

Sometimes we need our batteries charged

Initially, my intention was to write this story as I have written so many others; from an objective perspective offering only facts and perhaps a little anecdotal commentary about a local event.

As I began my story about Frank Pastizzo and "Warm Up The Workplace, Inc.," however, I realized that what I really wanted to do was share my experience and, in turn, provide the depth and dimension that this story indisputably deserves.

I will get to Frank Pastizzo; he is, after all, the reason for this article. For the sake of perspective, however, I must first digress for a moment. I am a teacher, to be more specific, I currently teach sixth grade at Peru Middle School. I have ventured down many occupational paths since entering adulthood, including retail management, quality assurance, parent aide services, and car sales.

I finally found college and teaching, for which I will always be grateful, and I knew that my "work-wandering" was over. For me, finding this profession was a little like reaching the pinnacle of a very tall and steep mountain, and as anyone who hikes will tell you, when you arrive you spend many peaceful moments just basking in the view.

That said, teaching can also be a challenge; there are days that I arrive home both physically and psychologically drained (I am sure that, regardless of profession, there are many who can relate). Teaching is a humanistic field, and it is filled with a very diverse cross-section of humans.

Trying to find your place while simultaneously remembering your place (and your manners) is hard for anyone...especially on those days when your alarm clock seems to have gone off before you've had time to find the pillow. Sometimes, and I think we are all guilty of this, our frontal lobes fail and we treat others in a way we would not enjoy or appreciate ourselves. This brings me back to Frank Pastizzo.

As the company's title, "Warm Up the Workplace, Inc." suggests, Pastizzo seems to have dedicated himself to inspiring others to "warm up" or improve their workplace through improved interpersonal relationships. To be a part of one of Frank's presentations is like sitting with your favorite friend...a friend who is both motivational and endlessly funny.

On the day Frank Pastizzo visited our school, I could hear upbeat keyboard sounds drifting down the hall long before I reached the auditorium. It gave me a "festive" feeling, the kind that you get when you are going to the fair and smell the cotton candy from the grassy parking lot or see the Ferris wheel from a mile away. As I found my seat and settled in, I noticed that the keyboard was being played by a lone man and other than the "jazzy" music, there was no backdrop, no props, nothing exciting. Big deal. I thought, shameful from an educator, I know, but I my hope is that my honesty will help to build the scene for you.

I was sitting between friends, fellow teachers, and we began to "talk shop" while we waited for the assembly to begin. I was not prepared for what happened next. When Pastizzo stopped playing he walked in front of us (a group of the entire school's faculty and staff) and cracked a couple of lame but hysterical jokes.

I would share them with you but I could not do them justice, in order to understand the appeal you would have to hear them from Pastizzo himself, his delivery is awe-inspiring. By the time we had recovered from our fits of laughter, Frank was already infusing monologue, story, and message into his presentation. His ability to vacillate between funny anecdotes, audience inclusion, poignant stories, and message driven expressive speaking is absolutely captivating.

The auditorium would be silent as Frank talked about going to "pretend school" under his mother's upright piano, as he shared stories about his passionate Italian father, as he reminisced about the time in his life when

he had forgotten to treat people as people. The auditorium would then erupt as Frank would crack a joke or lovingly reminisce a good-natured prank for which his loving family was known.

In addition to this, Frank Pastizzo also spent the afternoon building familiar societal circumstances (like the dreaded visit to the motor vehicle office), only to turn his perspective to that of the service rep behind the counter looking at a sea of impatient people. He gently and masterfully led us toward a realization...the need for engaged and sincere human interaction (our need to feel valued) is two-sided. And although he served up hard truths for us to swallow, at no point did the message seem harsh or "preachy." It was like Pastizzo was just waking up that side of us that seems to diminish as we leave the inhibitions of our honest childhoods.

Frank Pastizzo shared his secret to successful human interactions. He confided to us that all people need to feel, "a sense of belonging, freedom, value, and fun." It may seem basic, like we should know this for ourselves. The fact is, however, that Frank Pastizzo has a way of convincing you, through his delivery, to get this valued secret to stick in the brain.

On the day Frank Pastizzo visited Peru Central School District he convinced the students, faculty, and staff that engaged, sincere, and "in the moment" interaction with others is the only way to become part of another's choice world. So far, the aftereffects of Pastizzo's message can be seen in the hallways, lunchrooms, and classrooms at Peru.

If you too would like the opportunity to hear or read Pastizzo's message, you can visit his website at www.warmuptheworkplace.com or read his book, *Cherish*. You will not be disappointed and, at the very least, you will be entertained and as Frank likes to say, "sometimes everyone needs to get their batteries charged."

Written by Johnna Benware