

was right. After I explained that his work was far below passing standards, the student admitted that he hadn't put forth a serious effort in the course.

"But," he continued, "my past record is at least average. Can't you consider that?"

I pointed out that I could not, because we measure performance one course at a time. I added that rigid academic codes prohibited changing grades for any reason other than an honest mistake on the part of the professor.

Then the student, realizing that all avenues toward a grade change were closed, became quite angry. "Professor," he said, "I could name fifty people in this city who've succeeded in a big way without taking this course or even knowing about it. What's so blasted important about this course? Why should a few bad marks in one course keep me from getting my degree?"

"Thank God," he added, "they don't look at things on the 'outside' like you professors do."

After that remark I paused for about forty-five seconds. (I've learned that when you've been sniped at, one fine way to prevent a war of words is to take a long pause before answering.)

Then I said to my student friend, "Much of what you say is true. There are many, many highly successful people who know absolutely nothing about the subject matter in this course. And it is possible for you to win success without this knowledge. In the total scheme of life, this course content won't make or break you. But your attitude toward this course may."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Just this," I answered. "Outside they grade you just as we grade you. What counts there just as what counts here is doing