

The Not-So-Secret To Effective Classroom Management

by Michael Linsin on June 3, 2009

There are teachers who have been searching for answers to their classroom management problems for years without success. They try one new idea after the other in the hopes of finding the magic combination of techniques and strategies that will work for them.

They test drive interactive bulletin boards, ever-new sets of rules and consequences, echoing chants, bells, and other attention-getting devices, and time-consuming community circles. Soon, they discover that these methods aren't making the impact they hoped for.

They become frustrated and fall back on lecturing, raising their voice, and sending students to the office.

The fact is, there is nothing inherently wrong with any of these ideas. They're just missing an important ingredient, something so important that nothing will work well without it. You've no doubt heard of this not-so-secret ingredient, probably hundreds of times. But only a small number of teachers are actually using it.

99% of teachers have rules or standards of behavior for their classroom, and most of these teachers have consequences in case these rules are broken. This is good. But here is the problem: only a small percentage of teachers actually follow their rules and consequences to the letter.

Your success in creating an optimal learning environment for your students hinges on your willingness to follow your rules and consequences precisely and every single time.

The central reason why so many teachers struggle with classroom management is because they don't really follow their plan. Most only kinda-sorta do. The beautiful bulletin boards and creative sound makers can be fun and enhance your room environment, but they're not going to make much difference unless your management plan is etched in stone.

Once a rule is in place and has been clearly defined for your students, never waver. This is a critical factor in effective classroom management, one that goes unnoticed by a majority of teachers.

Every time you let something go, ignore a broken rule, or fail to enforce a rule with a consequence, you are letting your students know that you don't really mean what you say, that you can't be counted on or trusted.

It's important to note that there are ways of creating leverage with your students that will make your classroom management plan much more powerful and effective, and we will discuss these in future posts. But if you aren't following your plan exactly, not much is going to work well for you.

How To Teach Your Classroom Management Plan

Of all the responsibilities you have on the first day of school, teaching your classroom management plan is número uno in importance. After all, your success as a teacher hinges on your ability. Teachers who are nonchalant about classroom management, or who see it as a nuisance, won't be nearly as effective as those who place it at the top of their list.

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Bring your classroom management plan into high-def focus for your students, making it clear and comprehensible – because ambiguity and confusion are the enemies of effective classroom management. Leave no doubt as to what constitutes following and breaking your rules by shining a light on even the most nuanced misbehavior.

Be Passionate

It's rarely subject matter that motivates students. It's the teacher and the passion she brings to the lesson. Given its importance, teaching classroom management is *the* time to let it out. Allow your students to see the real you, the one determined to create a classroom experience beyond the norm, the mundane, and the colorless – while reaching toward the extraordinary.

Be Dynamic

Teaching classroom management is a physical experience. To make it real for your students, to make it unforgettable, you must dramatize, model, and perform your way through your plan, vividly showing them what both following rules and breaking them looks and feels like. Walk them through each progressive step a misbehaving student would take.

Be Contrarian

Use the how-not strategy to demonstrate the most common rule-breaking behaviors students engage in. Sit at a student's desk and show them *how not* to get your attention, *how not* to ask a question, or *how not* to behave during lessons. They must see and experience what isn't okay in order to fully understand what is.

Be Interactive

Involve your students physically in teaching your plan. Let them role-play scenarios. Allow them be the teacher while you play the part of a student. Gather them around you, encourage questions, let them take an active role. After all, they have more at stake and more to gain from quality classroom management than even you do.

Be Thorough

Surprises lead to confusion, resentment, and ultimately more misbehavior. Make sure there is no misunderstanding. Make sure your students know precisely where your boundary lines are. Otherwise, they'll be forever

uncomfortable, unsure of themselves, and unable to relax and enjoy the freedom within your boundaries.

Note: The idea of allowing freedom within boundaries is a critical element of exceptional classroom management (a trade secret).

Be Skeptical

For review, ask your students to show you how to ask a question or how to get up to turn in work or how to attend during lessons. Make them prove they understand. Have them demonstrate what following rules do and don't look like. If you like, depending on the grade level, you can even devise a written test.

After that you'll want to review every day for the next three or four weeks.

How To Become A Classroom Management Natural

It is said that classroom management comes easy to a lucky few. That some teachers are naturals. They walk into a classroom and somehow, mysteriously, the students just know to be at their best.

But here's the thing.

If you peek beneath the surface of these "naturals," if you take a close look at how they interact with students, you'll discover no mystery at all. The same qualities that make classroom management look effortless for them... are available to you.

You too can be a natural. Just follow their lead.

Here's how:

Be calm. Teachers who radiate a sense of calm have an almost otherworldly effect on students. By their very presence they're able to settle excitability, erase silliness and immaturity, and focus students on what matters.

Be friendly. Natural teachers have a genuine, friendly attitude toward students. There is no false praise, ginned-up enthusiasm, or forced camaraderie. They're real, honest, and openly friendly—which gives them powerful, behavior-influencing leverage.

Be determined. Natural teachers have a bit of bulldog in them. An attitude that says: *I'm in charge, you're going to be well behaved, and we're going to have a classroom we love coming to every day.* And that's just the way it's going to be.

Be aware. Naturals in classroom management are sharp, perceptive, and acutely aware of everything that happens in their classroom. They observe a lot. They absorb a lot. And they're always three steps ahead of their students.

Be fun. Teachers who are open to humor, to laughter, and to seeing the fun and funny in their students are able to build strong rapport, camaraderie, and love for the class. All of which translate to better behavior.

Be confident. Teachers who carry themselves with confidence, despite not always feeling it, send the unmistakable message that *they* are in charge. In this day and age, many students only respect, listen to, and respond favorably to clear, confident leaders.

Be forgiving. Teachers with a forgiving nature are afforded greater influence. Every day is a new day in their eyes. No grudges are held. And behavior isn't taken as a personal affront. Students are given a fresh start every day, which is a powerful reminder that their teacher believes in them.

Be polite. Teachers who are noticeably and consistently polite enjoy a vast difference in the way students speak to them — as well as how their

students treat each other. In polite classrooms, misbehavior is exposed for what it is: rude, absurdly out of place, and unappealing.

Be unflappable. Showing frustration, yelling, or reacting emotionally to misbehavior undermines effective classroom management. Teachers who keep their cool regardless of what's going on around them are deeply respected by students—who in turn repay them with respectful behavior.

Be dependable. Natural teachers build trust by being the same steady teacher today as they were yesterday. Students know they can depend on them to be reliable in behavior, word, and action. Moodiness, after all, destroys trust and will cause a classroom to spiral into unruliness.

Be charismatic. Charisma is the sum total of the qualities above. For many discouraged teachers, particularly those focused on external rewards and stiffer consequences, it is the missing piece. It is what gives a natural teacher the personal magnetism that inspires students to want to please them and behave better for them.

What Are You Waiting For?

None of the qualities above are especially difficult or unattainable. They don't take extra planning or loads of time. No psychotherapy is needed. It isn't rocket science.

Becoming a "natural" in classroom management is like any other goal. It takes desire. It takes purposeful thought. It takes making a choice to pursue what you really want, and then putting your head down and doing it.

