

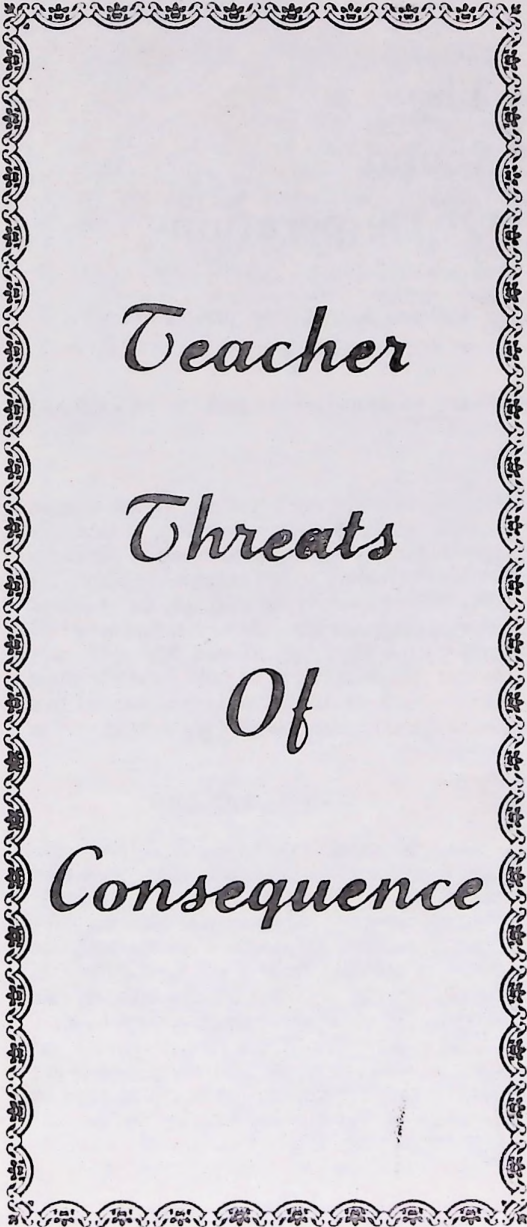


The MASTER Teacher

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Teacher Threats Of Consequence

The Sound Of Desperation

- "If you do that once more, I will...."
- "You'll do exactly what you are told or I will...."
- "If I hear one more sound, the whole class will...."

No matter what follows these teacher threats, students have heard them before. The fact that they are being used in school instead of at home is merely a shift in time and place. The only difference may be that we, as teachers, carry through our threats to a conclusion—or it may be the other way around. The child may expect the punishment to follow the threat at home—but finds that he need not bother to listen to teachers, for their threats are always void of action.

A SIGN OF FAILURE

A teacher should examine carefully the use of threats as a motivational tool. More often than not, they make a teacher look weak and foolish. Most teachers are fully aware of this fact. Why then, do professional teachers use threats? One reason is obvious. Threats are a substitute for effective discipline. When all else fails, threats become the automatic human response. They are an end result of frustration or simply not knowing what else to do. That's why threats are weak from the beginning. Most die as soon as they have been uttered and have but one impact: they further deteriorate the teacher's position. That's a fact. Oh yes, a threat may "work" a

time or two—until an individual student or the whole class finds out that it is an act of teacher desperation. After that, nothing the teacher does seems to make any real difference.

Sometimes teachers bargain with students by using a threat. They say such things as, "If you don't study, I will give a test," or "If you aren't quiet, we'll have to work five minutes into recess." These are nothing more than "bargaining threats." Never fool yourself into believing this type of bargaining is motivating. It is not. Too, experience will reveal that one threat must usually be followed by a bigger one.

Perhaps the most idle of all threats is the one where the student is told that he had better "shape up," or his parents will be called. He might even be told this two or three times—but the call is never made. Perhaps the worst of all threats is the one we never, even for a moment, intend to carry out. Out of our weariness, anger, or frustration we boil up inside and issue ultimatums that seem to give us a moment of satisfaction and relief. We threaten suspension and expulsion or promise failure in our course or class. Sometimes, we even threaten a child with a loss of our help as well as our friendship. These are critical threats of consequence to students, the class, and our relationship with both. They can only be overcome by putting professional intellect and action above spontaneous personal reactions.

