



How To Get Your Class Back On Track Fast

By Michael Linsin on March 11, 2017

Recently, I got a new group of students for a high school class I was teaching.

Then a few days later, I came down with the flu.

It was awful.

It took me three weeks to shake and I missed more than a week of school.

When I returned, it was as if my new class had never met me.

They strolled into the room with zero urgency.

They chatted and giggled and met my [calls for attention](#) with a shrug.

Their body language was flippant and unmotivated. They had the look and attitude of being “too cool for school.”

In the time that I missed, the culture of the class had completely changed.

I wasn't surprised.

It was a large class (more than 40 students) and I had only been with them a couple days before getting sick.

I had also been warned that the substitute struggled. He battled with the students and eventually gave up asking much of anything from them.

There had been little direction and absolutely no accountability. Now it appeared that the students were in charge.

I worked my way through taking attendance, trying my best to remember names and faces, while they gabbed and payed me little mind.

But I wasn't concerned.

In fact, I smiled inwardly because I *love* this kind of thing. Classroom management is my passion and I saw their behavior as an opportunity to see how quickly I could get them back on track.

I had a couple things in my favor. In the days before coming down with the flu, I [laid out exactly what was expected of them](#), academically and behaviorally.

I set my standards of behavior, participation, and work habits high and taught in detail what would happen if they didn't meet those standards.

There was no question they understood, so I knew I didn't need to revisit them. There was a question, however, whether I truly meant what I said.

My other advantage is that I'm supremely confident in the principles and strategies we believe so strongly in here at SCM. They work regardless of where you teach or who shows up on your roster.

When I finished taking attendance, I decided to let things play out a little longer just to see how bad things had gotten. So, after giving a simple one-objective assignment, I sent them on their way to work in small groups.

It was a disaster.

As I watched them waste time, goof around, and give scant attention to the assignment, I thought of [John Wooden](#). John Wooden was a basketball coach for UCLA in the 50s, 60s, and 70s.

He was remarkably successful and became a hero of mine after reading his book, *Wooden*.

One thing that resonated with me was his attention to small details. At the beginning of every season, he would teach his players how to put on their

socks. The idea was that if they could do this one thing well, they could do all things well.

Excellence transfers.

So, after about 15 minutes, I stopped my class. I sent them back to their seats (to groans). And I taught them a lesson on how we, the class, enter the room and listen during attendance.

I was respectful and not demeaning. I was pleasant. But I was also bold and passionate. I taught in explicit detail how we begin the period and why it's important to begin that way.

I reminded them briefly of the consequences for not meeting the standards of the class, then took attendance again.

This time they behaved as expected.

But just to make sure we were truly back on track, I gave them a new assignment. Again, working in small groups with one objective.

The difference was night and day.

Now, it's important to point out a couple of things. First, although I was teaching a high school class, I would have used the same strategy with a group of first graders (and have).

Second, the manner in which I taught the classroom management plan and set expectations *before becoming ill*, had a powerful effect and allowed the strategy to work. The students just needed a refresher and a reminder that I meant what I said.

The most gratifying thing about the experience, however, and the most striking change, was their happiness and sense of calm well-being in knowing exactly where they stood and what they needed to do to succeed.