

Introduction to the Teaching & Learning Section

The real Erin Brockovich (not the movie character) describes herself by saying she is “an advocate for awareness, the truth, and a person's right to know. I believe that in the absence of the truth, all of us stand helpless to defend ourselves.” The need for awareness, truth, and the ability to defend oneself is the foundation of both the articles in the Teaching & Learning Section of this issue of *OMJ*. In “The Potential of Erin Brockovich to Introduce Organizational Behavior Topics” by J. Benjamin Forbes & Jonathan Smith we have a teaching design with an in-class assignment and an innovative take-home viewing assignment. Topics such as perception and motivation can be illustrated through watching Erin upend the status quo of both a law firm and an environmental polluter.

The second article, “Jane’s Decision: Her Experience as a Plebe” also uses the experiences of a strong and brave woman to overcome organizational obstacles. In this case by authors Andra Gumbus, Jill Woodilla, & Christopher York, a young woman relates the case of her difficulties with the culture and behavior at a military service academy. Unlike Erin Brockovich, Jane is not a crusading force for legal justice but someone trying to fit into an educational system that seems to be designed to undermine its own mission. This is a compelling case of institutional blindness as well as individual effort. The themes of authentic leadership and trust are close to the surface here in a format that students can access for classroom analysis and will find compelling for classroom discussion. This is accompanied by an outstanding teaching note from the authors.

These two situations are very different as one character comes from an iconic movie while the other tells us about a system mostly hidden from public view. However, these two articles have much in common. In both cases, the experiences of the title character create a vehicle to highlight aspects of personal and organizational behavior. More importantly, as the authors of “Erin Brockovich” point out, the advantage of using these articles in teaching our OB topics is to add to the “emotional engagement and appreciation of the relevance of the material.” By bringing human struggle into a practical and innovative teaching design, the authors of both articles create engagement in expert fashion.

I think readers of *OMJ* will appreciate the clear writing, good experiential design, and powerful stories in each of these articles. I have found both useful in my own teaching and I am sure you will as well.

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