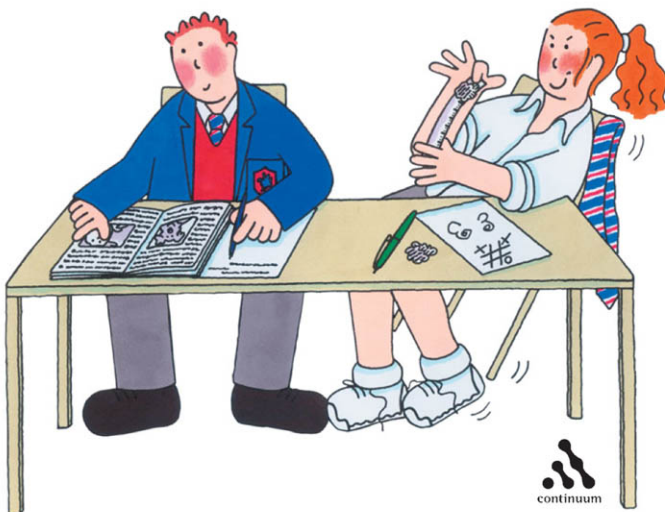


Dos and Don'ts of Behaviour Management

Roger Dunn



Dos and Don'ts of Behaviour Management

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Dos and Don'ts of Behaviour Management

2nd edition

Roger Dunn



This book is dedicated to my loving wife Valerie

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Introduction

At the time of writing, I am into my thirty-seventh year as a teacher. Incredibly, that time has simply flown by. I can say with my hand on my heart that there is no nobler profession or a profession more important than teaching. I could argue that perhaps successive governments have not given the level of importance it deserves to it, nor to the people who are its front-line troops. However, if you do not share my belief, then it probably isn't the profession for you.

At my present school, I am Director of Behaviour. Like all schools, and certainly every school in which I have taught, there are 'challenging pupils' (get used to that phrase!) and they represent a constant challenge to all the staff who teach them, or have to deal with them around the school.

I recently completed an MSc in Educational Leadership, which was an extremely valuable and illuminating experience. For one, I had to do a tremendous amount

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of background reading, and two, I entered into a journey of self-reflection. One thing that occurred to me was that there is a plethora of behaviour management books on the market, many of them with excellent advice and good methodology, but not one of them really hits the mark with me. They tend to be far too wordy and concern themselves too much with mundane theory. What you really need is something direct and to the point. If I was going into teaching now, I would want a handy, easily accessible book of dos, don'ts and possible strategies that I could employ. I would want it to be easy to understand and follow and just as easy to put into practice. I would want alternatives and advice, and I would want to know that I could trust these, because they had been tried and tested in the most difficult of educational circumstances and were still being employed. I would also want a complete checklist of everything I would need to do before I stepped into the classroom, before I came into contact with my first pupil. I would also want a guide to all the other aspects of teaching that I had not even given any attention to. In short: a comprehensive, easy to read, straight to the point book I could dip in and out of as and when.

If you are considering teaching as your chosen profession, this book will give you concise advice on everything you will need to know and do in a wide range of circumstances: from problems with individual pupils, to a classroom 'riot', to how to mark, as well as ensuring you are perfectly prepared at all times and

know how to bring this about successfully. All of these have either a direct or indirect impact on the behaviour management of pupils, as I shall outline as I proceed.

As you read this book, you will see overlaps and points that resonate throughout. This is quite deliberate: very little practical advice that I shall give you stands in glorious isolation. It will also serve to underline key pointers and hopefully, in this way, begin to inculcate the very common-sense and well-tried methods that do work. And please remember, and forgive me for being prosaic so soon, I am coaching you and new techniques need to be practised in the teaching sense just as much as in any sporting sense you can conjure up. Do not give up if it doesn't work straightaway: persevere and grow in confidence and trust me: it will score for you too!

I repeat that this is a wonderful, rewarding and incredibly important profession. You owe it to your own sanity and to the education of those in your charge to be as good as you can at it.