A MATTER OF REASONABLENESS

There's a ring of hopelessness as soon as a teacher uses the "Big Threat," such as, "If there is any more talking, the whole class will spend an hour here after school tonight." First of all, the injustice of the whole class paying the price for a few is galling. It will be a long time before a teacher will have the respect of students—or their parents—if such an injustice is perpetrated. It would be traumatic enough if it were only unjust. But, along with this, the teacher will have to deal with the half dozen students who must go elsewhere immediately after school—to football practice, the doctor, the music lesson, or the school bus. I could go on endlessly listing the direction of the gales that will sink this teacher's ship. Such a threat can only end in disaster.

However, it's a rare teacher who has never used any threats. This fact must make us wonder, are we all without student respect? Of

course not. It must also make us ask: Is there ever a time when a threat is justified? Of course. But a teacher must remember and recognize the importance inherent in the fact that things have progressed to the point where a threat is believed necessary. Of equal importance, to have any meaning at all a teacher must remember that a threat must be a reasonable one and one that is carried out. That's why a threat needs teacher thought before it is issued and teacher action after it has been stated.

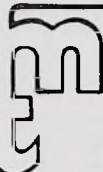
THE MASTER TEACHER

The Master Teacher knows that threats are usually ineffective in teaching. They work best for the teacher who uses them least. However, unless they are reasonable and carried out, they are of no value at all. They only put the teacher in a position of disadvantage.

The Master Teacher realizes too, that a threat must never violate privacy. If a child is humiliated in the presence of classmates with an angry threat from an angry teacher—even if it is carried out—that student won't easily forgive the misuse of teacher authority and power. It is very hard, indeed, at times not to make a threat openly to a child. Yet, it is an absolute must for a teacher never to make this mistake. If the reason for this is not quite clear, try to remember that time when you were on the receiving end of humiliation. Nothing can justify teacher vengeance. Compassion must always be our companion. When it is not, our actions can be worse than the wrong we are punishing. A professional educator must remember there is a consequence of significance within every teacher technique. That contained in a threat is seldom good for a teacher or those they teach.

Robert L. DeBruin





MASTER Teacher tips...

FOR IMPROVING

Student Motivations

Humor definitely has a place in the classroom. It should be used by every teacher. However, the teacher who is "witty" at the expense of students "loses" those students who are the brunt of teacher wit. Usually, this teacher behavior forces students either to withdraw or construct a protective barrier. Teachers should recognize this fault as a personal ego-building device that destroys student relationships. We must laugh with students—but never at them.

Many students will withdraw—sometimes permanently—if their responses during a classroom discussion are met with a negative reaction. Fear of being wrong is often the cause of this reaction. That's why a teacher should try to turn every student response into a worthwhile contribution by adding information to the answer or by using it as a departure point which leads to a correct answer. It's a truth of human motivations; encouragement will motivate a student into becoming a regular class participant—discouragement will not.

Interruptions are a part of teaching. They can range from noise outside the classroom to an intercom announcement. However, a teacher's reaction to the interruption is vital in regaining lost attention. Usually, a teacher should not continue as if the interruption did not occur. Remember, regardless of the intensity of interest before the disturbance, minds will be temporarily lost to the diversion. Therefore, a teacher must acknowledge the interruption and allow students to do the same. This can be done by comment or short pause which is necessary to allow minds to return to the lesson at hand. Do not make a "big deal" out of the interruption regardless of how distracting or personally irritating it is—or you make returning to the lesson more difficult. Your "second distraction" will only cause student minds to delay in returning to your teaching.

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*"We must expect each student to strive
for excellence in terms of the kind of
excellence that is within his reach."*

—John W. Gardner

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