



During the seminar you mentioned that you allowed your students to work away from their assigned seats. I like the idea but also a bit worried that students might just move to another spot to goof off. How do you handle that?

Your concern is both justified and reasonable because just about every classroom is populated with students who will attempt to take advantage of any freedom granted by an adult.

Student

QUIETLY REFLECTING ON WHAT HIS TEACHER JUST ANNOUNCED:

--Oooohhh. I get to move to another spot to work? Sweet. I'll go sit next to Andy and talk about League of Legends.--

And faster than you can say *jail break*, a dozen students have relocated. Some of them moved to the unoccupied reading table. Others grabbed a clipboard and are leaning against a wall. A couple of students are on the carpet or sitting on cushions.

But what are the odds they'll actually be productive? Well, if your classroom is like most classrooms, some students will be on task while others will be engaged in social talk and not much else.

As my brain guru, Len Torres, taught me, *Action is the only reality*. Ergo, to just talk

No surprise, really. They've been told what to do for years and years and have arrived at the conclusion that there's no need to do things the right way. **After all, the teacher can usually be counted on for a reminder or two.**

Well, if your classroom is like most classrooms, some students will be on task while others will be engaged in social talk...

But merely reminding off-task students about being productive is problematic.

about inappropriate behavior but not act on the behavior will do little to improve it or the typical attitudes that are usually associated with the behavior.

So try this.

The Freedom List

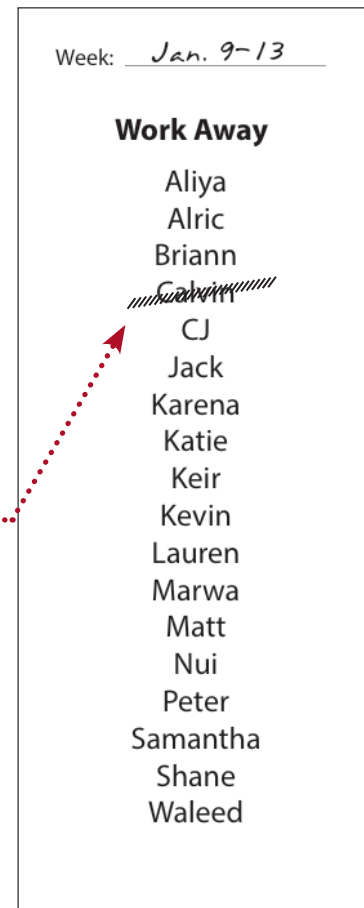
Post a list of names on a bulletin board. Label the list **Work Away**, and date stamp it with the current week.

Let your students know that, henceforth, they may work wherever they wish. Other than the empty seat of an absent student and the need to use a clipboard for writing if they aren't at a desk or table, they can have at it. All that's required is that the move helps a student to be productive.

Non-productive behavior will result in a student having to return to the regularly assigned seat. A line will be drawn through the name of the offending student which will indicate that, for the remainder of the current week, the student is restricted from moving.

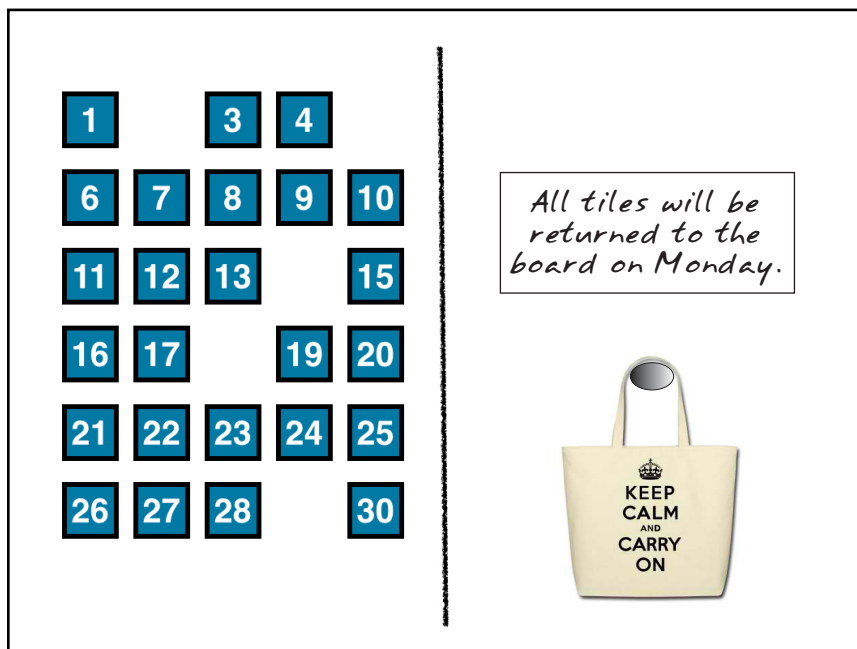
No reminders. No second chances. No means no.

