

## **Sarasota County Teacher of the Year acceptance speech Victor Fernandez of Booker Middle School, Jan. 26, 2012**

When I was thinking of what to say if the possibility of me receiving this humbling recognition came to fruition, I started writing and filled 8½ pages...and realized that would be too long.

But I will try to condense it in just a few words here. First off, every single person in this room is just as deserving of this award as I am.

As an immigrant to this great country, with English as my second language, it so very humbling for me to be standing here speaking to all of you.

The work you do every day, the work I do, in the trenches every day, is the most important job in all the world. We have a direct hand in shaping the future, not just of our children, but of our country, our society, and our world.

On my outgoing emails, part of my signature is a quote from the Roman philosopher Marcus Tillus Cicero, which reads, "What nobler employment, or more valuable to the state, than that of the man that instructs the rising generation?" Spoken over 2,000 years ago...and still so true today.

Receiving awards is certainly humbling and motivating. But none of us do this for the recognition; we do this job because we love children. We do this because there is such a thrill in experiencing the process of helping every child become the very best that he or she can be.

There is absolutely nothing more rewarding in teaching than seeing our students blossom into happy, joyful and successful adults and reach the great potential that lies within them all.

We have the most important job in the world, and as we look to the future, we have to lead our children through the power of our example.

We cannot expect our students to be eager and excited to learn unless *we* are thrilled and eager to teach. We cannot expect students to achieve personal and academic excellence unless we lead them by the strong power of our example.

Leading by the power of example is the most powerful and influential form of leadership. In the famous words of Mahatma Gandhi, we have to be the change we want to see in the world, a powerful philosophy of life that applies so beautifully to our classroom, teaching, and our lives.

We have to stand tall, like beacons of light, for all the children we teach — only this way can they learn to find the greatness that lies within them all.

I will leave you with a final thought: As I watch the news and read the papers, I strongly feel there has never been more of a need for positive, inspirational and motivational leaders to rise than now, when our culture and society face so many challenges. Our children are asking for and seeking positive role models to inspire them to rise to greatness in their lives.

The scope of our jobs, in my view, lies far beyond scores and statistics, as every child we teach, has, in essence, unlimited potential for greatness, success, happiness and joy. If we could impact every child in the world today in this way, it is beautiful to think of the world we would all share tomorrow.