This book can be used by anyone going into or already in teaching, whether they are primary or secondary based. It is as germane to a teacher in this country as it is to any teacher in any country in the world. Teaching is a universal art; it does not significantly change from one country or culture to another, but the principles remain the same. I am a secondary school teacher, but that does not mean that my experiences preclude those in the primary sector. My wife is a

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primary school teacher and has read this through for me; you have the benefit of her many years of primary experience also. However, where I mention different classes or teaching groups, I appreciate that this is not germane to the primary sector. The advice is though, as are all the guiding principles; so all you primary sector teachers don't be put off.

I wish you well and sincerely hope that what you are about to read will be an ongoing useful tool that you will refer to time and again to enable you to become the teacher who you really want to be and who all the pupils, whom you will teach, deserve and need you to be.

1 Making the Decision

There were four things I seriously considered taking up as a career. One was sport. I had the opportunity of playing professional cricket, but there just wasn't the money in the game and I never felt that I was good enough to make it all the way to the top and play internationally. I was considered for semi-professional football, but I got married, moved away from that area and didn't try again. One career in sport down! A career trading the boards was also a possibility. I did main drama at teacher training college and there were plenty of opportunities to take up a career as an actor when I finished. Ditto as for cricket: not enough money in it unless you get to the very top. Two down! I have the actor in my blood and love the cut and thrust of argument and debate; so a career as a barrister appealed. Problem: too footloose and fancy free at 19 to consider working that hard and having to study so intensely. Three down! The fourth was teaching. And actually it combined all four of them in one package:

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I have taught sport, run teams (football, basketball, cricket), I have taught drama and written, directed and produced scores of plays in schools (and if you want to be a success in front of pupils, you need to have the good actor somewhere in your blood), and I also get to hold court in both classroom and staffroom.

However, the most important thing that you need is confidence. This is the one absolute attribute that you have to take into the classroom. Without it, you are already on the back foot. Pupils smell fear, indifference and nervousness. They begin to assess and weigh you up the first second they clap eyes on you. They make their calculations based upon these initial observations. How you stand, how you walk, the way you carry yourself. Be under no illusion, look weak and timid and already some of them will have started licking their lips. Be unsure and uncertain and you are already at a disadvantage. It is not about size or colour or shape, it is about the way you come across, and that must be as confident, composed, and most importantly, in control.

If you are reading this because you are considering a career as a teacher, you need to ask yourself: 'Do I think I have these attributes?' You need to do a self-assessment, because if you do not possess them naturally, you are going to have to acquire them. One of the tasks we did many years ago at Drama College was looking at how people walked and what it said about them. It made me analyse how I walk myself. Head up, shoulders back and a measured pace with not too big a

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step, comes across as being in control, confident and reassuring. Conversely, small hurried steps, head down, shoulders hunched, give off the exact opposite vibes. Of course there are combinations of the examples mentioned and each one gives off a different message about that person. I tried my hardest to walk like the first example. Obviously you can never totally change, but it is amazing how such small, seemingly insignificant things add up and make such a significant difference. Try it for yourself: observe those around about you and apply some of the principles I have mentioned above to try and assess how they come across to you as a result, and see if you agree with what I am saying. The aim here is to give you what sports people call 'the edge'.

How good a talker are you? I can talk for my country ('More is the pity!' I can hear friends and colleagues chorus). But believe me, the ability to talk is a major advantage in teaching. This does not preclude people who are naturally quiet. But they cannot be 'quiet' in a classroom and the ability to talk, and talk well, is a fundamental necessity, because much of your teaching depends on it as a means of communication. And it is not just being able to talk: can you talk clearly so that pupils can understand what you are saying? Do you have a strong regional accent that would be difficult for those outside of that region to understand? Can you modify it? Is it going to be a problem for you if you teach outside of your region, or indeed for pupils in that region who are not locals?

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Do you like children? This seems an almost absurd question, but you might be amazed by how many teachers I have met in my time who really dislike youngsters. It's a bit like having arachnophobia and working with spiders for a living! A fundamental liking for and interest in youngsters is so important. They will try you, frustrate you, wear you to a frazzle at times, but if you understand, sympathize and even empathize, you will have the patience, tolerance and forbearance to 'touch base' with them and ultimately succeed. And they will know this, believe me; never underestimate how important you are going to be, or already are, in many of their lives, and taking a real and genuine interest in them as people will reap huge dividends.