Make Fun A Priority

Adding some fun to your classroom isn't difficult. It doesn't take a lot of pre-planning and you don't need any special talent. It just takes a willingness to make it a priority.

Schedule learning games, tell stories, be your silly self, and try to bring a spirit of fun to (almost) everything you do.

Your students will appreciate it, and you'll add more leverage to your classroom management plan.

Why Routines Make Classroom Management Easier; Plus One Great Idea

It's that important. Peak performers in every industry, including sports, business, and education, follow routines in order to focus on the things that matter most. Students, too, benefit from the use of thoroughly taught, well-established classroom routines.

In fact, they are the lifeblood of a successful classroom.

The Benefits Of Routines

Routines – also known as classroom procedures – rid students of distractions that waste time and interfere with learning. Guesswork is minimized. Minor frustrations and inconveniences are fewer, as are opportunities for misbehavior. The students, then, are left to focus on learning.

If your students know what to do and how to do it during every transitional or procedural moment of the school day, they can more easily attend to what is most important. Furthermore, adding more responsibility and purpose is a surefire way to boost morale. Well-executed routines also save time and lessen a teacher's workload.

Instead of giving directions and talking students through transitions, passing out papers, leaving and entering the classroom, and dozens more, these tasks are automated into routines, allowing you to merely observe and focus your thoughts on the next activity.

For everything your students do in your classroom repetitively, there should be a routine.

One Great Idea

The US Marines consider routines a way of life. They drill them over and over until they become second nature. The reason is because routines help them stay safe in the field. When placed in dangerous situations, instead of being distracted by fear and panic, they're able to fall back on their routines and focus on getting the job done.

Of course, our students aren't soldiers; they benefit from doses of levity and humor. Routines absent amusement can be drudgery for students and make the teacher feel like General Patton.

You can have the highest expectations for your students and still keep a spirit of fun and enjoyment in your classroom.

Many years ago, Rick Morris shared with me the idea of using music from old television shows, like *The Adams Family* and *The Cosby Show*, to initiate routines – with each piece of music prompting a different routine.

For example, the music from *The Simpsons* might signal that students leave their desks and reconvene on the carpet in front of the room for a read aloud. *Mission Impossible* might mean that it's time to get ready for literature circles.

But what makes this idea really cool is that the length of each song is the amount of time students are given to complete the procedure. So, for example, the 36-second opening theme to *The Office* might be used to indicate to students that it's time to line up for lunch.

Within those 36 seconds, the students must clean up their work area, push in their chairs, and get in a straight line before the song ends. With experience, a teacher can choose the exact song to match each routine.

And after awhile, students get to know the songs so well that the music acts as an internal clock, much like the iconic *Jeopardy* theme is used as a timer for the show's contestants.

Students love this idea because the songs are silly, they make routines seem... well, less routine, and they represent a challenge.

Students love challenges, and upon hearing the music, they're universally determined to complete the procedure before the song ends – which you'll find to be an excellent teamwork/community builder.

Everyday routines are thus completed quickly and efficiently. Best of all, you don't have to open your mouth. Just point your remote at a boom box and set the routine in motion.

Thousands of TV theme songs, old and new, are available to download for free at televisiontunes.com. For more information about using music in your classroom, visit [Rick's TV Theme Songs page](#).

How To Improve Classroom Management By Doing Less

It's natural for teachers struggling with classroom management to try to do more. They talk more, move around the room more, and meet with students more. They raise their voice and micromanage. They hover and pace. They race through lessons hoping to finish before losing students to the hum and distraction of a rowdy class.

They create another chart, try out another incentive, and have another go at behavior contracts. Before long, they become so accustomed to the frenetic pace that it becomes normal, the cost of being a teacher. But what else is there to do but something more?

Doing Less Equals More Control

Take a deep breath...

If you slow down, move less, talk less, and at times do absolutely nothing, you will gain more control.

And classroom management won't be such a challenge.

Here's how to do less:

Slow Down It's always smart to take your time. If you rush or get ahead of your students, you'll lose them – and control of your class. By slowing

down, you'll cover more material, get more done, and have better behaved students.

Move Less You've probably been told that teachers should move around the room a lot and avoid staying in one place. But unless you're checking in on students working independently, this is poor advice.

Your students need to focus on you and your instruction and nothing else. This is best accomplished by staying in one place. There should be no misunderstanding about where their eyes, ears, and thinking ought to be.

Talk Less Most teachers talk too much. The reality is, the more you talk, the less your students will tune in and the more likely they are to misbehave.

If you want your words to have meaning, be brief, get to the point, and move on. Save your voice for inspired lessons, readings, stories, and activities.

Pause Often When giving directions or providing information, pause often. Allow a beat or two of silence between sentences. This helps students focus on your message, allows them to process what you've told them, and gives you a chance to see how well they're following along.

Do Nothing If your students aren't giving you what you want, stop whatever you're doing. Stand in the most prominent place in the classroom (I like to stand on a chair) and do nothing.

When your students are silent and looking at you, wait some more. Gather your thoughts. When you're ready, tell them again precisely what you expect and then have them do it again.

Lower Your Voice When you raise your voice, you train your students to listen to you only when you get loud and to tune you out the other times. It says, "Okay, I'm yelling because I really mean it this time!" If you want your students to listen, speak softly. They should have to lean forward ever so slightly in order to hear you.

Trust Your Classroom Management Plan You created a classroom management plan for a reason. So use it. Let it do the heavy lifting. Pull yourself away from the drama and frustration of trying to plead, persuade, counsel, manipulate, intimidate, bribe, and will your students to behave. These methods, all examples of trying to do more, don't work.

A New You

Decide today that you're going to start doing things differently. Gone are the days of trying to do more, of chasing trends, of being stressed and in a hurry, of hoping your students will behave. Instead, decide that you're going to do what really works. Students respond predictably to certain teacher behaviors. You can't just wing it. You can't just do what comes naturally or what feels right. More than any other area of teaching, effective classroom management requires you to work smarter, not harder. Today's topic is a perfect example. Rather than doing more and having little to show for it, do less and become more effective.

A Forbidden Classroom Management Strategy You Should Be Using

It's not bribing with Snickers bars. It's not free time. The forbidden strategy I'm referring to has gotten a bad rap, but is so effective it's used to train nurses, police officers, professional athletes, and opera singers. What is it? Repetition.

The overuse of repetition to teach subject matter, lovingly called "drill and kill," is frowned upon because it can dampen enthusiasm for learning. But using repetition to teach classroom management routines is another story. It's the only way to deepen the grooves.

A Danger

There is a danger with using repetition, however. In the hands of an unskilled or impatient teacher, students can become bored, resentful, and

likely to cause trouble. They'll have little incentive to behave for a teacher who like an old football coach yells, "Let's do it again! And we're gonna keep on doing it until you get it right!"

Repetition Done Right

Repetition doesn't have to be agony or time-consuming for you or your students. Done a certain way, it's an effective classroom management strategy you'll both enjoy doing.

Here's how:

Call it practice. Using the metaphor of a sports team practicing for a game makes sense to students and gives meaning to a seemingly mundane exercise.

Teach and model first. Repetition should come only after baseline learning takes place. Teach and model routines thoroughly before asking students to practice them.

