

# A handshake, a smile, a lesson in etiquette

DHS class to prepare students for the working world

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Dave Dillman, right, will be teaching a marketing class at Durango High School beginning in January. Dillman is working with Jack Llewellyn, the executive director of the Durango Chamber of Commerce, to organize internship opportunities and jobs for students at local businesses.

**F**or motivated students, Durango High School is a heady world of intellectual possibility, offering kids an entrée into calculus, foreign literature and award-winning science.

But new teacher Dave Dillman anticipates he'll spend a lot of time perfecting one basic skill: shaking hands.

"I want it to happen right here," he said, pointing to seats in an empty classroom as though it were populated by dozens of imaginary, handshake-challenged students.

"It's number one in sales, and we practice it everyday. I do things to make it fun – we'll go over different handshake styles – the lumberjack, hand-pumping shake, the bone-crusher handshake, the Nintendo handshake – but that one's not so businesslike," Dillman said.

From "Pygmalion" to "My Fair Lady," mastering the etiquettes of adult life has a long tradition in education.

Starting in January, it's going to have a formal role in DHS, as Dillman begins teaching a marketing course aimed at preparing students for the harsh, often boring realities of working a job.

Dillman said in a world where high school students' attention is frequently splintered by digital pressures, he is a modern day Henry Higgins, telling teenagers it isn't appropriate to text in a job interview.

He said even elementary aspects of interpersonal communication can elude otherwise lovely high school students, who, reared on cellphones, Snapchat each other in greeting upon entering a room, rather than making their salutations aloud.

"I'm going to insist on those interpersonal skills being used everyday, so when I take role, or say 'hello,' the kids know I want to look them in the eyes, and I don't want their heads down, hands in their pockets, with their feet shuffling – this isn't prison," he said.

He said students can conceptually struggle with grasping the psychology of a potential employer.

"One thing I talk about is what employers really want from their workers. Are you on time, groomed, engaged, not texting your girlfriend or surfing the Internet all day? One thing they find really interesting to talk about is whether or not wasting time on a job is stealing," Dillman said.

Dillman said one exercise that frequently blows students' minds is reviewing video footage of practice interviews.

“Everybody gets a DVD. The camera picks up a lot you wouldn’t see,” he said.

“We have the class vote on who’s the most improved, who’s the best – my goal for students is that every time they get an interview, they get the job,” he said. “Because there will always be people who have more qualifications than you on paper, but whoever interviews best – every time – will get the job.”

While Dillman’s emphasis on behavior, appropriateness and manners makes him seem like a great fit for the mentor role in a makeover movie a la “The Princess Diaries” or “Tarzan,” his marketing class isn’t simply a crash course in civilization.

He said it is also designed to get students versed in the language of marketing – making the sell, sizing up the customer and honing a pitch – by developing their own business ideas.

He said one group of students was trying to design a guiding business based on becoming certified survivalists: parents coming to visit Durango would drop off their kids to go on a seven-day outdoor adventure trip on public lands with teenage tour guides.

“Right now, we’re talking about price structure, what these boys should be charging,” he said.

He said students also will have the opportunity to intern and work for Durango businesses, and that he’s been in meetings with local leaders such as Jack Llewellyn, executive director of the Durango Chamber of Commerce, to give lectures.

“My job is find out what these kids are into, and then use that passion for business. It’s all about attitude. How do I get that student who’s working shifts after school at Footlocker to see that job as a stepping stone he can learn from?”

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