the story is told about a young boy who had many rabbits. The lad asked some of his friends to help him care for his pets. Not a single volunteer appeared.

The boy then approached his friends and suggested that if they would help, he would name one of the rabbits after him. The owner of the rabbits had no difficulties getting volunteers to help care for his brood. Carnegie made the point: A person's name is, to that person, the most beautiful sound in any language. Of course, this means that the name is the one that the person WANTS to be called.

The point: **A simple and powerful way to immediately establish a positive relationship is for the teacher to ask a student the name the student wishes to be called** (exclusive of street names).

The strategy is so simple, yet so empowering and will endear the teacher to the student immediately.

Ideas for implementing the proactive (Covey), noncoercive (Glasser), collaborative (Deming) approach to reducing behavior problems is at http://www.MarvinMarshall.com/raise_responsibility.htm

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