

Attitudes for Success

A Blog ETP by Andy McIntyre

Someone has wisely said, “Attitudes are contagious; are yours worth catching?” Blogging about my experience at Palm, Inc. this summer caused me to contemplate the truth of that question on several occasions. I discovered that much of the quality and benefit of one’s internship is determined by the attitudes with which they approach the experience.

This summer was my second internship at Palm, Inc. Because the project I was working on was much nearer completion than the one I worked on last year, the atmosphere at Palm was completely different. This year you could feel the pressure and stress of everyone trying to finish the project. There were no work days at a Giant’s baseball game or trips to a movie built around someone using a Palm product. And to make life more interesting, a move of the entire company from Milpitas to Sunnyvale was thrown in for good measure. It was in this atmosphere that I learned again about the importance of attitudes. While I realize that this is not a “transferable plan” that one can implement in a classroom, I believe that it is fundamentally even more important. The best lesson plan can become a failure in the wrong hands. To a large degree success in the classroom depends more on whom one brings into the classroom than on what one brings into the classroom. With that said, here are some of the attitudes that blogging about my experience at Palm, Inc. helped me to discover.

The first attitude that I discovered was the need to be willing to try new or difficult assignments. I tend to be an introvert, and I usually shy away from new assignments or assignments that appear at first glance to be difficult to understand. Because my mentor, Lis Hammel, is extremely polite and gracious, she would always ask me if I “would be willing” to tackle a new assignment or a new area of responsibility. Believe me, it took a lot of attitude adjustment to always say, “Yes, I would love to.” However, because I said yes, I learned much more about the product I was working on. For example, one of the tasks I was given was called Upgrade Testing. Essentially I acted as if I was upgrading to Palm’s new product from an older product or a product from a different manufacturer. Not only did I get to “play” with lots of different devices, I was also able to discover first-hand the superiority of the Palm device. It took a few days to completely learn the process, but it was time well spent.

I think it is extremely important for me, as a teacher, to be willing to tackle new, difficult assignments as well. In fact, I am going to try two new things this school year. First, I am going to be writing an online course for the Junior Bible Class. Although this will take a lot of work, the benefits for my students will be enormous. Second, I will be using a technology called Tegrity in my classroom this year. Basically, I will be using a Tablet PC to project lessons via video projection. The software will allow me to use PowerPoint, internet pages, captured images, a virtual whiteboard, etc. to teach my lessons. The software also allows me to write/highlight/underline directly on the projected images. And the lessons are also recorded and placed on the internet for students to review or for absent students to use to stay up with the class. Although this is new and scary, it is important that I am willing to attempt new ideas to improve my role as a teacher.

The second attitude that I discovered was the importance of being a team player. While my role at Palm did not require a master's degree in computer science, it was important to the overall project. My primary assignment was to daily test the latest software build for the new device. Each morning I would download the latest software from the company website and install it on my device. Then I would run a set battery of tests on the new software to see if it functioned properly. My findings were then recorded on a template, posted to the engineering website, and then emailed to everyone in Software and Quality Assurance. That's when the fun usually began. After people saw the posted results, I usually found myself answering questions, clarifying statements, and doing additional tests. This is when I really felt a part of the team. My efforts were making it possible for someone else to further their part of the project. And it didn't take long for people to begin stopping me and asking, "How does it look today?" Although my role was very small in the overall process, it was great to be part of the team.

I cannot overstate the importance of a team mentality in teaching. It takes a lot of teachers, classes and time to produce an education; and, working together as a team is essential for that education to be successful. I face this every day as the Bible Department Chair. I am reminded that although Bible is important, it is not the only class that students have or the most important; it is a part, not the whole. When we as a staff work together to produce an education, instead of a private kingdom, the students are truly served.

The third attitude that I discovered through blogging is the importance of being a servant. While this might not be highly valued in our culture, it is an unbelievably productive and rewarding attitude. On one assignment, I was told to ask fellow employees if they needed my help to test third-party applications. Because they were so busy doing other things, some had not been able to test the applications assigned to them. So, I emailed the other employees offering to help them with their testing. Almost immediately, I received an email back from one individual asking when they were supposed to be finished, and if he could complete them over the weekend. He thought I was checking up on him, instead of offering to help. After I clarified that I was only offering to help, not prompting him to get something done, he was happy to turn his application testing over to me. And he was genuinely grateful when they were completed. Looking for opportunities to help not only completed more aspects of the project, but it also gave me the opportunity to meet many awesome people at Palm.

In teaching, it seems as though we are all always extremely busy. What a difference it makes when someone comes alongside and offers to help. But the best part is that serving others gives a lot more than it requires.

I don't know who said it, but I agree with the statement: "Attitude determines altitude!" It was certainly true at Palm this summer, and it will be same during this new school year. Although it was more stressful at Palm this summer, being willing to try almost anything, being a team player, and being willing to serve others made it an awesome experience in every way. I am extremely grateful to Palm for these last two summers. I have had the privilege to work with the best Mentor ever, the joy of working with great people from around the globe, and the fun of working in a geek's paradise. They have all contributed to attitudes resulting in amazing heights.