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The Case of the Perplexed Professor Part II

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THE CASE OF

THE PERPLEXED PROFESSOR

part II

Two weeks have gone by since Tom described his problem to you at the last Faculty Development lunch. In that time you have thought a lot about his situation and have several suggestions you'd like to make to him, having just come back from POD. You sit next to him again at the next lunch and raise the issue of his class as a prelude to offering the suggestions.

Tom's reaction is an immediate rebuff. He says he is thoroughly disgusted with the class and their lack of cooperation. He has tried to make a change to encourage more regular class attendance and study. He got the idea from visiting Joe Thompson's sociology class just after the last lunch. Joe was using the Socratic method in a class on case work for social workers. It seemed to be really working for Joe, and Tom remembered the movie "The Paper Chase" and how hard those students worked, so he decided to try it in his class. He prepared a reading assignment and handed it out on Friday for discussion on Monday. On Monday he came to class armed with a set of really fine, tough questions and the class roster and began calling on the students to respond. There was a lot of confusion and silence at first, but eventually a few students were able to answer some of the questions. Unfortunately, many times Tom found himself answering the question because the

student had obviously not prepared. He was very disappointed with the results, but decided to give them a second chance. He handed out a second assignment for the next class period and warned them to come prepared. The next class period attendance was down again, and the students who did come to class were not particularly responsive to his questions. Of course, some of the best students were well prepared and gave good answers when called on, but a majority of the students present sat sullenly and only responded when absolutely necessary. Tom felt frustrated and angry that the students weren't willing to meet him half way on the class. He decided that the "spontaneity" they mentioned at the beginning of the semester was really just a desire to not have to prepare and that they resented his efforts to make them accountable for the material. After those two dismal classes he has decided to return to his previous format of lecturing and just get the class over with.

At that point you decide that a strategic retreat would be the best move. You mutter a few words of sympathy and turn to talk to the person on the other side of you.

What have you learned at this conference that would help you deal more effectively at this point with:

TOM?

HIS CLASS?

YOUR OWN REACTIONS?