Practice at intervals. Practice each routine only twice in a row. Then take a break from that particular routine. Your students will learn faster if you come back and practice later in the day – or the next one.

Praise now. Your students need immediate, positive feedback while practicing routines. Praise keeps the momentum of each repetition moving forward and effectively expresses what you expect from them.

Judge later. After your students are finished practicing a routine, sit them down and tell them exactly what areas need improving. Don't pull any punches. Be specific about what you want and accept nothing less.

If they get it right, stop. Only repeat a routine done incorrectly. If your students get it right, tell them they were perfect and move on to something else.

Lighten up. Arms crossed, frequent sighs, exasperation. Many teachers dislike teaching routines. But if your students see your annoyance, it's

going to take them forever to learn. Having fun and demanding excellences are not mutually exclusive.

It's all teaching. Whether you're teaching your students great works of poetry or a run-of-the-mill routine like how to clean your classroom, it's all teaching. It's all good. It's what we're called to do. Choose to see every opportunity to teach as enjoyable and worthy of your time.

Mastering Routines Is About Pride

Routines make your life easier and less stressful. They save oceans of time. They keep students focused on excellence, which will transfer to *everything* you do.

But more than anything... Routines are about pride – pride in doing something well, pride in being part of a special group, and pride in standing apart from the crowd. A brisk, confident class rolling like a train on their way to lunch is a beautiful thing. Your students will walk tall and purposeful, taking both compliments from adults and stares from other classrooms in stride.

And you? You don't have to do or say a thing. Just follow.

How To Be A Better, Happier Teacher By Slowing Down

If you're like most teachers, you're in a hurry much of the time. Your schedule is overloaded. Your curriculum is bursting at the seams. And you have precious little time between one activity and the next.

Stress rises along with your dissatisfaction, but you continue to push the pace because you've been lead to believe that if you can somehow shoehorn everything in by the end of each day...

You'll be a good teacher – doing your job, making progress, moving the curriculum along.

But it's not true. Being in a hurry will make you less effective, not more effective.

Here's why:

Being in a hurry...

- Gives you less control of your class.
- Causes your students to become excitable, restless, and inattentive.
- Diverts your attention away from students.
- Causes you to cut corners with your classroom management plan.
- Gives you less leverage with students.

Slow Down

The solution is to slow down. Easier said than done, right? If it were that simple, everybody would go about their day at a nice, leisurely pace. With everything on your plate, how are you supposed to slow down?

Trim the fat. Most teachers try to do too much – much more than they really need to. Take a close look at *everything* you do and cut out what isn't directly related to improving academic progress or classroom management. Focus only on what's important, and eliminate the rest.

Look ahead. Take two or three minutes every morning and visualize your day. Let the images flash quickly through your mind. Athletes use visualization to improve performance and avoid mistakes. It works just as

well for teachers. You'll be a more effective teacher and save yourself a lot of time if you mentally rehearse before the day begins.

Wait. Never move on with a lesson, an activity, or a transition unless you're getting exactly what you want from your students. Moving on before every student is locked in and following along will come back and bite you later. Waiting is the best defense against future interruptions, misunderstandings, needless questions, and other time-wasters.

Stop and enforce. When you're in a hurry, you'll cut corners – especially with classroom management. But nothing wastes more time than misbehavior. So when a student breaks a rule, enforce it immediately. It may feel like an interruption at the time, but it will save you loads of time in the long run.

Talk Less. Over-explanation is a common mistake teachers make. Get to the point and move on. You'll save a lot of time by talking less, and you'll enjoy other benefits as well – including improved behavior, better attentiveness, and deeper comprehension.

Teach your routines. In many – if not most – classrooms, the time wasted on transitions is staggering. Your students need to know exactly what to do every minute of the school day. Done efficiently, routines and procedures can save hours of time during a typical week.

Observe. Good teachers observe a lot – which is itself an excellent time-saver. It keeps students on task and completing their work faster. It's also the best way to know the needs of your students and what changes you need to make to your instruction.

Remember to breathe. Being aware of your breathing will keep your mind in the present and guard against racing headlong into the next thing. No, you don't have to behave like you're in a yoga class or float around in a meditative state. Occasional awareness is all that's required. Mindful breathing will also protect you from stress, focus your mind, and help you perform at your best.

Should Your First Consequence Be A Warning?

Giving a warning eliminates the need for three commonly used strategies that make classroom management more difficult. Teachers who struggle with classroom management tend to lean on one or more of them. What about you? Do you do any of the following?

Reminding The teacher reminds students when they don't follow classroom rules.

Example: Mrs. Fowler asks a question during a lesson. Eric calls out an answer. Mrs. Fowler says, "Good answer, Eric, but next time raise your hand."

Mrs. Fowler often reminds her students to follow classroom rules. Predictably, they break them often.

Glaring The teacher glares at students when they don't follow classroom rules.

Example: Mr. Penn sees Michelle and Elsa giggling during writers' workshop. He positions himself where they can see him and then, with arms crossed and eyebrows raised, gives them "the look" until they get back to work. Mr. Penn is proud of his ability to stop misbehavior in its tracks with his well-practiced "look" but has grown tired of the constant battles to get students to follow his rules and focus on their work.

Correcting The teacher corrects students when they don't follow classroom rules.

Example: The class is lined up for lunch. But one boy, Terrence, is out of line and acting up. Frustrated, Mr. Stallings barks, "Terrence, close your mouth and get in line!" Mr. Stallings is a ball of stress at the end of each day. The burden of having to command students to do this and don't do that is causing him to reevaluate his career choice.

Giving A Simple Warning Is Easy

Instead of the stress and frustration of reminding, glaring, and correcting, all three teachers could save themselves a lot of trouble by giving a simple warning.

A warning works best as a first consequence because...

It's easy to be consistent.

When you have a classroom management plan that includes a warning, it takes the guesswork out of handling initial misbehavior. Student breaks rule...teacher gives warning. It's as easy as that.

It's not personal. By consistently giving a warning whenever a student breaks a rule (for the first violation), you avoid the drama that can result from a direct and personal confrontation.

It builds trust. Doing exactly what you say you will do builds your students' trust in you, which makes it easier to influence behavior.

It's quick and easy. There is no interruption when giving a warning. You just give it and move on without a second thought.

It's stress free. You don't have to rely on persuasion or intimidation to stop misbehavior. You don't have to yell, remind, glare, or use any of the other stress inducing methods so many teachers feel trapped into using.

It makes sense to students. When you follow your classroom management plan exactly as stated – which includes a warning – there is no confusion for students. They know exactly what to expect, which gives them a sense of safety and frees them to be their best selves.

Note: A warning is only effective when backed by a strong, take-action consequence.

How To Give A Warning That Improves Behavior

The Purpose Of A Warning

A warning is just a warning – and nothing more. So when you give one to a student for breaking a rule, leave it at that. You ruin the effectiveness of a warning by adding a lecture, a scolding, or anything that shows your displeasure. That may sound counterintuitive, but a warning only works when its purpose is to allow students to fix their mistakes on their own.

A warning is another way of saying: *You broke a class rule, but I trust that you will check yourself and ensure that it doesn't happen again.* When students are given the freedom to make the right choice, rather than having it forced upon them, it says loud and clear that you believe in them and their capacity to control their behavior. And this makes all the difference.