Are you well organized? Trust me; this is no profession for those who are not. Being confronted by a class of pupils is not the time to discover that you've left your overheads at home, or that you haven't brought any spare paper or pens, or you really don't know what you're going to teach in that lesson. Yes, it does happen! And it mustn't happen to you, especially in the first weeks and months. Train yourself now! Tidy up your room at home and put things in order. Get used to filing things neatly away in clearly labelled folders. If you don't have a diary, buy one and start recording key dates in it and get used to using it at least twice daily: at the start and the end of each day. This must become a habit. You will learn about other good habits later on in this book, but this is one that will have a

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positive effect even outside of the school and is one that you can train yourself to do now.

Are you a good planner and organizer? It is not just teaching that requires these two attributes, most professions do. However, in teaching you will have to constantly plan and organize. Good teachers tend to be excellent at both, in and out of the teaching environment. Again, you can train yourself. You need to be able to think ahead, commit ideas and thoughts to writing, revise, change as required and then act logically on what you have devised. The committing to writing is all important. Get used to doing that now with anything and everything you are planning and organizing: holidays, parties, night out, etc. Get used to making lists and filing them away (see above) for future reference. Don't always rely on the PC; you do need the paper hard copy as well for easy reference or for when the PC is not operational, a not uncommon occurrence in the school situation! Whilst on the topic of technology: do not rely on it solely in teaching, because it will let you down and it always seems to do that when you are most under pressure and confronted by your most challenging pupils. You will need a back-up: make sure you have that back-up to hand.

2 The Psychology of Teaching

A classroom can sometimes feel like a battle-zone, with you as the teacher entrenched on one side of the room and the pupils dug in on the other. Like major battles, they generally start with a few skirmishes. In military terms, skirmishers are the soldiers who go in front of the main army and test out the opposition's defences. You will meet these in the classroom: they are the pupils who will be testing your defences from the second they meet you.

And of course, just as in the military situation, these skirmishers are going to shy well away if they are confronted by a well-armed, battalion-strength force, which is prepared, bristling with fire power, confidently standing its ground, clearly anticipating every eventuality and obviously up for the battle. Pupil skirmishers are no different: they will observe what is in front of them and make their decisions accordingly.

As I mentioned in the previous section, pupils sense nervousness and they feed on your uncertainty, and a

The Psychology of Teaching

point to really take on board is that when you start teaching, they are the ones on familiar territory: it is their ground not yours. The senior pupils in that school will have been there for five years in a primary and four in a secondary school! Only pupils who start the school when you do will be on equal terms with you. For the rest of the pupils, they will know the layout of the school, be familiar with all the nooks and crannies and be up to all the little ruses.

So be prepared for all of this. Do not go like a lamb to the slaughter into the lion's den. Remember: you are the adult! You are in charge! You know what you are doing! And they are going to see that the instant they clap eyes on you. Stand tall, look them in the eyes, be business-like, be professional and start as you mean to go on. And if you do, you will have already won round one of the battle. And round one is the most important, because it is very difficult to win the other rounds if you lose that one. That very first registration, that very first lesson with a new group is all important: essential even.

And finally: keep a sense of proportion, and this is of huge significance and relevance, because aspiring teachers can get the impression (haven't I just given it?) that the majority of the pupils will be against them. This is simply not true, even in the most undisciplined of schools with a plethora of challenging pupils. The miscreants in all schools are very much in the minority. However, they too frequently cause problems disproportionate to their number and if you do not keep the

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situation in focus, you can pretty soon feel beleaguered and battle weary. So remember: most of the pupils do want to learn and do want to impress you – they do, really! Get that majority on your side and bring them along with you and you will be psychologically in a good frame of mind, because you know that you are doing a worthwhile job for most of the pupils in your care. So with the majority of youngsters on your side and you literally thanking and praising them at every opportunity for being so, we move on with a little more confidence and a little less trepidation.