

## Maintaining the Attitude of a Life-Long Learner (Cengage Learning, Dec. 2012)

If you're reading this blog post, you obviously value the purpose and process of education — enough to devote your career to it! However, when we're constantly moving through our daily pattern of meetings, deadlines, paperwork, and other pressing responsibilities, we can potentially lose sight of those things that enable us to move forward in new and challenging directions — and that, in itself, can make us feel stuck, stale, or solution-less.

In McKeachie's Teaching Tips, Marilla Svinicki and Wilbert J. McKeachie share some suggestions for identifying new methods, strategies, and opportunities that you can bring into your teaching. These suggestions may seem rather straightforward, but perhaps they'll serve as a reminder of some practices you can adopt (or re-adopt) to keep yourself open to solutions you had not previously considered.

•**Reading.** Scholarly publications offer reliable, vetted material that can provide valuable insight on teaching practices, and can also alert you to current research and trends that can inform the procedures you adopt for your course. There are numerous publications that focus on teaching and learning generally; your field likely has a journal or text that focuses on teaching in that subject area as well. And these days, many of these publications likely have newsletters or blogs that can push news and articles straight to your email account or RSS feed. Don't know where to begin? Ask your colleagues; they likely have resources they consult on a regular basis. (And, if you find value in the information we provide at this blog, you can subscribe to our Cengage Learning eNewsletter and receive notification of each week's articles on a regular basis.) *Reading is much like conferences and seminars in that it is only professional development if an action is taken to implement the strategies and techniques. Just as the picture in the IA office states, "Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare." Our vision is very clearly spelled out in our vision statement, which requires "excellence in education and **student success**"; as well as our first strategic initiative which requires us to "demonstrate the College commitment to quality teaching and learning through **increased student success and continuous improvement** in instructional programs". Action is the best motivator for further action, while a lack of action is the best motivator for continued lack of action....for both students and teachers.*

•**Hearing & Discussing.** Teaching conferences, workshops, and your discipline's regional & national conventions all offer a stellar setting in which you can learn about new research, observe new techniques in action, and interact with like-minded individuals. But don't feel as though you need to travel in order to glean worthwhile inspiration — a hallway conversation with your colleagues on campus can also prove just as valuable. *Don't forget to reach out to individuals from outside your department; sometimes, that cross-germination can ignite ideas that you might not have otherwise had, had you not spoken to someone from a different field.* *Instead of focusing on how 'different' our particular content may be, focus on the common denominators for all content. This involves applying critical thinking and action to techniques and pedagogical strategies that are **proven** to work for ALL content areas, including many of the intangibles associated with student perception of the learning environment (see article on using student feedback to improve effectiveness).*

•**Seeing & Experiencing.** *Take the time to watch a colleague in action while teaching a course.* How do they present material? What tools do they use? In what manner do they engage with students? You may also find some guidance or inspiration by *watching instructional videos that demonstrate the use of particular methods or technologies.* *All that is required is an understanding that we can always be more effective, combined with a self-confident commitment to be unhindered by our own **self-perceived** limitations. Brainstorming among divisions, as well as across divisions, can provide an opportunity to hear how others (especially the more effective faculty) may approach the same issues you may have.*