But so many teachers mess it up by giving a warning and then adding, “I don't want to see you do that again. Do you understand me?” or something vaguely threatening like that. You have to give trust before students will show you they're worthy of it.

When a student first breaks a classroom rule, give them the opportunity to show you they can get themselves back on track by letting your warning be a warning. Keep your personal feelings out of it. **We want students to look inward when they break a rule. The last thing you want is for them to get mad at you for their mistakes.**

If your students get angry with you or blame you when they break a rule, then classroom management will be infinitely more difficult. Finger-wagging lectures, added reminders, scolding, sighing, threatening. They're all self-sabotage.

How To Give A Warning

Quickly, dispassionately, and with as few words as possible.

However, there are two variations depending on the situation.

First Variation: If a student breaks a rule, and you're sure the student knows what rule was broken, then you simply write his or her name on the board, place a yellow card in the student's designated pocket, or do whatever you do to signify a warning. **(The mode by which you indicate a warning is irrelevant.)**

And that's it. You never speak to the student. The student sees the yellow card turned over and knows that a warning has been issued. The bonus, then, is on the student to do what he or she needs to do to avoid further consequence.

This is how you'll give a warning about 75% of the time.

Second Variation:

The other 25% goes like this: If a student breaks a rule, but you're not sure the student is aware of it, then approach the student and say, "You have a warning because you broke rule number two." Say it matter-of-factly and then immediately walk away.

Make Sure You Do This

To make your warning most effective, make sure you do the following:

Include everyone. Even the most well-behaved students make mistakes once in a while. Resist the urge to look the other way when they break a rule. In fact, when your top student breaks a rule, it's a great opportunity to show the entire class your consistency and integrity.

Back it up. A warning is only effective when backed by a consequence your students don't like. They need to know that if they break a second rule, you will hold them accountable.

Use Enduring Classroom Management Strategies

This "hit and run" method of giving warnings is a good example. The longer you consistently use it, the more effective it becomes.

The reason is simple.--When your students begin to grasp that the responsibility for breaking rules in your classroom falls firmly – and solely – in their laps, behavior *will* improve.

And this kind of improvement is permanent.

Warning: Most Teachers Make This Classroom Management Mistake; Do You?

If you can eliminate this one mistake when responding to misbehavior, you will lower your stress level, save time, and have a more influential relationship with your students.

What is it?

The mistake most teachers make is asking students why they misbehaved.

Example:

Mr. Shoemaker glances across the room and sees Jeffrey standing on a chair.

Mr. Shoemaker (yelling): *Jeffery! Get down from there right now!*

Jeffery gets down. Mr. Shoemaker pulls him aside.

Mr. Shoemaker (exasperated): *Why were you standing on your chair? Please explain it to me, because I don't understand. What were you thinking?*

Jeffrey hems and haws and, like anyone caught behaving poorly, is not sure how to answer.

Mr. Shoemaker (becoming more frustrated): *Answer me, Jeffrey. The class is waiting.*

Jeffrey still doesn't know what to say, but Mr. Shoemaker is determined to pressure an answer from him in the false belief that by doing so he is holding Jeffrey accountable.

Jeffrey must learn a lesson and therefore should explain himself... right?

So Mr. Shoemaker waits on Jeffrey until Jeffrey mumbles an acceptable response. He then lectures Jeffrey on why he shouldn't stand on chairs, and the incident ends.

But not without lingering effects.

Mr. Shoemaker walks away tense and frustrated. And Jeffrey is angry – though not with himself.

He's angry at Mr. Shoemaker.

Why This Is A Mistake

You should never ask a student why he or she misbehaved because...

You already know the answer. The reason Jeffery made the decision to stand on his chair is the same reason any of us behaves poorly: because, at the time, he wanted to. Ultimately, this is the reason any student misbehaves.

It's hard to answer truthfully. Few students answer truthfully because (A) they have difficulty putting into words their desire to misbehave, and (B) they know their teacher doesn't want to hear the truth: *because I felt like it*. So they make something up, blame someone else, or tell you what you want to hear – something like, *I was bad, I made a mistake, and I won't do it again*.

It replaces a real, effective consequence. The reason teachers ask students why they did this or did that is not because they really want to know the answer. The reason is because they're angry and want to teach the student a lesson. But in doing so, they're undermining their classroom management plan. Consequences remove the need to pressure, browbeat, or intimidate students into behaving.

It causes resentment. Forcing an explanation from students causes resentment. To them it feels like humiliation. Yes, you have a right to

handle misbehavior this way. But you'll pay a price for it. When your students dislike you, you have little influence over their behavior choices.

It's stressful to you. Asking why results in tense, frustrating conversations that rarely end well. Why subject yourself to that? Especially because, in the long run, it will increase bad behavior.

You don't have time. Pulling students aside after they misbehave wastes time. It also breaks up the positive momentum in the classroom, creates tension, and forces the rest of your students to wait on you.

A Better Way

A better way to handle misbehavior is to hold students accountable with a consequence.

Example:

Mr. Shoemaker notices Jeffery standing on his chair. Unhurried, he moves into Jeffery's sight line until Jeffery sees him and gets down.

Mr. Shoemaker (motioning to Jeffery): *You have a warning.* (Or a time-out or whatever your classroom management plan calls for.)

Mr. Shoemaker then turns and continues on with whatever he was doing.

That simple.

Jeffrey already knew he was wrong, so Mr. Shoemaker didn't need to point it out to him. There was no reason to ask why, because Mr. Shoemaker already knew why. There was no reason to make Jeffery explain himself, because the consequence took care of that.

Mr. Shoemaker communicated to Jeffrey in a way that students best understand. And he did it without wasting time, feeling stressed, or driving a wedge through his relationship with Jeffrey.

Four words, three seconds, one consequence and Mr. Shoemaker was done with the interaction.

Note: If later in the day Mr. Shoemaker wanted to explain to his class the dangers of standing on chairs and remind them that it's a violation of classroom rules, then this would be perfectly appropriate. But there is no reason to discuss the situation further with Jeffrey.

One Exception

There is one exception to the no-asking-why rule.---If you notice a student lashing out against others, you may have to ask why in order to rule out retaliation against bullying – which can never be taken lightly.

How To Stop Repeating Yourself And Start Speaking With Power

Do you repeat yourself when giving directions? Most teachers do.

Besides wasting time and energy, repeating yourself weakens the power of your words. It causes students to tune you out. When your students become conditioned to you repeating yourself, they know they can take their time following your directions. They can finish the paragraph they're reading. They can carry on their conversation a bit longer. They can cruise through the day without urgency because they know you'll repeat your directions – and anything else important – over and over again.

How To Speak With Power

Repeating yourself is a habit you must break if you want your words to have impact. The good news is that it isn't difficult to do. Chances are, you'll find it liberating.

Just follow these eight steps:

1. Stop moving. Before addressing your class, stop moving and stand in one place. This helps students focus on you and your message. It also acts as a modeling device; they'll mimic what they see from you.

2. Ask for attention. Ask for your students' attention using a normal speaking voice. I recommend something simple like, "Can I have your

attention, please.” Then wait until every student is quiet and looking at you before opening your mouth.

