

# Public Great

## Fear and Loathing in Chicago By: Bill Bott

### Can we hold teachers accountable for student performance?

The other night, my 11-year-old asked if we could move to Chicago. Apparently news of the teacher strike had hit his sixth-grade class and he liked the idea of getting a couple days off from school.

I asked him if he knew why the teachers were on strike and if he agreed with them. He assumed they wanted more money, which is what we all assume when we hear of a strike. But he was shocked to learn it was partly about student testing and that some people wanted the teachers to be graded based on the grades the students received. In no time, my son reached the same conclusion that Ken had reached last year: "Why wouldn't they give all the kids A's and everyone would think they were great teachers?" Bingo. (He has his mom's smarts.)

I don't want to reiterate the dangers of tying success measures to a person's individual performance, but I do want to touch on the overwhelming fear that, as an employee, we are going to be held "accountable" for something over which we have very little influence.

For teachers, we can assume they carry the larger load on educating our kids. However, the sixth-grade teacher is dealing with the students who have already at least five other teachers that laid the foundation for their studies. If that foundation isn't solid, why should they be held accountable?

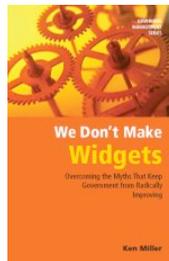
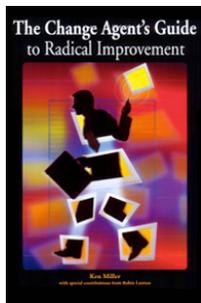
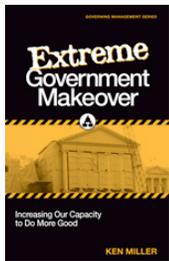
For teachers, we can assume they carry the larger load on educating our kids. However, the sixth-grade teacher is dealing with students who have already had at least five other teachers that laid the foundation for their studies. If that foundation isn't solid, why should they be held accountable? Of course, while teachers have our kids for seven

hours a day, parents have them a lifetime, and they play a vital role in teaching their children how to learn and to assure they are actively engaged in their learning experience. Teachers have absolutely no influence over the parents, so why should they be held accountable for failures at home? And then there's the individual student herself. If she's not willing to learn, there's only so much a teacher can do. A obstinate child's choosing not to learn should not be blamed on the teacher alone.

Those are three huge factors that influence learning, all out of the individual teacher's control. Let's add a few more: larger class sizes, lack of technology, reduction in special need programs, the new math, and Beiber fever. All impacting education, and all outside the teachers' control.

I'd be scared too. Enough to strike? Maybe. It's pretty easy to see why the Chicago teachers felt they were being set up for

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