Over the past few months, an academic medical center in the Midwest has been asking for my help via e-mail with their developing a physician leadership curriculum. Using my recommendation that they follow the NOTE model, first they conducted a Needs assessment, by surveying a large group and personally interviewing a subset. Based on those findings, they are now working on behavioral Objectives to define the knowledge, attitude, and skill that participants will learn. Next, they will select Teaching methods that are matched to those objectives and finally, they will design an Evaluation system to assess teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes.

Content issues they are working on include professionalism, teamwork, respect, integrity, mentorship, systems thinking, and communication skills. Now that they have been gently “pushed” in the right direction, they have asked for one more piece of free advice, and here it is:

**How they teach should be consistent with what they teach.**

This is known as the principle of congruence. The following is no joke: A business school professor promised his students a money-back guarantee. If they weren’t happy with how he taught his course, he would pay back their tuition! This was an example of congruent teaching because the subject of this course was “Management of Service Operations.” In this course, students learned how top-notch businesses like Federal Express, Domino’s Pizza, and Nordstrom deliver first-class service to their customers. As you can see, this teacher intended to bring the real world into his classroom by living up to what was being preached.

I am not suggesting that you promise to pay back dissatisfied students in your PA programs. What I am suggesting is that you match your process to your content. For example, if you are teaching patient communication skills, then you should model those skills in the classroom in your interaction with students. So, when you ask a question, do you tolerate silence or do you answer it yourself? If you were teaching a class on confidentiality, have you already established some ground rules for respecting what has been said in your classroom?

Thinking about the Midwest leadership program, when topics such as professionalism, teamwork, respect, integrity, mentorship, systems thinking, and communication skills are presented and discussed, the challenge, as I see it, is for the teachers to model the specific traits being proposed. Thus, if they want the participants to behave as professionals, then specific professional behaviors have to be built into the conduct of the teaching team. And, speaking of teamwork, do the faculty work as a team, or do they just take turns teaching? I am reminded of the visiting professor presenting a paper at a national meeting and citing results showing that students working alone were more effective than those who worked with others. Apparently the irony was not lost on the audience when she concluded, “My colleague and I will soon be publishing the results.”

I face the issue of congruence when “teaching teaching.” Wouldn’t it be silly of me give a lecture on how to lead a group discussion? Something akin to that happened when a guest professor I brought from a prestigious medical school gave a lecture on their student-centered, problem-based curriculum. In this lecture, never once did he practice what was being preached!

Best wishes in your attempts at congruence. You will know it “worked” when a student says, “Hey, I see what you’re doing. You’re doing what you want us to do, aren’t you?”