
Chapter 1

Changing Student Attitudes

Don't Accept Excuses

Be Prepared to Explain Assignments

Use the *Agree First* Technique

Unlock the Unknown

Acknowledge Opposing Viewpoints

Try the *Test Drive* Technique

Show Enthusiasm Consistently

Actions Guaranteed to Motivate (and Demotivate) Students

Focus Your Actions on the Majority

Cultivate Pride

Encourage a Lively Imagination

Provide Motivation to Finish Early

“It’s easier to change a student’s behavior if you first change his or her attitude.”

Don't Accept Excuses

Students who expect to fail are difficult to motivate. Many of them actually play the role of **S**underdog. All they do says, "I'm always getting pushed around," or "Everybody picks on me." As a teacher, if you take their bait, you'll never get them to deal with the two real issues of their problem: expecting defeat and not doing much to avoid it. Talk to these students calmly and patiently—but directly. Tell them you can't accept—or allow them to accept—alibis or excuses. Once they know for sure that you won't accept their "lame-duck" stance, you're better positioned to move to the work at hand rather than the excuse at hand.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you noticed students in your classes who expect to fail? What sets them apart from their peers?

2. Brainstorm ways to help these students develop a healthier self-concept.

3. Write about a time you counseled a student who expected defeat. Was your advice effective? What might you do differently next time?

Notes

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Be Prepared to Explain Assignments

Be prepared in advance for student concern about the time and effort it will take to do assignments—especially homework assignments. These concerns are normal. They are part of the learning process. Therefore, don't get angry and become unsympathetic about such concerns. Rather, think about the reactions students will have to an assignment and be prepared to give a refined, empathetic, considerate, and motivational reply. If you can't think of an adequate response, you may need to alter the assignment because your answers to students' questions will affect their focus and motivation to do the work.

Reflection Questions

1. Do your students show concern about the assignments you give? What sorts of things do they say?

2. Explain how you take student needs into consideration when planning your assignments.

3. What motivational responses could you give when students have concerns about the amount of time or effort an assignment will take?

4. How have you seen students become motivated to do an assignment when you give an empathic or motivational response to concerns?

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Use the *Agree First* Technique

Remember the *agree first* technique when you are trying to motivate a student. No matter how difficult it is to do, try to begin your efforts with a point of agreement. Remember, it is always easier to motivate with this technique, and it is almost always more difficult to motivate without it. In many instances, we may be certain that a talk with a student is going to produce resistance or a disagreement. Even here, however, we have the advantage. We can identify a point on which agreement is a good possibility before we approach the student. We would be wise if we did.

Reflection Questions

1. Why is it important to begin your efforts to motivate a student with a topic on which you agree?

2. Tell about a time you were able to avert a disagreement by starting with something you and the other person agreed on.

3. In general, how can spending a few minutes preparing for a conference with a student or parent help that meeting go more smoothly?

Notes

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Unlock the Unknown

One effective way to motivate people is to let them in on what they may previously have considered a mystery. For instance, how you create a test, grade papers, or arrive at decisions related to class routines, practices, or standards may be unknown to students. Explaining these processes creates trust—and it also builds better understanding by showing students how they can be successful in the classroom.

Reflection Questions

1. Tell about a time you were motivated by getting a peep into what you considered a mystery.

2. In what ways have you made students aware of the procedures and processes that regulate your classroom?

3. How could you incorporate student input as you set grading scales, write tests, and plan lessons?

4. Explain how being admitted to the behind-the-scenes work in the classroom could show students how to be successful.

Notes

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