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PART ONE

**A Music
Teacher is
a Teacher**

1

Managing Your Classroom for Sanity...and Success!

It's the first day of school; perhaps your first day of teaching! The students come in quietly, find a place to sit, and are not quite sure what to expect; perhaps they do not know many of the students around them, so they remain quiet until you have spoken. As you hand out classroom rules and explain your expectations, you feel yourself getting a little nervous. You start rambling on about yourself, about how involved you've been in education over the years and how you've always wanted to be a teacher. Pretty soon, the students are getting a little twitchy, and you feel yourself beginning to sweat. Your body language says you're not sure quite what to expect, frankly, because you are not even quite sure of yourself. In those few seconds of dead time, a restless student pokes another to get his attention, and suddenly, the class begins to focus on that distraction.

You aren't quite sure what you said or did to cause this situation, but now it seems as though the entire class is unraveling. At this moment, everything that was on your mind to tell the class over the remaining 45 minutes has escaped your head and panic sets in. It occurs to you that everything you ever learned in college (not to mention your thirteen years of prior schooling) never prepared you for what to do next. Finally, you hear a voice inside your head saying, "Why did you ever decide to be a teacher?"

It doesn't matter how great your musical skills are, how much you love children, how many conducting awards you won in college, or even what a genuinely good person you are if you don't have the most important tool for any teacher in any field—classroom management. This tool is essential if we are to get any of our educational philosophies across to our students, build any trust between ourselves and our students, or even begin to compete with the many outside influences that creep into our classroom.

Even though we would like for each and every one of our students to come to class well-mannered, well-dressed, well-kept, and fully prepared—physically, emotionally, and educationally—this will never happen. We have no control over our students' home environments. We have very little control over how our current students have been educated by their elementary teachers or if they have attained the skill level required to attend middle school.

But teachers do have a great deal of control, indeed an enormous amount of control, over what goes on inside their classrooms once the students arrive. Regardless of any excess baggage outside your room, the students will quickly adjust to your classroom climate—a climate set by you, the teacher. The amount that the students learn is based on the effectiveness of the teacher. An effective teacher is truly an effective leader. The President of the United States sets the tone for the country, the governor for the state, the manager for the store, the principal for the school, and the teacher for the classroom. The only way for students to gain achievement is through the leadership of the teacher, *not the other way around*. The same is true for other leaders. If any leader is unsure of his or her leadership, or is constantly changing direction with the wind, everything will eventually get out of control. This is especially true in the classroom.

Regardless of the background of your students, the amount of money poured (or dripped) into the school system, or the support of the community, it's *your* classroom. These are *your* students, under *your* direction. The effective teacher teaches the students how to behave properly, and accepts the responsibility of each student's educational outcome. It's up to the teachers to prepare themselves, set the stage, and dedicate themselves to teaching their students *until they learn*. Any-

thing less than a total commitment is unacceptable! Once these elements are in place, the students *will* respond to the teaching in the classroom rather quickly—it's up to the teacher to make the first move!

The teacher's classroom structure and organization in a classroom is the most important factor for increasing student achievement. Before any teaching strategies can be exercised, the room should be organized in a way that allows anyone walking in—students included—to immediately see that you are enthusiastic about your job, organized, efficient, and student-friendly. Your classroom's appearance is the first impression your students experience—give them a great one.

Once you are mentally prepared, have set the stage with an organized-looking classroom, and are ready to give a total commitment, it's time to put into motion your teaching ideas and strategies. The classroom management tools presented here are not intended to be the end-all of classroom management. Rather, its intention is to give you ideas and hints to think about when you are teaching. Each and every teacher is different, and each and every student is different. It's up to you to take your personality, along with the dynamics of your students, and glean the management tools to best work with your situation.

We tend to get what we expect.

—N. V. Peale

Despite your best teaching efforts, there is a good chance that you will receive nothing more from your students than your lowest expectations. If you allow thoughts like, "kids in middle school can't focus for more than 5 minutes" or "this is as much as I can ask from *this* group" to creep into your mind while teaching, you do a disservice to yourself and your students. Before the first student enters your classroom, set your expectations high. Expect the best from yourself, and expect the best from your students.

If you expect the students to behave properly and achieve at a high level, regardless of their background, there is an excellent chance that you will receive at least as much as you expect, if not more! Why? Because your body language will