

PART I. FOUR STYLES OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

What do we mean when we speak of an instructor's style of classroom management? Briefly defined, "management style" refers to an instructor's approach to organizing and leading a class of students.

Instructors typically exhibit classroom management styles that fit into one of four categories.

These are: (1) The Guide; (2) The Controller; (3) The Buddy; (4) The "Apathete"

The term "apathete" refers to one who is apathetic.

The Guide has excellent rapport with students, helping them maximize their productivity and develop skills that enable them to be active learners.

The Controller is highly motivated, well organized, very productive, and wants to do a good job.

The Buddy is very kind to students, expressing a strong interest in their personal lives and well-being.

The Apathete shows little concern for the quality of his work or the welfare of his students.

In most situations, the preferred style is that of the Guide, but before we visit with the Guide, let's first peek into the classrooms of the other three types of classroom managers to see how things are going.

PART II. VISITING THE CLASSROOMS

Let's begin with the Controller.

A controlling instructor is a strict disciplinarian. The limits and controls placed on students are inflexible and sometimes unreasonable. The arrangement of furniture and other room fixtures rarely if ever changes. Notice that the class is being conducted in a very restrictive atmosphere, and that students are very hesitant to question the instructor even if they have important concerns. Verbal exchanges and discussions are held to a minimum.

This instructor has little patience with students who do not strictly adhere to class policies and procedures. As a result, the students are often more preoccupied with the instructor's needs than with their own. Students seldom receive praise or compliments and special class activities are rare. Ordinary lectures are usually the exclusive method

for delivering instruction. Students are given little independence or input into decision making, and instead spend most of their time taking notes and trying to stay awake. When under pressure to cover a certain amount of course material in a specific period of time, many instructors resort to the controlling managing style because they believe it is the most efficient.

Let's visit the classroom of a Buddy instructor.

This person confuses the role of an instructor with that of a friend. Notice that the Buddy instructor runs a loosely structured classroom. In the Buddy's classroom, there are few rules, policies, or regulations and there is little supervision of students. Any discipline is likely to be inadequate and inconsistent. For example, the Buddy instructor often allows students to frequently and unnecessarily interrupt discussions. This instructor finds it difficult to deny students' requests because he's overly concerned about hurting their feelings. As a result, classroom decisions are frequently based on the students' feelings rather than on professional wisdom.

A Buddy likes to personally interact with students and is overly concerned about their welfare, often inquiring about issues related to their social and family affairs. This Buddy wants to be a friend and has difficulty separating his or her own professional and personal lives.

Students often have little incentive to achieve since few demands are placed on them. Class time is often wasted when discussions linger that are not related to the course content. Nevertheless, students like the instructor as a person – after all, this is their Buddy! However, students who are seriously concerned about mastering course objectives are dissatisfied with the instructor's style.

The Buddy may often break school rules in order to maintain popularity. For example, classes may be dismissed early or food and drink may be permitted in the restricted areas.

Controllers and Buddies are not totally unacceptable because they do reflect some positive qualities even though they offer their students less than the Guide.

For example, the Controller is sure to cover all of the course material. Classes are well-organized because the Controller is always well prepared. He or she has well defined course objectives that are clearly communicated to students. This instructor maintains high expectations of students and uses a grading system that is consistent and predictable, even if it is inflexible. Rules and regulations are closely followed so that students know what is expected of them regarding classroom performance and behavior.

As for the Buddy, his or her sincere concern for the emotional and psychological well-being of students results in a very strong rapport. The classroom atmosphere is friendly and non-threatening, which are characteristics that adults enjoy. Teaching methods are more likely to be active than passive and that is good. Students feel comfortable in the Buddy class and they interact among themselves and with the instructor.

In fact, a careful combination of characteristics of the Controller and the Buddy would result in an ideal style for classroom management. It would be that of the Guide!

Next, let's see what's going on-or not going on-in the classroom of the apathetic instructor. The Apathete is not motivated to impose upon himself or on the students. He puts little effort into class preparation. Anything that requires work is probably not worth it.

