

What It Really Means To Have High Expectations

February 9, 2019 by Michael Linsin

It's thrown around a lot.

"You must have high expectations."

"High expectations are the key!"

"Keep your expectations through the roof."

But what does it really mean?

It seems obvious, but the term has been repeated so often and for so long that its true meaning has been diluted.

Or lost altogether.

Most teachers have only the vaguest idea.

"It just means asking more of your students, right?"

"It means communicating what you want, but at a high level."

"It means to push your students to get better."

While these are all good things, they're merely the *result* of having high expectations. They skim the edges of the target, perhaps, but fail to hit the bullseye.

You see, high expectations aren't something you pull out of thin air.

They don't come from [a motivational poster](#). Your principal doesn't bequeath them to you. And you darn sure won't find them in a teacher's guide.

So where do they come from?

They come from inside you. They're developed over a lifetime of overcoming obstacles and disappointments. They're born of perseverance, mental toughness, and the role models who passed them on to you.

They're born of the belief that *anyone* can rise above their circumstances and find their own success.

In other words, high expectations must be part of who you are.

If they're not, if you don't have a feistiness and rebel can-do attitude when it comes to your students, then all the platitudes in the world aren't going to mean a thing.

Talk is cheap, but the force of your will is indomitable.

It's also visible to your students. In fact, that part of you that accepts no excuses and *knows* that they can transcend their own hurdles and difficulties is as plain as day.

When you say "You can do this," "I believe in you," or "This is how we're going to do it," they take it on faith that it's true. They may not be able to explain this ever-present force that surrounds and accompanies you every day.

But they can feel it.

It gives them confidence that when you state who they are and what they're capable of, when you set your expectations way above what they've experienced before, they believe it.

They believe the definition you give them about themselves. They believe your word that they really can conquer whatever you set before them.

This is why certain teachers can [give a direction](#) one time to a class they've just met and it's followed. This is why some classes make unimaginable gains and unheard of test scores.

This is why every year Mrs. Smith's class appears so different – mature, focused, content – from any other.

High expectations that come from within you, that relentlessly project their power upon your students, become part of them too. They imbue them with their own brand of gutsy, I'll-show-them spirit.

That stands and fights.

That won't be denied.

That sees it through to the very end.