



Why You Should Never, Ever Confuse Accountability And Motivation

By Michael Linsin

One reason many teachers struggle with classroom management is because they confuse motivation and accountability. Although related, they are two separate areas of classroom management. To be effective, they must remain separate.

Teachers run into trouble when their attempts to motivate students to behave interfere with or replace the accountability process. It's a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants method of classroom management that leaves them stressed and scratching their heads wondering what they're doing wrong.

Keeping them separate, however, can be magic.

There are only two effective ways to hold students accountable. The first, which is a response to individual misbehavior, is to dispassionately follow [your classroom management plan](#). A student breaks a rule and you enforce a consequence. It's as simple as that.

The second is employed when [your class as a whole fails to follow directions](#) or perform a routine as taught. It entails stopping students in their tracks, rewinding to the beginning of the transitional period – or the transition itself – and starting again.

Both ways are action-oriented. In other words, you *do* something in response to misbehavior, which is a key characteristic of effective accountability. Any and all talk is held to a minimum.

The wonderful thing about both methods is that there is no guesswork. You know precisely what to do in response to every incident of

misbehavior – individual or otherwise. The central message to students is that *you* (the teacher) don't choose to enforce a consequence, they do by their behavior.

The problem for many teachers is that instead of relying on one of these two effective responses, they'll attempt to "motivate" their students to change their ways. In other words, they'll lecture, question, correct, admonish, threaten, discuss, and otherwise use their words and body language to try and convince, coerce, or manipulate their students into behaving.

Sometimes this tact is used in place of accountability and sometimes it's used in addition to accountability – as in escorting a student to time-out while giving a lecture. In either case, it only makes matters worse.

Feigning exasperation, adding your two-cents, giving a talking-to, threatening, glaring, complaining, raising your voice . . . these common reactions to misbehavior build walls between you and your students. They cause friction and distrust and a resentful, you-against-them relationship. They undermine accountability, absolve responsibility, and ultimately cause more misbehavior, not less.

True accountability, on the other hand, as defined above, protects the student-teacher relationship. It's never personal or hurtful. It isn't reactionary, aggressive, or manipulative. And it doesn't pull you into stressful arguments or confrontations.

Rather, it's an open, honest, and fair affirming and taking of responsibility. It's predetermined and agreed-upon. It's thought-provoking and reflective. It's a determination to do better and a desire to be a valued member of your classroom. It's a lesson learned and a repentant heart, a clean slate and [a welcome back with open arms](#).

Motivation, in an effective classroom management sense, is never negative and comes more from the classroom environment you keep than the words you use. It comes from creating a clean, safe, and enjoyable learning experience your students look forward to.

It comes from sharp routines, a brisk pace, inspired lessons, and amusing stories. It's your likability, your trustworthiness, and your calm, consistent personality. It's the rapport you build and the good vibrations emanating from every molecule in your classroom.

It's direct. It's honest. It's real.

And it never, ever replaces, hinders, or weakens true accountability.