

Annette Breaux and Todd Whitaker

An **Eye On Education** Book

50

**Ways
to**

**IMPROVE
STUDENT
BEHAVIOR**

*Simple Solutions to
Complex Challenges*

50 Ways to Improve Student Behavior

Simple Solutions to Complex Challenges

Annette Breaux and Todd Whitaker

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Meet the Authors

Annette Breaux is one of the most entertaining and informative authors and speakers in education today. She leaves her audiences with practical techniques to implement in their classrooms immediately. Administrators agree that they see results from teachers the next day.

A former classroom teacher, curriculum coordinator, and author of Louisiana FIRST, a statewide induction program for new teachers, Annette now serves as the teacher induction coordinator for Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. Annette has coauthored a book with Dr. Harry Wong on new teacher induction.

Her other writings include *101 Answers for New Teachers and Their Mentors*; *REAL Teachers, REAL Challenges, REAL Solutions*; *The Poetry of Annette Breaux: Tips and Poems for Teachers and Students*; *10 Days to Maximum Teaching Success*; and *Seven Simple Secrets: What the BEST Teachers Know and Do!*

Teachers who have read Annette's writings or heard Annette speak agree that they come away with user-friendly information, heartfelt inspiration, and a much-needed reminder that theirs is the most noble of all professions—teaching.

Dr. Todd Whitaker is recognized as a leading presenter in education. His message about the importance of teaching has resonated with hundreds of thousands of educators around the world. Todd is a professor of educational leadership at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. He has spent his life pursuing his love of education by studying effective teachers and principals.

Prior to coming to Indiana, he taught and coached at the middle and high school levels in Missouri. Following his teaching experience, he served as a middle school and high school principal. He also served as a middle school coordinator.

One of the nation's leading authorities on staff motivation, teacher leadership, and principal effectiveness, Todd has written eighteen educational books including the national best seller, *What Great Teachers Do Differently*. Other titles include *Dealing With Difficult Teachers*; *Teaching Matters*; *Great Quotes for Great Educators*; *What Great Principals Do Differently*; *Motivating & Inspiring Teachers*; and *Dealing With Difficult Parents*.

Todd is married to Beth, also a former teacher and principal, who is a professor of Elementary Education at Indiana State University. They are the parents of Katherine, Madeline, and Harrison.

*“Life could be so wonderful if my students would just behave
But at the rate they’re going right now, I’ll see an early grave
They talk, they laugh, they hit, they throw
What will I do? I do not know
I beg, I plead, I punish, I scream
Oh help me, please, I’m losing steam*

*What? You have the answers to get students to behave?
Some simple things that I can do? My sanity you’ll save?”*

*Yes, we think that we can help to ease your needless pain
We write this book with you in mind. Allow us to explain
That if you take our words to heart and do what we suggest
We think you’ll soon be witnessing behavior at its best!*

Annette Breaux and Todd Whitaker

What This Book Will Do for You

Want to be a better teacher who has better student behavior and better student learning? Want less stress in your life? Want an overall happy, more effectively and efficiently run classroom? Want better student motivation? Then this book is for you.

This book focuses on you, the teacher. It is written for teachers who teach students of all grade levels, genders, ethnic backgrounds, and social up-bringsings. It is not designed to make you the perfect teacher. There is no such person. It is not designed to help you mold the perfect students. There are no such people. Rather, it is designed to provide you with the tools to improve, not perfect, student behavior in your classroom. As an added benefit, **when behavior improves, so does learning**. So we intend to help you to improve both student behavior and learning. We also believe you'll soon realize that by applying our suggestions your teaching will improve dramatically.

We sincerely believe that it is your goal, as one who wants to touch lives and make a difference, to be as effective as you can be. We believe that you, as one called *teacher*, possess the ability and the desire to be the teacher every student remembers.

So if you want to be a better teacher with better student behavior and, as an added bonus, improved student learning, read on!

