

# Excellence in Teaching!

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Recently I read a book called “Excellence in Teaching with the Seven Laws”. It is always interesting to me how simple truths that others spell out can be so helpful to refine my thinking. But, if I refuse to learn from those who have gone before me I will have to reinvent what they have already done or I am bound to make the same mistakes.

In wrestling we are always teaching. The Coach, Team Captain, Teammate and Parent often find themselves being teachers. With that in mind, let’s look at the Seven Laws and see how they apply to wrestling. The points are not difficult. They almost suggest themselves, but they give us a structure to study and improve our teaching.

Here are the Seven Laws, first listed by John Milton Gregory, Superintendent of Public Instruction for Michigan between 1859 and 1865, and abridged by author Carl Schafer in 1985:

**1) The teacher must know the lesson, truth, or art he is to teach.**

Learn all you can about wrestling. Be a constant student of the sport. Get around those who know it well and absorb all you can. Where you lack knowledge look for books, videos, your assistant coach or guest clinicians to help. Too often we fail to admit we need the help of others. I often wonder at the fact that I continue to learn new wrestling techniques every single summer at camp. I believe that the best teachers are perennial students.

**2) The learner must show interest in the lesson.**

While it is possible for a person to learn something when they have little interest, it is assured that he will learn the most when he is excited and eager to learn. Take extra time teaching those who are most interested in learning.

**3) The language used between teacher and learner must be common to both.**

In wrestling, our language usually starts with spoken words, which we use to explain moves, strategy, and intensity. Wrestling people have developed terms like *crossface*, *armbar*, *single*, *head control*, *cradle*, and many, many more.

But there is much that is communicated by body language and watching. When I was a college student at Iowa States University, I learned a whole new level of intensity from our team captain, Mr. Dan Gable. A look, a quick walk back to the center, and non-stop, knock-down, drag-out hard goes were clearly understood by me. After those years of training, I new what a high level of competition was. Gable had been a master teacher to John and me even when he was a competitor himself.

**4) The unknown must be explained by means of the known.**

When I coach grade schoolers (or any beginning wrestlers), I try to begin with basic positions and basic motions. For example, if wrestlers cannot do a back step they are not ready for a single leg dump. If they do not change elevations well, they probably are not ready for an ankle pick (ankle block), because they will stay too high and get too stretched out. Wrestlers are not ready for college and international moves if they haven’t mastered the basics. “Always be refining the basics” and then slowly add in the specialty moves as your students show they are ready for them.

The Master Teacher Himself, Jesus, told his disciples about the kingdom of heaven – a high concept indeed! – by use of parables. By making illustrations using common ideas and concepts, he sets an excellent example of communicating the unknown by means of the known.

**5) Teaching must arouse the pupils to learn for themselves.**

After years of coaching, my own greatest thrill is to see a gleam in the eye of a young wrestler. When I see a love for wrestling, for learning, and for working hard, I know there will be significant advancement in the development of that budding grappler. The teacher should try to cultivate and instill those qualities in young wrestlers by exhibiting them himself.

**6) Learning is thinking in one's own understanding a new idea, truth, habit or skill.**

Be careful of gauging the learning process just by wins. I don't tell my six-month-old grandson he is a failure because he cannot run yet. He is still working on getting a base. My first seven losses as a freshman (all by pin) were invaluable because they forced me to do a great deal of learning. I learned to keep trying, the value of a solid base, the need to keep my head protected, and the value of strength and conditioning. But I think the greatest lesson I learned was that my family and teammates were not going to belittle me – they were there to encourage me. Those lessons learned stayed with me for the next 16 years of competition.

**7) Teaching must be completed, confirmed, and tested by review, rethinking and application.**

Don't be too rushed that you don't review and redo the skills and drills from yesterday, last week or last month. I carry a list of what I have been teaching and regularly bring those skills and techniques back in future practices for review and drilling. I encourage you wrestlers not to wait for your coach to do all the reminding. Find time on your own to drill the things you have recently seen and been taught. "Repeatedly reinforce desirable neuromuscular pathways!"

My brother John is a master teacher of double leg takedowns. (1) He knows double legs inside and out. (2) We are always looking for interested individuals for him to teach. (3) He starts with simple concepts and motions and then (4) slowly builds to more complex set up ideas, finishes and combinations. (5) By the end of any hour-long teaching session at Camp of Champs, he has each wrestler asking questions and (6) trying to build doubles in to their own personal style and series of takedowns. (7) He actually reviews throughout the session, but always does so again at the end.

You, too, can become a great teacher. Review each of these points for each session you are to teach, and slowly, the process will become a habit. If you are the student, look at each point and determine what will help you to be the best learner now, and then later you will follow them as a teacher. There is little to compare with the joy in the eyes of those we help to learn and improve.

**\*Ben & his brother John now run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: ben@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org.**