

# *The Superior Educator*

**A Calm and Assertive Approach  
to Classroom Management  
and Large Group Motivation**

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**Never be powerless in the classroom again.**

**Unlock the secrets to calm  
and assertive leadership.**

**Learn to manage large groups  
and move them to success.**

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*Stephen T. McClard*

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## Foreword

A desire of every teacher is that many of our students will have had their lives enriched positively and that at least a few of them will have been sufficiently influenced to assimilate our teachings, while developing basic concepts even further. In this way, effective teaching practices become the culmination of generations of teachers and students.

A good teacher welcomes students who question the status quo, and Stephen McClard was just such a student. He has continued to question, explore, and develop his knowledge and techniques as a teacher and shares his journey as well as discoveries with the reader.

There is no shortage of self-help books on the market, except for teachers. This book fills this void by presenting ideas centered on the importance of examining our own behaviors, attitudes, and self-expectations as they relate to particular teaching techniques. Not only does this book contain numerous "gems of wisdom" for the novice teacher, but it will be enlightening to the experienced teacher as well.

The book is organized so that reading a chapter a week, while assimilating the techniques into your own teaching style, will provide you with many of the skills necessary to maintain better classroom management and to enhance the learning environment. Enjoy using this "field manual for survival in the classroom."

Robert M. Gifford, D.M.A.  
Professor Emeritus of Music

# Introduction

Are you sick of teaching through distraction? Is the routine of poor behavior in your classroom driving you to substance abuse? Do you get the feeling that nobody is listening to you and you are not receiving the respect that you deserve?

If you have been searching for a way to take control of your classroom, now you have it. Why spend your best years fighting stress and disappointment? Take charge now and learn the secrets to a better life and rewarding educational experience for you and your students.

In this book, you will enter a world where you are in charge of every situation. It does not matter whether your classroom is a large group, such as a band or choir, or just a few students. By applying a simple set of guidelines and psychological strategies, you will soon become the amazing teacher you dreamed of becoming when you started your career. As an added bonus, this book will help you prevent heart disease, control diabetes, lower your blood pressure, heighten creativity, improve your physical appearance, increase coordination, strengthen your immune system, lose weight, and add 20 years to your life.

Now that I have your attention, let me say that the claims made above are not necessarily a fantasy and can become a reality. This is entirely up to your drive, determination, and self-control as an individual. By changing one person, you can change the lives of thousands.

All teachers, no matter the leadership style, will make mistakes, upset parents, and do amazingly dumb things in the classroom. As I read over the words that I have written in this book, I realize that many of these best educational practices are, in reality, some of my own personal weaknesses.

After reading this book, you may think that I must be some kind of super-teacher who has total control over all aspects of his classroom and program. I'll be the first to admit that this is not always the case. I have had some amazing times in the classroom and have moved groups of students to wonderful successes. When this has happened, I can say with confidence that it was when I followed my heart as a teacher and tried to see the good in my students and myself. I am continually striving toward this goal—the goal of continuous personal development for my students and myself.

We all have weaknesses to address and personality problems to iron out. We all wish that we could be the people who we admire most, but there are always times that we fail to meet these ideals. We are all human, after all. No matter how much we admire others for their work, we can bet that they make mistakes just like us. The grass may not always be greener on the other side, but it will always look that way. Your job is to keep your own "lawn" looking the best you can.

Let me give you a story that will relate to this idea. One of the interesting jobs that I have done with my spare time is to take old upright pianos and convert them into computer desks. I have built these desks and sold them all over the United States. This unique hobby came from my background as a piano tuner and technician.

I was in my garage one day, looking at a uniquely crafted old upright piano that I had recently acquired. It was mahogany and had solid, hand-carved legs. The only problem was that it had a huge crack in the soundboard. That was the end of the road for this piano. I looked it over for a few minutes, then walked into my house and sat down at the computer.

My computer desk was nearly in pieces, so I looked over at my wife and said, "I'm going to take that old piano out there and make it into a desk." Needless to say, that didn't go

over very well. My wife said she would not allow me to waste our money in that way. A few minutes after she said that, I was in the garage tearing it apart and starting to build my new desk.

My wife was not very happy with me for several weeks. As the desk came together, she slowly admired the new piece of furniture. The final coat of finish was on, and she was moving furniture around to make room for our new desk. She even invited family and friends over to see her new and unique piece of furniture.

A few years later, I had the opportunity to build a computer desk for a Hollywood producer. Over the next month or so, we communicated about the building of the desk and became friendly enough with each other to talk about life, including aspects of our careers and families. I saw him as a successful Los Angeles hotshot and me as a lowly teacher from the Midwest. What I discovered as I talked with him was that we were very similar individuals despite our different backgrounds.

