

## Asking students to help take care of errands and tasks is always a good idea.

Assuming the task at hand is age appropriate and there are no supervision issues, I'm all in favor of students helping out in meaningful ways. It's more of a relationship thing than a taking-care-of-business kind of deal.

The only tricky part is the communication strategy. For years it was me *asking* a student to take care of something. Predictably, the system wasn't terribly reliable. And that was especially true if the student hadn't headed off immediately to take care of the task. If the task were put off for even a bit, the success rate suffered. Either the student ended up forgetting about the task, or I failed to get a timely status update on the progress.

Most likely outcome? Conflict and frustration. Not all that much, mind you, but enough to be annoying. And you don't have to put up with annoying. As my brain-guru, Len Torres, is fond of saying, "Reality can be changed." So, TRY THIS.

[I'll save you the journey I took from spoken words to written ones. And even though a quick note was better—less forgetting on their part—we still had the issue of me following-up.]

No, the Simple Solution was to purchase a spiral-bound While You Were Out message pad. [Adams® Phone Message Book, 8 1/2" x 5 1/4", 300 Messages, \$5.99.]

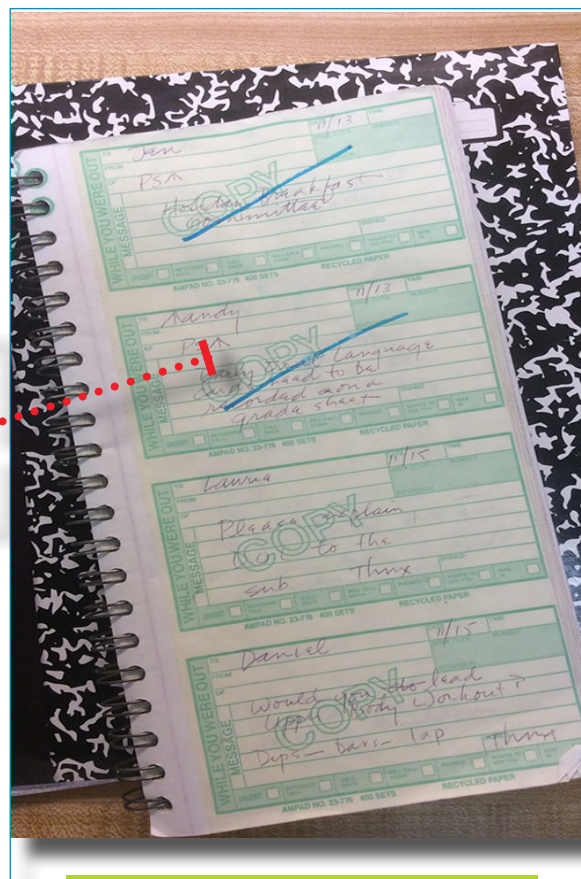
The student received the original copy. And I've got to tell you, they thought it was really cool getting a request from the boss to take care of something. That small gesture on my part fed the limbic brain's need for power and fun.

The bonus feature, though, was the fact that I had in my hand a simple way to monitor the task status. It was the NCR copy of the task request that was being held in the loving arms of the pad's spiral.

All I had to do was pick up the message pad and look for any entry that didn't have a highlighter slash through it.

And now that both issues—forgetting and follow-up—had been resolved, empowering students to help out successfully lightened my load and boosted the quality of the relationships in the classroom. Not bad.

And just think about how many notes you could create in just one staff meeting. The mind boggles.



Try This 01 is an excerpt from the book, *Tools & Toys: 50 Fun Ways to Love Your Class.*



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## TRY THIS 01: ADDENDUM

### *Please See Me*

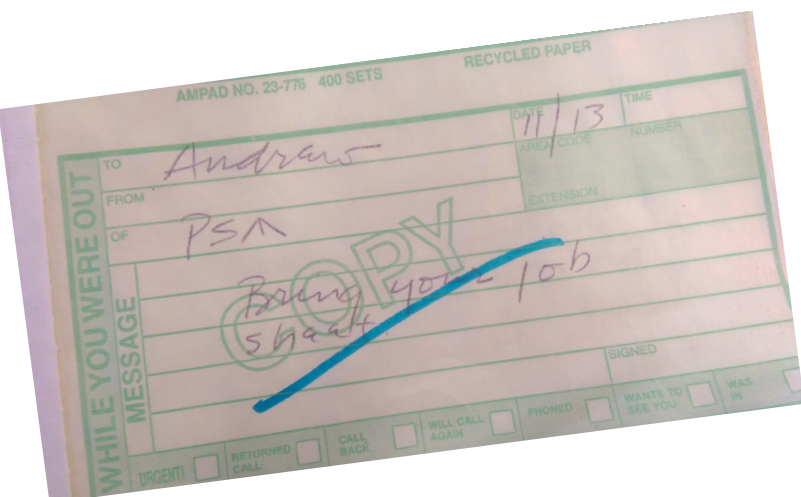
There will come a time when you find yourself about to write a task on a message slip and think it would be a heck of a lot easier to just talk with the student. And you would be correct in thinking that. It would be easier. However, we'd be right back to the memory game which decreases the likelihood that the task will be completed.

But I feel your pain. Writing all those notes can be a bit time-consuming.

#### So here's what I tried.

*Please See Me* I would write PSM in all caps at the top of the note slip. When the student read the note, it was understood that I was asking for a quick collaboration.

I also tried to include some information about the topic to be discussed. This removed any concern about hearing bad news from me. It also helped to remind me if we didn't get together until later in the day.



After Andrew and I had had our talk, I would have drawn a highlighter slash through the note to indicate completion.

# BRAIN Child

Part of the process of moving from childhood into adulthood is the gradual diminishing of the Limbic brain's overwhelming influence on childhood behavior (emotions, instincts, etc.) and the gradual increasing of influence from the PFC (PreFrontal Cortex - the part of the brain which processes concepts, language, math, etc). This changing balance between the two brain centers is an essential growth process during the first 18 years of life.

One sign that this "brain balancing" is progressing well is a student's increasing willingness to accept more responsibility. And when task-completion occurs successfully in full view of one's peers, that student's morale can go through the roof. When several students are obviously enjoying their new tasks, the limbic brains of the other students easily identify their emotional state and want to match it. Classroom morale may be characterized as the communal emotional optimism of the group. Since it's emotional, it's limbic-based. And getting the limbic brain to enforce a behavior which has positive PFC components is the holy grail for most teachers.

Routines which increase one-on-ones between teacher and student (and which are successful from the student's point of view) build a better, deeper relationship. And when a student has a good relationship with the teacher, they will naturally perform better. (Actually, the limbic brain, at an early age, recognizes "authority" and the higher survival-odds of aligning with the group's major decision-maker.)

It's clear that every adult must have at least rudimentary skills involving responsibility - these skills are essential elements in work, school, and meaningful relationships. Therefore these are essential skills to learn in the classroom.

*Len Torres is a national-award-winning designer who has created a brain model based on the latest researches in neurology. This model begins with the discovery that every human has two decision centers in their brain: the older, basic Limbic system and the unique, human PreFrontal Cortex. How these two centers harmonize (or not) has enormous impact on human behavior.*