3. Say it once. Give your instructions once using clear, direct language. And don’t over explain. Giving too much information is a common mistake. Keep it simple. Tell your students only what you want them to do.

4. Pause. A longer-than-normal pause will keep students focused on you. If you speak again right away without a generous pause, you’ll lose them. Looking away as the teacher begins speaking is another behavior teachers condition students to do. A well-timed pause eliminates this danger.

5. Ask a negative. Ask your students if any of them does *not* know what to do. This is an effective questioning technique that helps shift the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the students. If a student does raise his or her hand, tell the student to ask a neighbor *after* you give your signal to begin.

6. Give your “Go” signal. Go is a power word that initiates action. As soon as you say it, your students will get busy doing *something*. If you follow the guidelines given here, however, they’ll do what you ask of them.

7. Don’t help. You’ve done your part. Now it’s their turn. The responsibility to carry out your instructions lies with them, not you. If you notice a student lost or unsure of what to do, resist jumping in to help. Give the student a chance to figure out what to do on his/her own or to ask a classmate. If you’re the type of teacher who is quick help, then you’ll create dependent students (i.e., learned helplessness).

8. Do not repeat. If a student asks you what they’re supposed to do, answer by telling the student to follow your directions. This encourages students to 1) listen intently to directions and 2) take responsibility by finding out from a classmate. This is key to creating a classroom of sharp, independent students.

Big Benefits

By following the guidelines above and never repeating yourself, you'll cut the amount of talking you do in half. You'll have better energy at the end of the day. You'll get a lot more done. But best of all, your words will have power – power that causes students to tune in to the sound of your voice and to carry out your directions with speed and accuracy.

Body Language And Classroom Management

The core principles we associate with classroom management – *rules and consequences, incentives, and following through* – are important. No doubt about it. The first step for teachers wanting to improve is to learn how to use them effectively. By following these principles, your classroom management plan will be built on a solid foundation. **However, to be remarkably effective, to create the class you really want, you have to learn how to create leverage.**

Leverage simply means having great influence with your students. This is where the real power comes from.

Leverage makes everything you do as a teacher easier and more effective, particularly classroom management. The topic of today's article, body language, is one way to increase your leverage.

Creating Leverage Through Body Language

Seven percent. That's how much speaking impacts your students. The other 93% is attributed to non-verbal communication. Part of that 93% is the way you use your voice – tone, volume, pace, enunciation, etc. *The rest is body language.*

8 Things Teachers Do To Encourage Misbehavior

True, students come to class with behavior issues and personal agendas. Some are prone to misbehavior and are difficult to deal with. A few may even enjoy trying to disrupt your class. Teaching is challenging enough. Putting yourself behind the eight ball by your own doing can make it unbearable.

Let There Be Light

In that spirit, the following list represents things teachers do unknowingly that encourage misbehavior.

- 1. Talking over students.** Talking over students breeds inattentiveness, side-talking, and poor listening. If your students have trouble following directions, this is often the culprit. The simple solution is to wait until you have the full attention of your class before speaking.
- 2. Rushing around.** Being in a hurry creates tension in the classroom, causing restlessness, excitability, and poor behavior. This common mistake is easily corrected by trimming the fat from your curriculum, being better prepared, and then slowing down.
- 3. Answering call-outs.** Answering students who don't raise their hand encourages disrespect and communicates to your students that your classroom management plan is no longer valid. Condition yourself not to respond no matter who asks a question or how insightful it may be.
- 4. Moving on.** Continuing with lessons or instructions when students are inattentive—or worse—lets them know that less than their best is good enough. Wait until your students are giving you exactly what you want before moving on.
- 5. Negative thinking.** Negative thoughts about students always bubble to the surface—body language, tone of voice, sarcasm—causing resentment, misbehavior and, ultimately, revenge. Choose to see the best in your students... and that's what they'll give you.
- 6. Irritability.** Showing frustration, taking behavior personally, reacting emotionally. These self-sabotaging behaviors will weaken your influence and undermine your ability to control your classroom. Instead, keep your cool and lean heavily on your classroom management plan.
- 7. Clutter.** Classroom clutter shows a lack of pride that rubs off on students and leads to unwanted behavior—the broken windows theory at work. A

pin-neat, attractive classroom, on the other hand, is congruent with, and transfers to, values like hard work, neatness, respect, and character.

8. Self-defeat. Believing that students decide whether or not you have a good class is a belief that virtually eliminates the possibility of creating the teaching experience you really desire. The fact is, *we* create the class we want, not our students

The Heart Of The Matter

Rules and procedures. Incentives and consequences.

You must get to the heart of the matter, which is deeper than stickers, strategies, charts, or time-outs. It's more than outside circumstances. More than names on a roster.

The heart of the matter is you.

Your body language has a strong impression on students. Therefore, it makes sense to use it to your advantage. What follows is a short list of how to use body language to gain more leverage with your students. It's not comprehensive, but it's doable. And with regard to cultural differences, the items on this list are generally universal.

Eye Contact – Eye contact is perhaps the most powerful way we communicate. A single fleeting look from across the classroom can speak volumes. Longer eye contact is associated with trust, good feelings, and rapport – all of which are important leveraging qualities. Be aware, however, that too much eye contact can be intimidating, especially for shy students. So although we want to utilize the power of eye contact and should use it often, we shouldn't over do it.

Facial Expressions – This one is easy. Smile. A smile makes communication easier, less awkward, and more persuasive. It's also a mood-changer and will evoke warm and happy feelings in both the giver and the recipient. So let your guard down and smile away.

Posture – A sagging posture displays a lack of confidence and is associated with weak leadership. To students, it says that you're unsure of yourself.

They won't listen to or trust someone who appears wishy-washy. Walking tall, with your body erect and shoulders straight, engenders confidence in you as a leader. You then become more believable, and students are more apt to accept what you say. The difference between telling a student to go to time-out with a tall comportment versus saying it with a sagging, defeated posture is night and day.

Proximity – Some classroom management “experts” recommend standing close to difficult students during lessons. But moving into someone's personal space without permission is a show of dominance. It's aggressive and antagonistic and is universally perceived as a threat. And although it may dissuade unwanted behavior during the brief moment you're standing there, doing so will give you *less* leverage and influence in the long run, resulting in more disruptive behavior. Allow students their personal space. They'll appreciate and respect you for it.

Touch – A brief tap on the shoulder or arm of a student you're speaking with can elicit a subconscious response that makes you more persuasive. I know it sounds manipulative, but in reality, all it does is help build rapport. It's a natural thing to do when speaking to someone in a friendly manner. It says: “Hey, I like you, and I want what's best for you.”

Think about what your typical body language is communicating to your students and how it's affecting your classroom management success. Is it increasing the amount of leverage you have with your students? Or is it making it more difficult to influence them?

Try out the above recommendations. Use more eye contact, smile more often, stand up straight, allow your students their personal space, and use the persuasive power of touch. Take note of how differently your students respond to you. I know you'll be pleased. Also, notice how changing your body language affects how *you* feel.

Why You Should Never, Ever Be Friends With Students

One of the keys to effective classroom management is to build relationships with students. Making personal connections—through humor, kindness,

likeability, and more—is a powerful way to influence behavior. It can also be astonishingly rewarding. The give-and-take with students, the trusting rapport, the shared affection—these are the things that make teaching more than just a job.

