What goes into the making of a great lecturer?

In Summary

- First, knowledge in the classroom gets demonstrated through variables, variables, and more variables. A good lecturer sees the world in terms of causes and effects.

Nervous and eager students clamour for space in coveted courses. Stories fly around campuses regarding which lecturer proves better, wiser, easier, harder, and more engaging.

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As the term progresses, stammering commences as learners seek answers to pertinent questions before examinations. Real learning takes a back seat to panic as the desire for good marks outweighs the usability of information.

The hallmarks of upwardly mobile Kenyan lives entail two pillars upon which we invest the lion’s share of our money: land and education. Instead of jostling for just any paper as proof of educational pursuits, the collective call across Kenya involves the realisation that not all universities are equal. Even deeper, not all lecturers teach with the same depth, skill, and organisation.

Inasmuch, over the next several weeks, let us embark on a journey to explore how to discern competent lecturers, choose suitable academic programmes, and pick the best universities that meet your goals at the undergraduate or graduate levels. Beginning today, we delve into detecting a good lecturer.

First and foremost, a lecturer must retain immense knowledge. Researcher Gregg Henriques defines knowledge as justified true belief that is backed up by empirical evidence.

Lecturers must make the leap from pure speculation to data driven proof. A brilliant lecturer doubles as a prolific researcher and a commensurate practitioner whereby theories get tested in the real world.

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Satirically, if you senselessly turn to your brother and punch him in the face, the effect would clearly be an increase in his anger and likely physical retaliation back to you because you caused it. On a serious note, if a chemist adds a certain ingredient as a cause, then a particular effect should develop. If a manager desires higher job satisfaction as an effect, then he or she could increase job autonomy as a cause. The entire world around us exists in terms of independent variables that cause dependent variables as effects.

So students, look up variables that relate to your discipline. Test your lecturers to see if they are widely read or simply just download their PowerPoint slides off Google and talk from the textbook.
In a managerial course, variables include job, team and organisational performance, increased profits, organisation commitment, in-role behaviour, organisational justice, organisational citizenship behaviour, organisational trust, felt trust, trustworthiness, degree of delegation, cross-cultural awareness, heterogeneity, and team cohesion, among hundreds of others.

A solid lecturer knows how all these variables interrelate with each other. Which causes what? Only by understanding scientifically which cause leads to what effect, can a lecturer truly impart knowledge to students.

Ask lecturers in a strategy course what independent variables lead to a dependent variable of then increasing firm profits. You can learn variables by looking through cutting edge research on Jstor, EBSCO, Web of Knowledge, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, among other powerful research databases. Further, our understanding of variables changes and becomes more refined over time. Unlike the theory of debt that was established early in the 1900s and disproven in the 1960s, it is still taught across Kenya.

The theory did not stand up to empirical testing in practical settings and was therefore debunked. If your lecturer talks about concepts that were solidified more than 10 years ago and does not give you up-to-date thinking and refinement on those variables, then they are stuck in an old textbook time warp and you deserve your money back for the course you took with them.

Other factors come into play that can influence variable X’s impact on variable Y, as an example. Researchers have known since 1995 that if employees find their superiors to hold trustworthiness characteristics, then those same employees are more likely to perform in their jobs.

However, more modern research detailed mediating factors. Mediating variables are situations whereby if a cause passes through an intermediary effect, then it makes the end effect even stronger. Researchers later found that trustworthiness characteristics get amplified in companies if the employees also feel committed to the organisation.

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**Increased performance**

Inasmuch, trustworthiness leads to organisation commitment which leads to increased performance. Organisation commitment mediating the relationship between trustworthiness and job performance was stronger than simply the cause of trustworthiness alone and its impact on job performance.

Lecturers must also understand moderating effects. Moderating variables are forces that push from the outside that can impact the relationship between variables. Geography, as an example, can play a strong moderating role between independent and dependent variables.

Some causes and effects work in Asia but not in Europe all the while with different outcomes in Africa. A keen lecturer stays on top of the trends in research and knows which outside variables may push relationships.
Students need to learn all the different factors that influence desired outcomes.

Otherwise, their education becomes useless. When testing a lecturer’s knowledge, watch out for the telltale signs that a respondent does not know what he or she is talking about by way of these responses: “what do you think” or “how would you solve it” followed by “anyone else in the class have an answer?”

A strong lecturer answers questions with a firm “recent research shows these results” or “executives can expect these effects generated from these causes in Africa, but in North America managers must behave differently due to these moderating variables”.

A good lecturer can name at least 10 seminal research studies and know the variables and can name at least 20 famous researchers in their field and know what they have done. Additionally, in classrooms, lecturers can draw out what variable leads to what mediating effect that leads to what dependent effect that might get hindered by whichever moderating effect.

A lecturer must be able to map these out on a board easily and understandably for their discipline. Next week we continue dissecting good lecturers from the bad.

Discuss good and bad lecturers from your past with other Business Daily readers through #KenyaLecturers on Twitter. Stay tuned for the next USIU-Business Daily Public Lecture on professional writing on Saturday, September 24, 2016 at 2pm.

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