

# Promoting Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

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## **USE THE LANGUAGE YOU WANT LEARNED**

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*The highest reward is not what students get--  
rather it is what they become.*

Responsibility and democracy cannot be separated. John F. Kennedy in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, ***Profiles in Courage***, wrote,

For, in a democracy, every citizen, regardless of his interest in politics, "holds office"; every one of us is in a position of responsibility. . . ." (p. 255)

**Responsibility** is the bedrock of our democracy. The following words changed history--borrowed from John Locke and so eloquently stated by Thomas Jefferson:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, **deriving their just power from the consent of the governed.**

Up until that last line was penned and our revolution a success, people received their rights from the king, baron, chief or the leader of the "community." Jefferson's statement turned the world around.

The foundation of this approach is a responsible citizenry.

A prime objective of our profession is to hand down the beliefs and values of our forefathers to future generations. Our society will continue only if we do this--which means teaching, promoting, and fostering responsibility. In a classroom, it means **using the language** which represents the values we want to promote.

The traditional approach is to post rules. Rules promote obedience and place the enforcer in the role of a cop--wearing a blue uniform and copper buttons.

Most of us did not enter the profession to be enforcers of rules, imposers of consequences, and practitioners of punishments.

Our mission is to be facilitators of information, sharers of knowledge, developers of skills, empowerers of wisdom, educators, teachers, role models, coaches, mentors--not police officers.

As you plan your communications for the new school year, consider using the term, RESPONSIBILITIES, rather than RULES.

### **THE TERM, "RULES," SHOULD BE REPLACED**

Rules are necessary in games, but in relationships rules are counterproductive. When a student does not follow a class rule, the tendency is to think in negative terms. The reason is simple: rules in a classroom imply "or else." A rule that is not followed often leads to an accusatory encounter and results in some type of psychological pain, anger, or resentment for both teacher and student. The rationale is that there must be a consequence for breaking the rule. A consequence is a light punishment that, by its very nature, is coercive. It encourages feelings of enmity, which are not very conducive for positive relationships or learning.

Classroom rules often work against the very reason for their existence--to have students behave responsibly.

The mere fact that one knows a rule does not mean it will be followed, in much the same way that information that has been taught does not mean it has been learned. When we discover that a teaching has not been learned, we try to assist the student. Similarly, behavior is learned, and the student should be helped, not hurt or caused to suffer. These negative emotions foster resistance, rather than trust--which is a necessary feeling to promote learning.

Rules are "left-hemisphered." They are sensible, orderly, and structured. However, students who "break the rules" often operate spontaneously and process randomly--typical of "right-hemisphere" behavior. These students need to learn procedures to resist their impulsivity. Rules do not work for them.

### **THE TERM, "RESPONSIBILITIES," SHOULD BE USED**

RESPONSIBILITIES engender student empowerment; they serve as expectations and inducements. They tap into internal motivation and foster commitment. Responsibilities promote desire--something that compliance never attains.

Here are two sets of responsibilities. Note how they connote expectations, rather than obedience:

**Do my work**  
**Have materials**  
**Be where I belong**  
**Control myself**  
**Follow directions**  
**Speak considerately**

**Be prompt**  
**Bring materials**  
**Listen for instructions**  
**Honor self and others**  
**Accept ownership of my choices**

## **PROCEDURES**

Very often, what a teacher refers to as a rule is really a procedure. We need look no further than to one of the first rules students are given. They are taught the classroom rule of raising a hand to be recognized by the teacher before speaking out. Simply reminding students that this is a procedure, rather than a rule, places the teacher in the position of a coach and eliminates an enforcement mentality.

We too often assume that students know what we know and what we would like them to do. Do not make such an assumption. Teach procedures, such as how to enter the classroom, how to use an activity center, how to distribute supplies, or anything else that requires a mode of operation. A successful classroom has routines and procedures, which give organization and structure to learning. The outstanding teacher communicates high expectations and then teaches procedures to facilitate them. Just keep in mind that **process precedes product, that procedures precede content.**

By teaching your procedures and posting student RESPONSIBILITIES (rather than "rules"), students become more responsible, inappropriate behaviors are reduced, and the joys of learning and teaching are enhanced.

By the way, notice that all the responsibilities above are positive. Positivity promotes empowerment which, in turn, promotes responsibility.

Make a mental note when you return to school. With a little creative thought, those school rules--often posted in negative terms--are easily turned into positive ones. And referring to them as RESPONSIBILITIES will enhance and promote your goals.

**If you and your school want to promote responsibility, use the language you want learned.**

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**Additional information to promote responsibility can be found at <http://www.MarvinMarshall.com>.**

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