But there is a danger in building relationships with students. There is a line that can never be crossed. If you try to connect with students on their level—in a peer-to-peer-like friendship—then your efforts to influence their behavior will backfire. And you'll struggle with classroom management.

Here's why:

They won't respect you. Your students need someone to look up to, not a buddy to hang out with. You're not a peer and therefore should never behave like one. When you use slang or try to be cool or become overly familiar, they'll lose respect for you. Your influence comes from your position as their teacher, not their friend.

They'll stop listening to you. Becoming too informal or casual in your interactions with students will weaken the power of your words. The urgency for your students to listen and learn will wane as the year rolls on and more of them begin wearing a too-cool-for-school attitude.

They'll challenge you. As soon as students get a whiff of your “cool teacher” vibe, they'll start challenging and testing you. And you'll likely find yourself in a showdown with a few or more students bent on wresting control of the classroom from you.

Rules will no longer apply. Your students will react to your buddy-buddy management style by routinely and nonchalantly breaking your rules. They'll stand and approach you in the middle of a lesson. They'll stop raising their hand. They'll assume, since you are friends, that the rules don't *really* apply to them.

Consequences are taken personally. Your students will start reacting to being placed in time-out by blaming you. They'll become hurt and angry

with you for merely doing what you said you would. Some may even pout, have a mini temper tantrum, or refuse to talk to you.

Accountability no longer works. Accountability only works when students acknowledge internally that they indeed made a mistake. But if, when sitting in time-out, they're mad at you because they feel you betrayed them by putting them there, then there is no accountability and no motivation to improve their behavior.

You become lax in following your classroom management plan. Because your students tend to act dramatically when given a consequence, you will naturally begin to shy away from following your classroom management plan. You'll tiptoe around them. So instead of *you* having leverage to influence their behavior, *they* now have leverage with you.

Tips For Building Influence

Building influential relationships with students without confusing them about who you are and what your role is isn't difficult. Follow the tips below, and you'll be the teacher they need instead of the friend who disappoints them.

- Be a teacher, mentor, and role model, but never a friend.
- Maintain a polite but warm level of professional distance.
- Engage in the same friendly banter with all students.
- Don't use slang or terms popular with them.
- Model politeness and expect it in return.
- Follow your classroom management plan as it's written.
- Focus less on individual relationships and more on creating a classroom your students love coming to every day.

Influence that is powerful enough to get your students to *want* to behave and *want* to learn is not born of peer-like friendship, casualness, or laid-back coolness.

If your students like you because you're friendly and good-humored, and they respect you because you always do what you say you're going to do...Then influence grows naturally.

Losing Control Of Your Class? Here's How To Get It Back

One of the happy truths about classroom management is that you can always press the restart button. You can always call a do-over. Any time you like. So as soon as you notice your students becoming less motivated and more prone to misbehavior, that's exactly what you should do.

Crumble up and start over. Don't wait until your students are climbing the walls, and you're sobbing during your lunch break. Do it now.

Every day your wet finger should be in the air, testing the behavioral winds of your classroom. If you don't like the direction they're blowing, it's time to shake things up. And start over from scratch.

Here's how:

Begin first thing in the morning. It's best to start over in the morning, as soon as your students arrive to school. In the meantime, if you're trying to get through a rough afternoon, slow everything down. Take your time, talk less, and wait until your students are quiet and looking at you before moving on to the next thing.

Rearrange seating. Before your students arrive in the morning, change the seating arrangement – as well as where students sit in relation to one another. A new place to sit signals to students that change is in the air. The old way of doing things isn't in play any longer.

Clean up the clutter. Physical environment has a noticeable effect on behavior. A tidy, clean look, with lots of pride and open space, sparks an immediate understanding in students—without you saying a word—that

excellence is expected. Clutter, on the other hand, whispers to all who enter your classroom, "*Mediocre will do.*"

Block out one hour (or more). Most teachers are in a hurry to plow through the curriculum, giving less attention to the one thing that makes the greatest difference in the classroom: classroom management. Clear your schedule for first thing in the morning. Give yourself *at least* one hour to work your classroom back into shape.

Model procedures first. Your students need to know exactly what to do, and how to do it well, during every minute of the school day. When they don't, bad things happen. Routines and procedures are critical to your success – and sanity. They should be reviewed, modeled, and practiced during the first half of your one-hour block.

Practice walking in line. Although all procedures are important, walking in line is at the top of the list. Nothing focuses students faster or more effectively than practicing a smooth, brisk, arrow-straight line. It gets them doing things the right way, which will then transfer to everything they do.

Reintroduce your classroom management plan. After practicing procedures, your students will be calmer, more attentive, and more receptive to your instruction. Now is the time to reintroduce your classroom management plan. Model each rule and consequence like it's the first day of school.

Recommit yourself. If your students have become careless with their behavior, then you've become careless with classroom management. It's as simple as that. So own up to it. Tell your students that you've done a poor job of holding them accountable and therefore haven't fulfilled your most important job: to protect their right to learn without interference.

Then give your word that it won't happen again.

Pedal To The Metal

Whenever you feel like you're losing control of your classroom, it's because of something you're doing—or not doing. It's not about your students. It never has been and it never will be.

It's about you.

Effective classroom management is a daily, hourly, commitment. As soon as you let up and relax your standards, you're going to pay for it—with interest.

The solution is to keep your foot on the gas, propelling your students toward your ever-rising bar of excellence.

Do this, and you'll never have to start over.

The 7 Rules Of Handling Difficult Students

If you're like most teachers, two or three students take up most of your time. On the days when they're absent, or pulled from your class, everything goes smoothly. Teaching is more fun. You're more relaxed. And you can cruise through your lessons without interruption.

But when they're sitting in class, which seems like *all* the time, they can make you want to pull your hair out. Unfortunately, the frustrations you feel dealing with difficult students can cause you to make mistakes.

The following is a list of 7 rules—all don'ts—that will help you avoid the most common pitfalls, and turn your most difficult students into valued members of your classroom.

Rule #1: Don't question. It's normal for teachers to force explanations from difficult students as a form of accountability. But asking why and demanding a response from them almost always ends in resentment. And angry students who dislike their teacher never improve their classroom behavior.

Rule #2: Don't argue. When you argue with difficult students, it puts them on equal footing with you, creating a “your word against theirs” situation.

This negates the effects of accountability. It also opens the floodgates: everybody will be arguing with you.

Rule #3: Don't lecture, scold, or yell. Lecturing, scolding, and yelling will cause *all* students to dislike you, but when you direct your diatribe toward one particular student, it can be especially damaging. Creating friction between you and your most challenging students virtually guarantees that their behavior will worsen.

Rule #4: Don't give false praise. Teachers often shower difficult students with praise for doing what is minimally expected. But because these students can look around at their fellow classmates and know that it's a sham, false praise doesn't work. Instead, give only meaningful, heartfelt praise based on true accomplishment.

Rule #5: Don't hold a grudge. "Every day is a new day" should be your mantra with difficult students. They need to know that they have a clean slate to start each day—and so do you. To that end, say hello, smile, and let them know you're happy to see them first thing every morning.

