

Six Difficult Classroom Situations You Can Learn to Manage with Tact

After discussing and studying the contents of this G.O.L.D. Leadership Team Report, your team members (and instructors) will be able to manage difficult classroom situations with leadership, tact and grace. Knowing how to maintain control of the classroom improves the quality of your instructors' lessons and the learning environment for their students.



Even a simple situation, such as a student arriving late for class for the first time, requires a carefully considered response and action from an instructor. A more complex incident, such as a disgruntled student verbally abusing the lead instructor or questioning the credibility of his skills and lesson, calls for great self-control and a successful strategy for managing such a student.

Your leadership team members need these skills, so they can think on their feet and remedy negative situations quickly, without disrupting classes or embarrassing the student who may be challenging authority.

This Report presents these valuable skills in six classroom scenarios, which most instructors have experienced during their careers.

- Student arrives late to class.
- Student arrives without gear.
- Student vehemently disagrees with an instructor about his teaching method.

- Too many preschool students ask to go to the bathroom at the same time.
- An adult student receives an excessive hit from a partner, and becomes angry.
- Parents coach their children from the sideline.

Use these skill-building scenarios in two ways.

1. Conduct a team discussion to explain these typical classroom situations. Ask your team members to contribute to the discussion and share experiences that reinforce or enhance these important leadership skills.
2. Organize a role-playing exercise. Pair two leadership students, and have one portray the student and the other the instructor in the first scenario. Give them a few minutes to practice, and then have them perform for the whole team. Choose other pairs of leadership students to practice and present the other five scenarios to the team. Continue the exercise until every leadership student has played a role in two or three scenarios and demonstrated that they can use these new skills in a real classroom setting.

Review the list of six difficult classroom scenarios and make a mental note of any possible solutions or tips you'd like to give your team when you lead this valuable discussion. As a veteran instructor, experience has taught you the best strategies to manage these six situations and many others. Generously share your experiences and the knowledge you've developed with your leadership students. Your youngest and newest leadership students need your guidance most of all. You want to be sure they're able to walk the fine line between enforcing the school rules and doing it in a manner that avoids upsetting or embarrassing the student or students involved.

An old, but still powerful, saying will help you hammer home the point. "It's not what you say, it's how you say it." Help your leadership students understand that even the slightest inflection in their voices sends

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a strong message that may determine how well they maintain control of the classroom. For some, it can be helpful to count to three or five, while taking deep breaths, before first responding to a difficult classroom situation. Controlling one's tone of voice and demeanor can be incorporated into the role-playing exercises below.

Lesson Exercises: Six Difficult Classroom Situations

Each of the six scenario exercises below provides a progression of discussion points that will help your leadership students learn:

- How to recognize a difficult classroom situation (SITUATION).
- What is the student's rationalization for his disruptive behavior (RATIONALIZATION).
- A recommended solution (SOLUTION).
- How to react to a student's resistance to your management of the situation (REACTION TO RESISTANCE).

Take the time to work through the discussion points for all six scenarios. Answer any questions or concerns from your leadership students, which may be prompted by your discussion. Your leadership team will be better prepared to manage a variety of classroom challenges. These skills will help them to maintain discipline, understand the reasoning behind the solutions, and enforce the rules without mistreating the offending students or parents.

Scenario #1

Difficult Classroom Situation: An adult student arrives 10 minutes late for class. Warm-ups have been completed and he wants to bow into class.

Student Rationalization: The student is usually on time, but has commented in the past that it's tough to arrive on time because of the heavy work traffic.

Instructor Solution: Smile, bow the student into class and say, "I'm glad you made it, please warm-up a bit, and then join us."



Instructor's Reaction to Resistance: Tell the student that it is very disrespectful to arrive late. He or she can watch class, but are not allowed to bow into class.

Scenario #2

Difficult Classroom Situation: An eight-year-old child arrives straight from school without his sparring gear, and on a day when your class always spars.

Student Rationalization: Be understanding if this is the first time that the child has forgotten his or her gear because it can happen to anyone once. If the child forgets often, then see the Instructor Solution below for ways to help the child remember.

Be aware of the fact that many children of divorced parents tote their gear with them between two households, two cars, school and your classroom. There are many opportunities for martial arts gear to be mislaid. Often the child is forgetful, and often he is overwhelmed by the confusion in his life.

