

3 Reasons, 10 Rules

What's the bottom line? In business, it's money. In the enterprise we call school, it's student learning.

Maximizing the bottom line—student learning—through the best possible learning environment is the primary job of teachers; and success hinges on effective management of the classroom. Why are classroom management skills crucial? Let's look at three major reasons and some corresponding rules.

The Reasons

Reason 1: Research says so. After analyzing 3,000 educational studies conducted in the last 50-some years, researchers concluded that classroom management is the most powerful influence on student learning (Walberg 1992). Subsequent research by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) combined the former study with two others to produce the most comprehensive study to date on classroom management. "The end result . . . was that classroom management was rated *first* in terms of its impact on student achievement" (Marzano 2003).

Reason 2: Instructional theory says so. Meaningful teaching and learning do not occur in the absence of effective management. In their Model of Pedagogical Knowledge, Saphier and Gower (1997) demonstrated that classroom-management skills construct the foundation for all other teaching skills. Management skills are basic to effective instruction.

Reason 3: Those without it fail. Interviews with teachers who exit the profession during the first three years of teaching reveal that lack of effective classroom-management skills ranks as one of the top three reasons for their departure. Salary and lack of administrative support are the other two.

The Rules

What produces effective classroom managers and successful students? Begin with 10 rules framed from information Saphier and

Gower presented in *The Skillful Teacher* (1997). Teachers with excellent classroom-management skills follow these rules:

Rule 1: Build personal relationships with students.

If teachers don't follow this rule, the other nine won't matter. Teachers must care about their students and show it. They must see students as individuals, respecting and taking a personal interest in them.

Rule 2: Have high expectations. You get what you expect. Students measure up to the teacher's expectations for achievement and behavior. Make yours high but realistic for all students.

Rule 3: Get their attention. Students must be tuned in to learn, so begin every lesson with getting their attention. Be persistent about maintaining attention. Use eye contact and proximity, and present interesting and challenging lessons.

Rule 4: Keep momentum. Prolong those precious teaching and learning moments. Don't break them to deal with trivia that can be postponed or ignored. Hang a sign on your door that says, "Stop! Learning in progress." Make a pact with colleagues not to interrupt each other's classrooms.

Rule 5: Make space work for you. Arrange furniture to facilitate learning and make the classroom work for you. Place your desk to the side or rear of the room and don't teach from it. Accommodate traffic patterns. Avoid clutter. Let students have a say—it's their room too.

Rule 6: Use time wisely. From kindergarten through grade 12, students spend only nine percent





of their waking hours at school, experts estimate. Therefore, you cannot afford to waste time! Engage students productively whenever possible, including time you must carry out dutiful tasks. End class with a summary, questions, and a “dress rehearsal” for the inevitable question: “What did you do today?”

Rule 7: Maximize routines. Teach routines that will save time and increase efficiency—passing out and taking up papers, entering and exiting the classroom, or using free time. You will be amazed how orderly classrooms run when students are given responsibility for learning and following routines.

Rule 8: Discipline effectively. Discipline oversees misbehavior; it’s not punishment. The goal of discipline is to develop *self-discipline* through focus

on desirable, rather than undesirable, behavior. Therefore, discipline is something you teach, not something you do. Many classroom misbehaviors—such as talking and goofing off—are merely annoying conduct. Yet, teachers frequently interrupt learning to deal with these trivial offenses while appropriate conduct is ignored.

Review rules 1–7, and then read 9 and 10. If you do all of these well—or most reasonably well—rarely will you deal with misbehavior.

Rule 9: Build a climate of choice, ownership, inclusion, and risk-taking. Create a classroom environment that includes and values all students; where students are given responsibility and expected to make decisions. Above all, build a community where students will take risks because they know they won’t be subjected to humiliation, ridicule, or punishment.

Rule 10: Play. Make the students’ day! Be a playful teacher and let learning be fun. Everyone benefits from a classroom in which smiling and laughter are natural. As *Fish!* philosophy declared, anything worth doing is worth enjoying (Lundin, Paul, and Christensen 2000).

To develop your management skills, work on one rule at a time, starting with Rule 1. When you perfect a rule, add the next one. Some behaviors will improve naturally. When you can follow all 10 rules, your students and you will experience the joy of a classroom in which learning flourishes and good feelings abound. 🍏

References

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