Rule #6: Don't lose your cool. When you let students get under your skin and you lose emotional control, even if it's just a sigh and an eye roll, you become less effective. Your likeability drops. Classroom tension rises. And when difficult students discover they can push your buttons, they'll try as often as they can.

Rule #7: Don't ignore misbehavior. Given that there is an audience of other students, ignoring misbehavior will not make it go away. It will only make it worse. Instead, follow your classroom management plan as it's written. If a difficult student breaks a rule, no matter how trivial, enforce it immediately.

It's About Relationships

What if the two or three (or more) difficult students in your classroom admired you? What if they looked up to you, respected you, trusted you, and liked being in your company? What if they embraced whatever you had to say to them?

Your success in helping them change their behavior would go through the roof, and you'd have peace in your classroom. The fact is, everything hinges on your ability to build relationships with your students. Your classroom management plan merely nudges them in the right direction. Done correctly, it gets students to look inward, to self-evaluate, and to feel the weight of their transgressions. But by itself, it can only do so much. It's your relationship with your students that makes the greatest difference. **When you build trusting rapport with them, which anyone can do, you then possess a tidal wave of influence that can change their behavior, improve their academic performance, and profoundly impact their lives.**

How To Respond To A Disrespectful Student

A disrespectful student can get under a teacher's skin like almost nothing else. When confronted with disrespect, it's easy to take it personally. This is a normal reaction from a passionate teacher. But it's a colossal mistake. **Because when you take behavior personally, you're likely to react in ways that make managing that student's behavior much more difficult.** Your leverage and influence will then plummet right along with his or her behavior. But if you can refrain from doing what comes naturally, then you can hold the disrespectful student accountable and still retain your ability to influence future behavior.

Here's how:

Lose the battle. When a student is disrespectful to you, you have to be willing to lose the battle. In other words, you must resist the urge to admonish, scold, lecture, get even, or otherwise attempt to put the student in their place.

Don't take it personally. Disrespect comes from a place inside the student that has nothing to do with you. So don't take it personally. Your job is to help the student see the error of his or her ways so that it doesn't happen again.

Stay calm. Take a deep breath to quell any angry feelings rising up inside you. Remind yourself that you'll be much more effective, and the situation will go much smoother, if you maintain emotional control.

Pause. In the immediate moments following the incident, don't say a word. Simply maintain eye contact with the student and wait. Let their words hang in the air for several seconds, leaving no doubt about what was said, how it was said, and who is responsible for saying it.

End it. It's important not to escalate the situation, but to end it as quickly as possible. Your pause and unwillingness to react is unnerving and will leave the student devoid of anything to say. As soon as you break eye contact and walk away, the incident is over.

Move on. Refrain from enforcing a consequence—for now. Just continue on with whatever you were doing. Leave the student standing there, unsure of what to do. It's always best to get back to normalcy as quickly as possible for the sake of the rest of your students.

Do nothing. Proceed with your day as if nothing happened. Don't approach the student. Don't try to talk to him or her about what happened. Don't do anything until you're confident that the student has mentally moved on from the situation.

Enforce. As soon as the student is calm and the incident is forgotten, approach and deliver your consequence. I recommend bypassing the warning step of your classroom management plan and sending the student directly to time-out. Say simply, "You broke rule number four. Grab your work and go to time-out."

Notify. For overt disrespect, the parents should be notified. A letter home is most effective. It also adds a layer of accountability that lasts beyond the day of the incident. Near the end of the school day, hand the student your letter and walk away—without adding a lecture. Let accountability speak for you.

Let remorse set in. When you handle disrespect this way, without lecturing or scolding or taking it personally, even the most obstinate

student will be affected by his or her mistake. So much so that you're likely to get a sincere and unforced apology.

A Lesson Learned

By following these steps, you can turn a student's disrespect into a memorable lesson. The steps work because they heap the entire burden of responsibility on the student's shoulders, with none of it clinging to you.

He or she can't blame you or be resentful of you – thus undermining the lesson – because you didn't try to get even. You didn't have to win the battle. You didn't yell, threaten, scold, or lower yourself to the same level of disrespect.

You kept your cool and allowed accountability to work, which is the right thing to do for both you and the student.

Lower Elementary: In the case of a kindergartner, crawled on the floor and under tables after being sent to time-out. Playing, straying, and not sitting quietly in time-out can happen regardless of grade level.

And this problem can be especially frustrating. It pulls the teacher away from his or her responsibilities and diverts the attention of the class away from the lesson and toward the misbehaving student.

To make matters worse, how you handle a situation like this can negatively affect the behavior of the rest of the class. More specifically, if the student in time-out gets away with behaving poorly, or is able to get under your skin, then others will follow.

So in that moment, what are your choices? How do you respond without demanding, lecturing, or yelling? Do you have recourse?

These are important questions because they go straight to the heart of a teacher's job satisfaction. The worst position to be in as a teacher is one where you feel you have no leverage, no recourse, and no options other than responding out of anger and going home stressed and discouraged.

Many teachers leave the profession because of it. And I don't blame them. If I felt that students controlled my fate, that they decided whether I enjoyed my day or not, I'd consider another line of work too.

When a student misbehaves in time-out, it's a blinking sign that your time-out isn't working and won't effectively curb misbehavior. Furthermore, it's an act of defiance and shows a lack of concern over your consequences.

What To Do

In response to students who don't sit quietly in time-out, there are six things you can do to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

1. Show your students a complete picture, from start to finish, of what they're expected to do if told to go to time out. Use detailed modeling. Demonstrate how to walk to time-out, where to sit, and precisely how you expect them to spend their time there.
2. Use the "how not" strategy and be sure to include any unwanted behaviors you've seen from your students (i.e., crawling under tables, making loud noises, leaving the time-out chair).
3. Have them practice. Choose students "randomly," one at a time, to show the class how to do it. Make them prove to you they understand the ins and outs of going to time-out.
4. When a particularly difficult student is sent to time-out, if at all possible, ratchet up the fun. Have a learning game or activity in your back pocket for such moments. Time-out is only effective if the student feels he or she is missing something.
5. Back up your time-out with a consequence. Think of the one thing you do as a class repeatedly, every day or every week, that your students love the most. It can be a certain lesson, game, song, story, or anything you wish. Whatever it is, missing that activity should be your consequence for not sitting quietly in time-out.

If you're thinking, "I hate that they have to miss such a great activity. They love it so much and I feel bad taking it away from them," then you know you've chosen the right one.

6. Follow through. Do what you say you will do, and do it every time.

If you discover that a student you sent to time-out isn't sitting properly, or is otherwise not following the time-out directives, don't overreact. Better yet, don't react at all.

I know this is difficult to do at times, especially if the student is disrupting your class. But, at this point, it's too late. If you try to "win the battle" by yelling, demanding, or lecturing, you'll lose the war (so to speak).

Wait until the time-out is over and the student has settled down, and then calmly approach. Lean in and say, "Evette, because you didn't sit quietly in time-out, you will have to miss the Jeopardy vocabulary game this afternoon."

Don't wait for a response. Turn and walk away.

When the time for the game or enjoyable activity arrives, show your enthusiasm for the event and allow your students to get excited. But just seconds before the start, when the room is silent, walk over to the offending student and remind her that she won't be allowed to participate.