Instructor Solution: If appropriate, loan the child the necessary gear, or give the child alternate drills, while the rest of the class is sparring. While doing wandering corrections, ask the child why he forgot his gear. Suggest a way that will help him to remember to bring his gear next class, and all future classes. For example, suggest that he put his gear at the front door the night before class, and then move it from there to mom or dad's car on the way to school in the morning.

Instructor's Reaction to Resistance: Scold the child and remove him from participation in the rest of the class instructions and exercises.

Scenario #3

Difficult Classroom Situation: A teenage student notices that you don't teach a technique the same way the head instructor does. He raises his hand respectfully, and says in front of the class, "Excuse me, Mr. Smith, I don't want to seem rude, but I don't think that's how Mrs. Brown taught us that move. Which way should we do it?"

Student Rationalization: Most students want to learn and enjoy learning, which is why they are often confused when they receive what they perceive to be contradictory instructions. Treat the student's confusion and question with respect because, in most cases, he or she wants to understand.

Having the courage and conviction to ask the question is one of the basic lessons of martial arts. The student's inquiry should be genuinely considered, and if students are receiving contradictory instructions, then corrections should be made. You want your team members to be on the same page, when it comes to teaching the proper techniques.

Instructor Solution: Reply with "John, I believe that I am teaching you the move the same way our head instructor does. To make sure, I'll verify that with her and let you all know during the next class. Until I can check, let's all do the move the way I'm teaching you today."

Instructor's Reaction to Resistance: If the student continues to disagree with you, then he may become rude and insubordinate, try to make you look bad in front of the class, or has decided to just be a general

pain in a familiar extremity. At this point in the situation, your only strategy is to tell the student that if he disagrees that much with how you are teaching, then he should leave the classroom.

Scenario #4

Difficult Classroom Situation: A Little Ninjas student (preschooler) asks to go to the restroom. Immediately after you say "yes," four other children raise their hands, and say they have to go too.

Student Rationalization: Going to the bathroom is often a novel idea to a preschooler. Most of the time, younger children will be a "me tooer," compelled to join into any activity that seems to be attracting everyone. It's all part of the growing process. It's better to allow them to go than be confronted with an embarrassing accident.

Instructor Solution: You may ask the students, "Do you really have to go, or can it wait a few minutes until class is over?" Sometimes, they'll decide they can wait. Let them know that if they really have to go, that they can go when the other child returns. If you only have one bathroom, then let one student go at a time.

In the meantime, divert attention away from bathroom trips to an interesting drill or a super fun game that they won't want to miss. It's amazing how few preschool students will want to go to bathroom when you can distract them with fun and activity.

Instructor's Reaction to Resistance: Tell the students that they have to wait until the end of class.

Scenario #5

Difficult Classroom Situation: Two adults are sparring. The contact level is supposed to be light; however, student A hits student B with excessive force, accidentally. Student B loses his temper and throws his headgear to the floor in anger.

Student Rationalization: It's not uncommon in the heat of sparring for a student to forget what he has been taught in your school about self-control and anger management, but that is why he is a student. The path to a Black Belt requires that a student learn and learn again the proper way to control his emotions and reaction, even when clearly being wronged.

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Instructors should consider this occasional classroom situation as an opportunity to re-emphasize the conflict-resolution skills both the disruptive students and the entire class must learn to become masters and masters of themselves.

Instructor Solution: Use your best judgment when challenged by this situation. First, make sure that the situation doesn't become a real altercation. If you think that may happen, then ask Student A to step away for a minute. Validate the angry student's feelings by saying "You're right, he did hit you harder than he should have, are you hurt?" Once you know student B isn't injured, you can then focus on resolving the situation.

Tell the upset student (B) to take a few deep breaths. Explain that the excessive hit was an accident. Ask the two students to shake hands, and forget the incident. After class, talk with Student B and let him know you understand why he threw his gear in anger. Explain how important it is to his martial arts training to maintain his composure inside and outside the classroom.

Instructor's Reaction to Resistance: If the situation escalates, then don't hesitate to dismiss both students from the class quickly. Tell Student A that he should have had better control of his hit and Student B reacted with a bad attitude. You don't want the other students exposed to such behavior.