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Preface

“If only the parents cared more! If only the principal would *do* something about the misbehavior of students! If only the teacher who has my students before me wouldn’t get them so riled up that they’re wild when they get to me!” Sound familiar? We hear these opinions often and maybe even state them often ourselves. But the bottom line is that **we really can’t *do* anything about them**. Whether we think that some parents lack good parenting skills, or that our principal should do more, or that our coworkers should be more competent, we really have no control over such situations.

The focus of this book is on simple strategies you can use to become better at the one thing you absolutely do have control over—what goes on every day within the four walls of your classroom. Regardless of outside forces, regardless of home lives, regardless of what is or is not going on in the front office, it is the teacher who controls what goes on every day in the classroom.

But why don’t students just behave? Well, the fact remains that we teach children, and children do child-like things. They don’t make adult-like decisions; they don’t do what’s necessarily right or best for them; they do like to push our buttons; and they are not, for the most part, self-motivated or self-disciplined. That’s why they need us!

A speaker was addressing a group of teachers, and one teacher raised her hand and said, “Well, all of these things you are saying are fine, well, and good. And maybe your suggestions would work with some students, but you don’t understand. I have *no* parental support, and it’s impossible to teach these students when their parents aren’t backing me.” The speaker asked a simple question: “So you’re saying that if an orphanage opened next door to this school tomorrow, you could not teach those children?” A hush fell over the audience and over that teacher. Of course those students would still be teachable. Might they have issues to deal with that are unlike those of children who are reared by their parents? They might. But they’re still reachable and teachable. Just as you have to actually reach the summit of the mountain before you can stand on it, and just as you have to reach your vacation’s destination before you can do your sightseeing, **you have to reach a student before you can teach him**. Each student brings his own set of issues, his own dreams, his own strengths, his own shortcomings, his own abilities, and his own lack of abilities. But we believe that *each* child is someone special. Each child deserves a chance, and then a second one, and a third, and a fourth. **Each child deserves a teacher who believes in him**. If you are reading this book, we believe you are that teacher.

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1

Meet and Greet

A Point to Ponder



“When I retire, I want to be a Wal-Mart greeter.” We know you’ve heard it before. You may have even said it! But have you ever really analyzed why so many teachers continue to say this? We have.

Stores like Wal-Mart actually hire people to pretend to be happy to see you, a stranger, as you enter the store. In fact, these people possess the jobs that many teachers say they want to have when they retire. The reason so many teachers say they want to retire and be a Wal-Mart greeter is twofold: (1) The Wal-Mart greeter looks happy. (2) The Wal-Mart greeter looks stress-free! Who wouldn’t want a job where he felt happy and stress-free?

Now consider *why* Wal-Mart pays people to greet its customers. Wal-Mart does this because of the simple fact that **happy customers who feel wanted and welcome are more likely to buy what is being sold and will happily return to buy even more.** Period. This is why you are greeted when you walk into a restaurant, when you step onto an airplane, and when you enter any other establishment that puts concerted thought into making its customers feel happy and welcome.

So wouldn’t this same concept work with students? And shouldn’t we be putting concerted thought into making our students (customers) feel happy and welcome every time they enter our classrooms? Don’t we want them to want to “buy” what we are “selling”? Don’t we want them to **want** to come back? The answers to those questions are *yes, yes, yes, and yes!*

Classroom Solution/Strategy



So let's bring this simple strategy into the classroom. In our observations of teachers, we have found that most teachers claim that they greet their students every day. The fact is that some do, and others don't. So let's first establish what greeting does *not* mean. Some teachers stand at their classroom doors and, as the students arrive, say things like, "Let's go. Your work is on the board. Get busy as soon as you get into the room. Hurry. Let's get moving. The bell is about to ring." This, our fellow teachers, is *not* greeting. Rather, it is the equivalent of saying, "Welcome to my torture chamber!" Any student who is rushed into the classroom in this oh-so-unwelcoming manner will hardly feel like you want him in your classroom! Students not feeling wanted? That is a recipe for misbehavior, and class has not even begun! But the foundation has been laid and the little rascals are scheming.