As you increase the interest, excitement, and enjoyment in your classroom, as well as your likability, classroom management becomes an easier proposition. Add to it an unbending commitment to accountability, and you have an unbeatable combination.

Everything you do—how you speak, the classroom environment you create, your relationship with students, and much more—affects classroom management.

Why Laughter Makes Classroom Management More Effective...

Laughter has the rare ability to soften hardened hearts, open shuttered minds, and endear students to one another. It is the key that allows a teacher to reach her hand out to the difficult, the unmotivated, the awkward, and the unhappy... And have them reach back.

Here are a few more reasons why you should bring more laughter into your classroom:

Your students will love you for it. When you make an effort to add humor to your lessons, routines, and activities, you instantly become more likeable to your students—which causes them to want to be around you, to please you, and to get to know you better. This, in turn, gives you powerful leverage to influence their behavior.

It's a common language. Although it can take time for some students to come around, all students like to laugh. Laughter is the one thing guaranteed to build camaraderie and knock down social and emotional walls, binding students from different backgrounds together into one happy classroom.

It's easy. It takes little or no planning to bring more laughter to your classroom. All you need is a willingness to try. Your students will appreciate any effort to be funny. They're primed to laugh. So be your silly self, tell a joke or two, and show your best—or worst—dance moves.

It builds togetherness. I'm dubious of community circles — at least in the way they're commonly used. Hashing out grievances can lead to resentment and more things to complain about. Sharing a laugh and having a good time together, however, soothes old wounds and alleviates hurt feelings better than anything else.

It motivates students to behave. Humor can help you create a classroom your students love being part of. This, along with strict accountability, provides a strong motivator for students to behave. No student wants to wallow in time-out while their classmates are sharing a laugh with the teacher.

It eases tension. Many classrooms buzz with tension. You can feel it as soon as you walk through the door. And before long, you'll see it too: excitable, irritable, and misbehaving students. Laughter, however, can relax an uptight classroom – releasing tension, calming vibrating knees, and bringing joy to the room.

It encourages hard work. When students are happy to be in your class, you can ask so much more of them. They appreciate a classroom they enjoy coming to every day, and they'll want to repay you for it. It's human nature. We reciprocate those we feel indebted to.

It reaches the hard to reach. Humor has the power to help you make personal connections with students, particularly with those who are hardest to reach. When I look back on the most challenging students I've had over the years, I can often point to the use of humor as a major factor in helping me turn them around and guide them in the right direction.

The Straight Scoop

There is a common belief that if you use humor in your classroom, you'll lose control of your students. If you already have poor classroom management, then yes, it's true. Trying to be funny will backfire on you. Behavior will likely get worse. But if you have solid classroom management skills, then bringing more laughter into your classroom will make you even more effective.

Use Meaningful Incentives

Personal notes from you can be a powerful incentive.

Because of the reliance on email, text messaging, and other forms of communication, the old-fashioned handwritten letter has become a relic of the past. But the emergence of such technologies has also made letter writing that much more poignant and meaningful.

How would your students feel if they received a personally written note from you? How much more leverage and influence do you think you would have?

- 1. Use stationary that will communicate the specialness of your missive. It doesn't have to be high-quality paper, but a variety of colorful, fun, and interesting themes is a must. Post-its are a no-no.
2. Always handwrite the note. A computer-printed note is cold and lacks heart.
3. Write about something you noticed in the student that went beyond what is commonly expected.
4. Make it private. Put it in an envelope or fold it over and seal it with tape. Leave it just inside a desk, on a chair, or in the student's mailbox.
5. Be authentic. False or empty praise is dishonest and does nothing to improve long-term behavior.
6. Have the note waiting for them when they arrive in the morning. And unlike how I first handled it, don't watch them as they open and read it.-
7. Don't mention the note to them or speak to them about it unless they approach you. Most teachers talk too much. Actions speak louder and more profoundly. Let your note speak for itself.

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The most influential incentives are those that aren't connected to a particular behavior, as in "do this and you'll get that." The best incentives are those that arrive out of the blue.

None of us are immune to the wonderful feeling of receiving a handwritten letter or note from someone we admire. Follow the seven guidelines above and you'll discover your influence with students growing immeasurably.

How To Motivate Your Students To Behave Better, Work Harder, Care For Each Other... Or Anything Else You Want From Them

Lecturing individual students is a common classroom management practice – just another tool in a teacher's tool belt. But it's a colossal mistake,

born of frustration, that does nothing to curb unwanted behavior beyond several minutes. The reason?

When you lecture individual students, it's done out of anger and not out of a pure intention to help improve behavior. And students know it. It causes them to dislike you, lose respect for you, and desire to get even with you – greatly diminishing your influence.

Whole-class lectures, on the other hand, can work miracles.

How To Motivate Their Socks Off

I prefer to call class lectures “motivational speeches” because that's what they're designed to do: to motivate students. Done a certain way, a motivational speech can light a fire under a lazy class, reverse poor attitudes, inspire altruism, or stop unruly behavior in its tracks.

Here's how to do it:

Step 1: Tell them what you don't like. Your students will behave/perform better when they know precisely what not to do. To that end, start your speech by pointing out what you're unhappy with. What are you seeing from your students that you want corrected? Without singling anyone out, cite specific examples.

Step 2: Tell them why it's wrong. Explaining why is a powerful persuasion technique. Your students are much more likely to agree with you – and thus change their behavior – if you offer a clear explanation why their behavior is wrong. Make your reasoning brief, direct, and easy to understand.

Step 3: Tell them what you want. Make clear to your students what you expect from them. In other words, how they *should* behave. Again, be specific. Show them how you want them to attend during lessons, raise their hand, choose a partner, greet their tablemates, or whatever behavior you want changed.

Step 4: Challenge them. Ask your students, challenge them, to stand up if they feel like they're not going to be able to do what you ask – for whatever reason. Tell them that, if this is the case, if they really feel like they can't do what you expect of them, you want to know now. You don't want to wait and find out later when you see the same old behavior again.

Step 5: Challenge them again, then finish together. Challenge your class to stand and gather around you *if* they are committed to whatever you're asking of them. If they're not, tell them to remain seated (they won't). Extend your hand into the center of the group. Ask them to do the same. Now glance around, looking them in the eyes, and say, "Now I want you to show me, prove to me that you can listen, learn, study, and become the best students you can be."

Then finish with a bang: "Be the best on three. One...two...three... BE THE BEST!"

Add Your Passion

The above steps won't work if you just go through the motions. It will be just another lecture, just another teacher droning on, unless you tap into that place deep inside you that believes in an individual's capacity to overcome obstacles, to rise above their circumstances, to become more than the opinions of others.

You have to believe, to know beyond a doubt, that your students are capable of fulfilling the vision of excellence you have for them. Because if you don't believe it, they won't believe it either.

So don't be afraid to let it out. Don't be afraid to show your passion for helping students become more than they think they can. Don't be afraid to show your desire to create your dream class, to make your classroom and this school year a once-in-a-lifetime experience for you and your students.

If you get goose bumps as you look into your students' eyes, if they look back at you with intensity and determination to be better students, then you know you're on the right track.