Do it the right way and keep the freedom. Otherwise, not so much. Add in the grace and forgiveness that occurs by posting a fresh roster every Monday, and you'll find yourself with an easy-to-use system that reduces inappropriate behavior while inspiring students to figure out what it takes to be able to successfully work away from their seats.



Extension

You could accomplish the same thing without the roster on the wall. Just place a set of magnetic numbered tiles on a metal-based whiteboard and use them to indicate who still has a green light.[†]



Anyone asked to return to his seat would remove his numbered tile from the board and drop it into a little bag or container.

This more visible indicator of who still has the privilege of moving and who lost it might make it a bit easier to monitor.

But however you frame it—names or tiles—this kind of simple action speaks louder than words and eventually causes students to exhibit a greater degree of self-control.

[†] That's assuming, of course, that you and your students are using student numbers as a part of your classroom culture. If you've yet to try this powerful strategy, find a teacher on your campus who is and find out why student numbers rock.

Postscript Thoughts...

When it comes to conveying our displeasure with student behavior, the easiest thing is just blast everyone with a torrent of not-so-happy words.

In fact, this was me my first five years of teaching:

Old School Mr. Morris

FED UP WITH THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO ARE IGNORING THE PRODUCTIVITY ASPECT:

Hey! Forget working away from your seats!

You guys are just goofing out there.

PAUSING TO GLARE:

Everybody go back to your seats!

Although this response is understandable, it does little to improve the classroom culture. [Keep reading.]

Productive Student

THINKING:

--Wait a second. I was being productive.

What's going on here? Because some students don't do it the right way I can't do it at all?

Wow. Looks like being productive or showing self-control is not valued in this classroom.

Fine. I'll just do whatever I feel like doing until I'm told not to.--

Nope. No more of that. We're going to separate the wheat from the chaff so that freedom remains a viable option that will inspire students to develop self-control.

The only question is whether you introduce this new strategy right away or wait until 2015.

The advantage to starting now is that you'll gain important experience before winter break. What you learned during the maiden voyage of the *SS Freedom List* in December will help you stay the course when school restarts in January.

Or wait a while. The advantage to waiting is the opportunity for you to reflect on the whole Freedom List concept. Please don't overlook the importance of that or take it lightly. Using this strategy will require a serious commitment on your part. You'll need to keep calm as you consistently act upon any inappropriate moving behavior. It's the only way they'll learn that you're a Core Principle #2 kind of person: your words are backed up with action.

So maybe wait. 2015 just might prove to be a good time to get serious about upgrading your classroom culture.

And besides, who doesn't like [New Year's resolutions?](#) [I mean, making them. Not keeping 'em.]

BRAIN Child

In general, the human brain's Limbic system processes a person's hardwired input (i.e., emotions, pain, body sensations, optical input –in essence, everything any other mammal can experience) while the brain's other system, the PreFrontal Cortex, processes all ideas and concepts (i.e., how to read a book, write a letter, or add and subtract).

One of the results of this brain division is that the larger, more powerful brain, the Limbic, gets credit for showing us what's real while the content of PFC processing is considered not actually real but mental. *Being at the zoo*, for example, is way more real than *reading about the zoo*.

For the most part, students find actual physical feedback regarding behavior is usually more persuasive than ideas about how to behave. And in school, part of a typical student's constant experience is determining how and when ideas about behavior should affect one's own actual behavior.

Consequently, the more experienced the student, the more they understand and value PFC input. Over time and events, they learn the value of ideas such as "being on time" and "why we have rules" and that "studying helps us learn," etc.

Therefore, having students experience actual self-determination and self-discipline in the classroom will have a much deeper effect than merely talking about it in class or forcing students mindlessly into a particular behavior.

The real beauty of giving students the freedom to move about the classroom in the way Rick suggests is that they learn to recognize appropriate behavior on their own. This is a hugely important skill for anyone to have. The earlier that students have positive experiences with self-determination, the more it will influence their future personality and success.

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.