Scenario #6

Difficult Classroom Situation: A parent is trying to coach his child from the observation area, disrupting the classroom and the teacher's instructions, and distracting his child from class participation. The child is visibly confused by the contradictory instructions.

Student Rationalizations: The child is not responsible for the parent's behavior. In fact, the parent, though responsible, may not be aware that he or she is being disruptive. The parent is focused on his child, keenly interested in what he has learned and applauding his every move and turn.

Naturally, the parent wants his child to succeed, but what the parent recognizes as supportive enthusiasm is actually quite a distraction and counterproductive to

your teaching and what you want all the students to learn.

Instructor Solution: Politely inform the parent and student that, during class, the instructor's role is to teach and coach; the parents' role is to observe. Tell the parent he can contribute to a positive class experience for all of the students, if he will wait until the end of the class to talk with his child. To divert attention from the situation, ask the class observers to give the students a round of applause at the end of the class for their efforts.

Remember, it's not what you say; it's how you say it. In rare cases, the parent may continue to be disruptive. Be diplomatic and speak with them privately, or ask the head instructor to talk with the parent outside the classroom. He or she should re-explain the school's teaching methodology and how the parent can support your school's mission and improve the learning experience for all students.

A proactive strategy to consider is the occasional inclusion of parents in your lesson plans. Develop a participation strategy, so parents can hold targets or encourage all of the children, as they confront an obstacle course. Include parents in an activity at the end of your class to minimize disruption, but retain their support.

Instructor's Reaction to Resistance: You must maintain control of the classroom and stop the parent's behavior quickly. If you find it necessary, then command the parent to be quiet. Use a serious tone to embarrass the parent in the presence of others. You may have to control the parent through his child by asking the child to disregard his parent or leave the classroom until his parent agrees to be quiet. You can even threaten to ask all classroom observers to leave. The other parents in attendance will quickly become your allies in controlling the disruptive parent.

Follow your discussion of these six difficult classroom scenarios with some interactive drills that will test what your team has learned, correct any misconceptions and use fun to reinforce this G.O.L.D. Leadership Team lesson.

The Drills

Make sure all team members participate in each drill. Rate them on a scale of 1 to 10 on how well they performed the drills.

Drill One

Create a mock class with one leadership team member as the instructor and the others as students. Before the drill starts, secretly selects specific “students” to behave like the students in difficult-classroom scenario #1, #2 or #3.

When the drill starts, the “instructor” teaches typical classroom drills to the “students,” but he doesn’t know which “student” will cause a disruption or challenge the instructor’s teaching method. For example, you have assigned a “student” to behave like the student in scenario #3. The “instructor” teaches the class a specific form.

The secretly selected “student” will suddenly question the “instructor’s” method compared to the head instructor’s. Rate the team member, portraying the instructor, on how he reacted to and managed the situation.

Drill Two

Create a mock class just like Drill #1, with one leadership team member as the instructor and the others as students. Before the drill starts, secretly selects specific “students” to behave like the students in difficult-classroom scenario #4, #5 or #6.

When the drill starts, the “instructor” teaches typical classroom drills to the “students,” but he doesn’t know which “student” will cause a disruption or challenge the instructor’s teaching method. For example, you

have assigned a “student” to behave like the parent in scenario #6. He or she sits in the observation area and constantly coaches his or her “child” in a manner that distracts the “child” and disrupts the classroom. Rate the team member, portraying the instructor, on how he reacted to and managed the situation.

Drill Three

Create a mock class just like Drill #1 and #2, with one leadership team member as the instructor and the others as students. Before the drill starts, secretly instructs the “students” to behave randomly like the students in any of the six difficult classroom scenarios or create their own disruptive situations. (Organize this carefully so there are only one or two mock disruptions at a time for the “instructor” to manage.)

When the drill starts, the “instructor” teaches typical classroom drills to the “students,” but he doesn’t know which “student” will cause a disruption, or even what kind of disruption. Rate the team member, portraying the instructor, on how he reacted to and managed each situation.

Repeat the lesson as often as necessary. Reviewing the material every six months or year with your leadership students will reinforce the importance of these valuable leadership skills.