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Teachers Need to Follow Their Own Rules

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Somebody recently said to me, "I can't believe the way they misbehave and the lack of respect they show. They talk on their phones, text, and talk while I talk, don't listen to each other, come in late, leave early and have no patience for those who disagree."

Who is this person talking about?

- A teacher talking about her students?
- A principal talking about her faculty?
- An in-service presenter talking about teachers attending the training?
- A college professor of education talking about her class of pre-service teachers?

The sad truth is that you don't know. Too many students, faculties, audiences, and education students all behave the same way -- not all individuals, of course, but several individuals within each group are culpable. I remember once giving an in-service training session in a city in northern Ohio. The participants sat at tables, and the five men at one table were all reading the newspaper during the training. Normally, I am not bothered by participants' behaviors when I train in schools. Some are learning

while knitting, doodling or softly talking to their neighbors. And if they are not learning, there is nothing I can do to force them. That table of men particularly bothered me because I felt they were setting a terrible example to the others. It turned out that they were all principals. What a terrible message they sent to their faculties.

Behavior Follows Values

To be honest, had cell phones been invented while I was a seventh grade teacher, I might have been tempted to text during a boring faculty meeting. But not any more. Those of you who are familiar with my work or have read any of my recent posts know how strongly I believe that we behave according to our values. Sidney B. Simon, my professor in my doctoral program and one of the developers of *Values Clarification* (<http://www.amazon.com/Values-Clarification-Dr-Sidney-Simon/dp/0446670952>), taught me many years ago that your choices of behavior are among the best indicators of your true values. If this is so, then what do we learn about the values of pre-service and in-service teachers who violate their own rules?

Students Understand a Lot More Than We Realize

Many behavior problems that teachers face in their classrooms come from students who quickly see whether or not their teachers value appropriate behavior. The most disruptive students are often the ones who best intuitively understand when teachers are hypocritical as they try to enforce rules that they obviously don't follow themselves.

Shouldn't Adults Have Different Behavior Standards Than Children?

When I raise this issue with educators, I often hear, "But we're adults. Rules are different for us. We can drive, drink, and smoke, and kids can't." Not true -- these are not rules as much as they are privileges. And if you want the right to behave differently than children, you can do so. Just get a job where you don't influence children.

Two Behavior Changes

I recommend two changes for those educators who need them:

1. Follow your own rules in all professional situations. These include your own classrooms, meetings, trainings, and courses. Be on time, dress professionally, put your smart phones and newspapers away, and don't disrupt others. One other recommendation: if you want to have any friends, never ask a question as time is running out.
2. Be a good role model for your students. I once sat in a principal's office in Montgomery, Alabama, a place where I was treated with utmost respect and hospitality, while a parent was called in because her son was in trouble for hitting. She was a very large woman who strutted weirdly over to her son and slapped him very hard twice on his face. Then she put her hands on her hips and said, "Who taught you to hit?" I would have said, "Maybe it was you," but she was bigger than me.

Being a good role model means never doing anything to a child that you don't want them to do to others. Children learn to be adults by watching adults. Think carefully about the way you intervene with student misbehavior and ask yourself, "Do I want this child saying or doing what I am about to say or do to another child or adult?" If you yell, "Get out," imagine that student yelling the same thing to another child on the playground.

It's hard to work with children, and our professional standards are high. However, if a rule is too hard for you to follow, then think of how hard it must be for a child to follow it.

How do you consciously teach by example? Please share in the comments section below.

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