

Agreements

Are you familiar with Don Miguel Ruiz's *The Four Agreements*?

AGREEMENT 1

Be impeccable with your word - Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

AGREEMENT 2

Don't take anything personally - Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

AGREEMENT 3

Don't make assumptions - Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

AGREEMENT 4

Always do your best - Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret.

I use this term as a method of class discipline in my large ensemble, Concert Choir. We have an agreement; I give the class four minutes to come into the room, detox from their last class and share the latest earth-shattering news with their friends before I call the class to attention. During this time, they are to enter the room, get their Choir folder, drop their backpack and move into the center of the riser set-up. For me, it is a time that becomes a barter point. I give you a few minutes; you give me your focus for the rest of the period.

As happens with time, they begin to stray from our agreement. They congregate outside the risers, they drop backpacks and neglect to get their folders. Section Leaders and Officers try to enforce the agreement with gentle reminders.

Ultimately, I will have to reign in the behavior with the following...(addressing the class after warm-ups)...*"I thought we had an agreement. I give you a few minutes at the beginning of the period where you drop your backpack, get your folder and head into the center of the room. Seems we have lost sight of the agreement. So, let me re-state the options – I start the class as the bell rings and you suffer the consequences of lateness to the start of class OR we keep the agreement. What will it be?"*

You know their choice. I find that this type of class discipline works for me. They are happy and I am happy. And the end result is a solid effort in creating a quality choral sound. Ain't nothin' wrong with that!

PS – This year my "call-to-order" for my large ensembles is the clapping sequence ♪♪♪♪. Not sure why it is so effective, but the second I clap this pattern, my classes immediately stop talking and move into place. They remain quiet until I start the warm-up drill. I love it!

~Barbara Retzko, Choral Director
Ridge High School, Basking Ridge NJ
Barbararetzko@hotmail.com