

# Preface

*To be successful, the first thing to do is fall in love with your work.*

*—Sister Mary Laretta*

In the summer of 1997, I learned that a bright, idealistic young woman had decided that she wasn't cut out to be a teacher because she couldn't get her students to behave. She wasn't in my department and we had rarely spoken, but my heart ached at the thought that a person with such potential would give up after only a year. I decided to sit down and write everything I wish I had said to her in the hopes that she'd give it another try. I organized what I know to be true about good teaching into 10 basic attitudes—commandments, if you will. I wanted to tell her that much of what I know I learned through mistakes, but one of the wonders of our profession is that teachers get a chance to review and renew at the beginning of every year. Sadly, I lost track of her that summer, and I have no idea whether or not she stayed in the profession.

I've been a teacher for 30 years; I love my job, so it upsets me when I see eager, fresh-out-of-college teachers wanting to quit after the first two months. I've spent a great deal of time as a colleague, and now as a mentor, trying to help them find reasons to stay. I know that after the first difficult year, things will get better for them—they just need practical advice from someone who has faced the same challenges.

I have also worked with colleagues who have been in teaching for a long time, but who have lost sight of what attracted them to this job in the first place. Some have become

bitter, some have decided to take the path of least resistance, some are just waiting around for retirement. As a kid, I sat through class after class taught by frightened, frustrated newcomers or burned-out lifers. They had lost sight of the joy of teaching, but from their struggles, I created a vision of the teacher that I wanted to become.

In 2000, after a particularly difficult year, I added an eleventh commandment that reminds us that even veterans can feel like novices at times. Eight years later, I've updated the advice in this book to match what I'm currently doing in my classroom. I find that my overall approach to teaching still works; however, I have fine-tuned some of my classroom management techniques and revised teaching units to meet the ever-changing needs of my students, especially with slashed budgets and the dominance of standardized testing in our schools. For this third edition, I've also considered the increasing presence of sophisticated technology in the classroom. We would be foolish to ignore these wonderful tools, but at the same time, the most intuitive Smart Board will never replace knowledgeable, passionate teachers who can inspire their students to master the skills that will be useful both inside and outside of the academic world.

Our students can locate information that will help them pass standardized tests by reading textbooks or searching online—it takes an engaged, inspired teacher to help them believe that these skills are worth mastering. That's what this book is all about—recapturing the passion, figuring out ways to create intimacy in overcrowded classrooms, and making sure that our students feel *seen* and that their teachers are dedicated to their success. It is worthwhile work.

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