

TLA TIPS

I'M LEARNING!

In the article, "What Really Motivates Workers" in the January-February 2010 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, researchers report on the results of a study to determine what happens on a great workday. The findings demonstrate that the leading motivator of performance is progress. On a great workday, "when workers sense that they are making headway in their jobs or when they receive support that helps them overcome obstacles, their emotions are most positive and their drive to succeed is at its peak" (p. 44).

Are students any different? This semester, Nancy Popkin administered a pre- and post-test on grammar to her students in English Composition I. The pre-test was for diagnostic purposes only; that is, to help the students understand where they needed to focus their learning over the next two class periods. Professor Popkin administered the post-test to examine the increases in student learning. When her students compared their scores on the pre- and post-tests, they gained an understanding of the headway they had made. One student reacted ecstatically:

Student: "Oh, my gosh! Give me a hug!"
Professor Popkin: "Sure, but why?"
Student: "Because I went up so much, from 62% to 87%! **I'm learning!**"

What a great motivator for the student! And, for the instructor!

Professor Popkin then looked at the relationship between the scores the students had made on the post-test and class attendance in the two class sessions when the material was being taught. Not surprisingly, there was a direct and significant correlation between the two: higher test scores were related to class attendance. The average scores on the post-test were:

- 82% for students who attended **both** class sessions;
- 73% for students who attended **one** class session; and
- 63% for students who were **absent** for both class sessions.

She shared these results with the students to demonstrate that coming to class can lead to learning.

This generation of students thrives on constant feedback, support, and clear goals, no different from the employees studied in the *Harvard Business Review* article. The authors recommend steps to creating an environment conducive to progress:

- (1) clarify overall goals (i.e. student learning outcomes),
- (2) support worker's efforts (i.e. encourage students),
and
- (3) view small setbacks as learning opportunities.

Classroom assessment techniques, such as pre- and post-tests, can contribute to students' sense of purpose, progress, and motivation.

