

# My Experience Moving The Work Through Higher Education: Condensed Version

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This title is somewhat misleading. I do not really “move” The Work through higher education. I use The Work and what The Work has taught me in helping me improve my relationship with my students, both inside and outside the classroom. Nothing more, but nothing less.

The thing with me is that I am an Economist, and I teach a required course to hundreds of business majors every year at the University of Notre Dame. I have a responsibility to teach that stuff, and my students have a responsibility to learn it. We don’t really have much time to elaborate on subject matters that are extraneous to the material that I have agreed with the University to cover every semester. Then, how does The Work help me get my job done?

Through this brief document I will share with you something that I do in class with my students, and I will tell you how it has changed the quality of my teaching for the better. *The main change that I have implemented has been subtle*, so please don’t expect a long list of exercises and techniques that could readily translate to your own field. The result of this change, however, has been remarkable. Mostly: I am a happier, more honest and more humble teacher.

The main change that I have implemented is not even a change. It is something I call *a shift in perspective*. I started with the realization that “they’re my students” is a story. And without this story I am able to meet them as humans before I meet them as students. This has the effect that they immediately become people that I want to get to know, and so the shift in perspective stirs up my curiosity about who they are, where they’ve been, and who they want to become. **This shift in perspective is everything**. They can feel it because they know there is someone in the room who is listening, and trust develops. Out of this trust, a more solid teaching/learning relationship is born. More learning, honesty, better grades, and new friendships are born. This shift in perspective is a no-brainer, for me.

Now, make no mistake about it: I teach a rigorous class and set high standards of excellence for my students. I write challenging exams. Students get “F’s,” sometimes. What the shift in perspective helps me and my students do is not to take it all so seriously. We have these roles as teacher and students, and while the invitation is to engage the roles fully, these roles do not define who we really are.

And so there it is, I have told you the most important thing: Ask yourself, “How would you engage your students as you enter your own classroom without your story that they are your students or that you have anything to teach them?” That is the most important thing, in my mind.

*For copies of this document and for other ideas about how to integrate The Work into everyday life please visit <http://thewayofit.com>. More ideas will be posted there in their right time.*