

LEARNING TO BE A PROFESSIONAL.

TEACHING IN A ROOM NEXT TO AN EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONAL.

His name was Dave Mumberson, known as Mumby and Mumbo. My room was disgracefully untidy. I got away with it because Dave set a standard for untidiness that was unreachable by an ordinary mortal. A few weeks after I began professional life the head gave me a red, cardboard backed notebook. He called it a Record Book. "What is this?" I asked Dave. He explained that after every lesson or whenever I could I was expected to critique the lesson, just a short paragraph about what went right and what went wrong. I told him that was a nuisance. He showed me into his stock room. On a shelf he had a complete row of record books. "Every one of them", said Dave, "has been lost". I looked puzzled. He explained.

The head gave you a Record Book. You filled it in for the first half term of the year. After half term you did not bother. It would take a few weeks for the head to notice and then he would ask where it was. "lost", you told him. The head promised to get you another one but this would involve him going to see Doreen Davidson the school secretary whose office was as far away from him as possible.

Mr. Elliot was wary of Doreen who had been a policewoman. He would forget to get you another Record Book and, in any case, it was getting closer and closer to Christmas and his mind was, as a former music teacher, only on one thing: the carol concert. After assembly he would often tell the staff to have another cup of tea in the staff room and skip the first lesson so that he could rehearse the boys in a few hymns. What were we supposed to write in our record Books about that lesson?

During the short period when I did fill in my Record Book I made full use of my degree in politics. I would invent problems and difficulties in my teaching and then show what trouble I had taken to overcome them. He liked that.

My next lesson from Dave in schoolteachery professionalism concerned the dreaded stock book. In it was recorded the numbers of every pen, pencil, rubber and ruler that you had cost the school, all recorded in a little pink notebook. I asked for advice. "Simple", said Dave, "all you need is two identical stock books and use a different one each time". At the end of the year this meant that officially you had cost the school half of what you had actually cost the school.

And then came my greatest professional achievement, inspired by Dave but I think I can take the credit. I needed some new textbooks. The cost was high. I drew up the list with the costings in a list on the right of the page. I took the list to Doreen. She explained that she could not possibly accept it without the head's signature. What to do? I neatly cut off the column with the costings.

Then, a bit of luck, the head was about to interview a new girls physical education teacher. Mr. Elliot had a weakness, nothing of a sexual predatory nature, but he had grown up with the belief that girls were made of sugar and spice and all things nice. Late in life, after two rugby playing sons he and his wife had a little girl and he doted on her.

The interviewee was good looking, had dressed herself up to the nines and was drenched in perfume. Just as the interview was about to start and while he was gazing at her in wonder I bounced in to say, "You remember you said you would agree to this requisition? Doreen just needs your signature". He signed, I stuck back the column with the costings, took it down to Doreen and got my books.

The word 'professional' has featured a lot in the jobs I have undertaken. That must be because I was so well trained.

Thanks Dave.

Cliff Jones 20th December 2019

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