

## **I Stopped Holding My Students Accountable And Here Is What Happened**

**By Michael Linsin**

So I ran this experiment.

And enough time has passed that I can now share it with you.

Here's what happened:

I was halfway through the semester with a class I really enjoyed.

I had prepared them well to start the year by employing the same strategies I teach here at SCM.

And it showed. They were polite and well-behaved. They were independent and listened well.

We were cruising along, and I couldn't have been happier.

But for the sake of knowledge, and for a deeper understanding of what many teachers face every day, I thought I'd try something interesting.

For one week, I decided to no longer rely on my [classroom management plan](#). That's right. I just stopped following it.

I didn't change who I was or how I interacted with students. I didn't raise my voice or begin glaring and lecturing.

I just stopped holding them accountable.

So when a few students began whispering to each other while I was giving instruction, which was the first misbehavior I noticed, I just paused and smiled or gently asked them to stop.

But that was it.

I continued in this manner as more rule-breaking began popping up. This wasn't a surprise. Remove accountability and it's bound to happen sooner rather than later.

But what I wasn't prepared for, and found most curious, was that my relationship with my students quickly began to change. By Wednesday morning, it was clear that their opinion of me had dropped a few notches.

They no longer looked at me the same way. They weren't as friendly or as pleased to see me. Some hardly made eye contact and nearly all were markedly slower to listen and follow my directions.

**I started to feel like the invisible man.**

Although they were never out of control or outright rude and disrespectful, I could feel the animosity building.

Toward the end of the week, I was coaxing and cajoling them through lessons and all but tap dancing to keep their attention. I ramped up the engagement and overt friendliness, but could still feel control of the class slipping away.

My leverage and influence was fading before my eyes and my leadership presence was fading before theirs.

They, in turn, began showing signs of frustration and discontent. They grumbled under their breath and expelled sigh after sigh, all over the room. Their enthusiasm waned and they slumped lower and lower in their seats.

I was working in a challenging school, mind you, but it became clear that my [simple kindness and good humor](#) alone weren't enough to stem the downward tide.

They needed accountability as their counterpoint.

One thing I found especially interesting about the experiment, and heartening, frankly, was that as the week went on more and more students approached me to ask variations of, *"What are you doing?" "Why are you doing this?" and "Are you okay?"*

By Friday morning, I decided that enough was enough and came clean about the experiment.

They were relieved, to say the least. Many laughed and said that they knew something was up. Some even mentioned that they had been worried about me.

After a quick review of the rules and consequences and promising never to do it again, things went back to normal almost immediately. Blessed peace returned to the kingdom.

That afternoon, I asked them to write about their experiences. We shared out in groups and as a class. It was a great lesson in the value of firm boundaries – and not just in class, but in society and in their own personal lives.

They came away with a deeper understanding of how and why a fair, consistently followed classroom management plan is for *them*, not the teacher.

They learned in a memorable way that it's the very thing that ensures their right to learn and enjoy school, that it safeguards them from disruption and frees them to focus on their responsibilities.

They also learned just how profoundly even minor misbehavior can affect others as well as the entire mood of the class.

Done right, as we recommend here at SCM, [accountability](#) is a powerful force for good. It's a wonderful benefit for students and indispensable to creating a happy and well-behaved class.

If you're anything less than fully committed, consistent, and faithful to your classroom management plan, then double down on it today.

Take a stand for your students.

Make a promise to yourself and to them that you will follow it exactly as it's written.