Fall semester is well underway at my institution. Prior to classes starting I had the opportunity to have lunch with a couple of fellow faculty members. During our lunch, we discussed many topics related to the upcoming term, but classroom management emerged as a common point of contention.

This surprised me. Although I’m still fairly new to higher education, after spending more than 10 years in corporate communications management in the private sector, my colleagues are very seasoned educators. I didn’t expect they would have issues with students disrupting the learning environment by using mobile devices, coming late to class, and the like.

As I listened to the conversation, I reflected on my personal experiences. Even though we taught some of the same students, I didn’t encounter the same classroom management issues that my counterparts did. I wondered why this was the case, and realized that I followed three critical steps that help me preserve the optimal learning environment for my students’ success.

1. **Set the Tone from Day One.** Be proactive, not reactive. It’s important that you set and communicate your classroom guidelines from the first day of class – no matter what the instructional environment. Don’t wait until an incident occurs (i.e. a student’s phone ringing aloud in class or a student being disrespectful in an online discussion board) to put a guideline in place. Document and publish your guidelines within your syllabus or create an addendum document to accompany your course outline.

2. **Model the Way.** As educators, our students look to us as role models, whether we embrace it or not. It’s imperative that we ‘walk the talk’ when it comes to our classroom guidelines. If you have banned food and drink from your classroom, then you can’t eat your lunch while your class is taking an exam because you have a committee meeting at noon that day.

3. **Be Consistent.** Consistently enforcing your classroom guidelines is critical to preserving the classroom environment for learning. In politics, you often hear legislators proclaim, “What’s the purpose of a law, if no one enforces it?” The same applies for your
classroom guidelines. If you don’t enforce your own guidelines, then no one will follow them.

At the end of the day, as educators, we want to focus on learning and promoting our students’ success. Even though we may not encounter the volume of behavioral issues that our secondary school educators do; it’s our duty to ensure that the classroom environment is optimal for learning. Following these tips will hopefully help you do that — our success and our students’ success depends on it.

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