Classroom discipline is lacking since it requires too much effort. Students will just show up and kill time. Students are not motivated in an atmosphere like this, and as a result, little learning is ever accomplished. If homework is assigned, it is rarely checked or graded. Projects and tests are seldom returned to students in a timely manner. Frequently, students might not even bring their books and materials to class. The instructor may often be late for class. The lessons always seem the same since the teaching style is always the same. Students are often given what they perceive as busy work with little interaction between them and the instructor.

The Apathete usually teaches while sitting behind the front desk. There's rarely anything special scheduled such as speakers, projects, or demonstrations. This apathetic instructor will rarely if ever update or revise tests and other instructional materials. New methods are seldom implemented, and new equipment may never get used. Assignments are chosen that require little input or effort on the instructor's part. Attendance records are sometimes neglected or are inaccurate. School rules are rarely enforced. There's often time left over before class ends and this time is usually not used wisely.

Finally, let's consider the management style of the Guide. In most situations, it is the Guide's management style that is most preferred. This is because the Guide combines what's best about the Controller and the Buddy, resulting in a classroom manager who has excellent rapport with students, is well-organized, maintains an orderly yet highly interactive classroom, encourages students to work to their full potential, and helps them to develop skills that will enable them to be successful lifelong learners.

Let's visit the Guide's classroom.

It is probable that most instructors of adult students would like to think that they represent the guiding type of classroom manager which is, of course, the most desirable for adult students. Why?

This is the instructor whom students will ultimately respect most. He or she controls students' behaviors and demeanor effectively without inhibiting productive interaction. This careful balance is a major challenge for many instructors. Yet, this management style greatly reduces potential class disruptions.

The Guide interacts with students in a way that preserves their dignity when they step out of line. Classes are student-centered rather than teacher-centered and consistently feature a significant number of activities in which students are involved. The Guide is perceived as very competent, obviously loves the subject being taught, and consistently enjoys the role. He or she exhibits an appearance, enthusiasm, and attitude that students respect and enjoy. This type of instructor accepts responsibility for good classroom management and effective instruction. He or she tries to determine if undesirable student behaviors are caused by students' personal problems, and if they are, they're handled in an appropriate manner. These are qualities that adult students expect and appreciate. The guiding manager is most able to meet the special needs of adult learners, who desire independence and well-organized policies and procedures.

Adult students like to influence the instructional process, and they prefer active learning over passive. Most are very sensitive about their self-esteem and are comfortable in classrooms where they don't feel threatened. The guiding instructor provides students with this kind of learning environment. A Guide is polite, sensitive, organized, productive, and more of a helper than a dictator.

Note the procedural and organizational nature of this style of management. The Guide limits and controls students enough to maintain order. Students are expected to be self-disciplined as they actively participate and interact with others. The Guide encourages self-discipline by establishing policies that students perceive as fair and consistent. This instructor handles disruptive students firmly but always politely. Students believe this instructor has a sincere interest in their success and a professional commitment to them as individuals.

The Guide expects students to accept personal responsibility and to always do their best work. Since this instructor prefers to be a helper rather than a dictator, he or she is more likely to be "guide by the side than a sage on the stage."

The Guide often implements active learning strategies instead of passive methods like long lectures. Most students respect this instructor because he or she brings out the best in them and is the kind of person whom they can talk to without fear of being put down. This instructor has the soft skills and emotional intelligence that the controlling instructor usually lacks. The Guide is always well prepared, and unlike the Controller, adapts easily to change in plans or teaching conditions.

Of the four types of classroom management, the only one that is totally unacceptable is that of the Apathete. The Apathete's disregard for school policies and for the success of his students will reflect poorly on him and on the school. His failure to follow school policies and to properly deliver the curriculum could create difficulties for the school since the school may not fulfill the terms of the contract between it and its students.

It's fairly obvious that nearly all instructors do have a preferred management style, and sometimes it may not fit neatly into one of the four categories that have been described. One's preferred style can change over time with added experience. In addition, many successful instructors vary their management style to suit the nature of the lesson or the character of a particular class. For example, an unruly or uncooperative class may cause an instructor to place increased emphasis on the Controller's style. If rapport leaves something to be desired, an instructor may choose to assume more traits of a Buddy.