Now, let's look at what greeting *does* mean. The very best teachers, the ones who always seem to have the fewest behavior problems, know the simple strategy that stores such as Wal-Mart know: If the teacher (greeter) looks happy to see his or her students (customers) every day and can actually make the students feel wanted and valued in the classroom, then the students are much more likely to "buy" what the teacher is "selling" and are more apt to want to return to that particular class the next day and the day after!

So here's a simple way to greet your students every day. Don't reinvent the wheel. Just do what the most successful teachers do. Simply stand at your classroom door, every day, every class period, and say things like, "Hello. How are you? Thank you for coming to class. Nice outfit. I love your new haircut. Jason, I'm so happy you're back today. I missed you yesterday!" Okay, so you prayed last night that Jason would *never* come back, but the important thing is that Jason does not know that! He believes that you are happy to see him, and therefore he will be more likely to behave.

The truth is that students are less likely to misbehave in a classroom where they feel wanted and valued. To think that the simple act of "greeting" someone can solve so many problems! It can. The fact is that **if you consistently greet your students every day, then you will soon decrease your discipline problems drastically.** Anyone who does not believe this fact is not greeting students every day. Now, we do want to warn you that if you tend to be a little negative with your students and do not typically greet them every day with a smile on your face, this new approach will confuse your students at first. It will take more than one day of greeting your students to convince them that you are a "changed" person. But stick with it! The results will be worth it.

Is it possible that your “greeting” may be a little phony? Probably. Are you *really* that happy to see every student every day? Possibly not. But remember, we were hired to be actors and actresses! Oh, and just so you know, the Wal-Mart greeter is probably not overly happy to see you either! The flight attendant is possibly tired and hoping for a fairly empty flight. But here you are, yet another passenger! However, *you* should never know that that greeting was possibly a little overexuberant. You deserve to feel welcome and wanted and valued. Make your students feel the same way—every day! Even if you’re faking it just a little, you will soon find that the more you “fake it,” the more you will actually begin to feel happier, and thus your greetings will become more genuine. What a bonus!

Oh, and what more does it cost to tell them good-bye as they leave your room each day? If they arrive and leave on a happy note, better behavior you will promote!

Bottom Line



If you *want* your students to *want* to be in your classroom, then you have to convince them that you actually *want them there*. You never know when a simple hello will make someone’s day more okay!

A Simple “Hi”

Each day when I entered her classroom, she smiled and said hello
Just what that gesture meant to me, she truly could not know
She did not know that she and only she made me feel wanted
That *her* smile got me through a time in life when I felt daunted
That life at home was way too tough for any kid to take
That her classroom was my refuge, that my happiness was fake
That for her I put my best foot forward, even when times were rough
That my smile was a façade to hide my pain, for I was tough
But even though she never knew, it meant so much to me
That there was one place in my life where someone wanted me
Wanted me to be there, wanted me to learn
Wanted to help me realize there were good things I could earn
For beyond the books and content, I learned that year that I
Was someone who, to someone, was worth a simple “Hi.”

2

A Letter of Introduction

A Point to Ponder



Imagine being the parent of a school-age child and receiving a letter in the mail over the summer months from your child's prospective teacher saying who she is, what she wants for your child, what she believes about teaching, and just how happy she is to be teaching your precious angel.

Imagine being a child and receiving a letter from your prospective teacher saying how happy she is that you will be in her class and how anxious she is to meet you, to get to know you, and to teach you.

Think back to how many letters like this you actually received, as a parent or a student. Not too many, if any, right? Well, here are a few things to consider:

- ◆ Parents want to believe that their children are in the hands of competent, caring, trustworthy teachers.
- ◆ Children want to believe that their teachers are people who are excited to teach them and happy to have them in class.
- ◆ Parents who believe that you care about their children are much more likely to work cooperatively with you.
- ◆ Children who are in the classrooms of teachers they perceive as caring are more likely to exhibit better behavior than children who do not believe that their teachers care about them.

This is not rocket science. Rather, it is human nature. So let's take what we know about human nature and use it in our classrooms to foster better student behavior.