No matter how we see others, we are all human and make pretty much the same mistakes. We share the same desire—the desire for acceptance. If you want to be a great teacher, the only real job you have is to show students that you accept and appreciate them. Beyond that, you help them see their own potential and help them reach for success.

Let's be honest. Seeing the good in everyone is difficult. Being all things to all people is impossible, making the job of a teacher or coach demanding and frustrating. At other times, being an educator can be a rewarding and life-changing experience. The journey is never one of constant success.

Numerous factors in education are beyond the reach of the classroom teacher. Despite this fact, it is possible to make a significant impact on your students' lives and experience less

stress from day to day. You have the power to make this happen.

The secret of this book is in the next statement. **Enjoy the successes you have, constantly grow in your understanding, and learn from your failures.** The concepts found in this book are merely an attempt to help you achieve this simple goal.

The ideas in this book are my thoughts on classroom management and large-group leadership learned over the course of my career in education. Most of the insights here are gleaned from my own personal experiences and reflect years of trial and error. Some of the techniques that I share in this book are passed down to me through the advice of other amazing teachers such as my father. Yet other strategies are learned through the observation of other individuals outside the field of education and through my studies in psychology and philosophy. No matter the source, I consider these my best practices, worthy of sharing with other educational professionals.

I can only hope that, in some small way, this book might spur you on to effective ideas of your own. Through your journey as an educator, you will hopefully realize that you can succeed in the classroom despite the daunting obstacles that lay before you. If you get nothing else from this book, remember this truism: **If you want to succeed, then you need to hurry up and keep failing.** Success is found at the farthest edge of failure. If you do not push to the edge and look over, you will never know what you might have discovered on the other side.

# Preface

“There are three ways to attain wisdom. The first is reflection, which is the highest, the second is imitation, which is the easiest and the third is experience, which is the bitterest.” Confucius, 500 B.C.

This book started with Chapter 2 when I was sitting in a graduate class thinking of student misbehavior. I had my laptop open to the writings of Abraham Maslow when I keyed in on his Hierarchy of Needs. I came to the realization that many of the behaviors I was dealing with in the classroom were a result of unmet needs from the family. Many years of working around these missing needs have helped me develop a set of strong routines that have assisted in bringing success into the lives of my students.

At the end of the process, I realized that I wrote this book for myself first. Reflecting on my own weaknesses shows me just how much work I still have in front of me before I become the master teacher I envision. I have noticed through the years that the work I do to enhance my own personality and character is directly tied to the development of my students. The better I develop myself, the more my students achieve.

So, how do we arrive at this kind of success in the classroom? I have spent eighteen years in education figuring out that question, and here is what I have found: to lead the many, you must first lead the one. The “one” is you. Self-improvement as an educator is where success will start. Gaining self-confidence, self-control, and self-esteem will be your focus throughout this book. Being in control of one person will allow you to have control of thousands if that is what you want to do. Small class or large, it does not matter. You are the only “one” you can improve with certainty. From there, it is a matter of having the right tools, keeping them sharp, and keeping your optimism high.

As you consider what I said above, ask yourself these questions: What drives you in life? Why do you own the

vehicle that you own? Why did you choose its color the way you did? Do you own more vehicles than you need and why? Why do you take vacations, and how did you pick where you would go? I could keep going, but the answer to all these questions is need. Everything in your life is done the way it is done because of need. Need is in the driver's seat for every step you take.

When you are hungry, you eat. When you are thirsty, you drink. When you want to enhance your self-esteem, you purchase a shiny red motorcycle and try not to crash. When you want to stroke your ego, with disregard to your pocketbook, you buy a sports car. The need for constant stimulation to our emotions and desires is found in our ongoing thirst to fill need.

Right now, you are reading this book because you have a need. You have a desire for better classroom management so you will have a satisfying career in education. To fill this need, you must first realize what you are missing. You must be missing something, or you would already be meeting your needs. What I am hoping you see from my book is that you can only solve your problems by improving one person first. That person is you.

As you read, you will notice that I have included many paraphrased quotes from the teachings of Confucius. The translations that I reference are by James Legge (1815-1897), from his *Chinese Classics* series. Despite the fact that Confucius did not pen these words himself, I attempt to stay true to the original message within my paraphrase. There are many sources that are available to give us an approximation of his philosophies and teachings, and the paraphrasing found in this book will attempt to stay as true to the original philosophy as possible.

Confucius' thoughts, originating around 500 B.C., have been a dominating influence in the cultures of China and the Near East. There are many aspects of his writings that speak to the modern educator on topics such as morality, correct

social relationships, sincerity, and justice. By all considerations, Confucius was the originator of all the thoughts contained within this book and his original teachings still echo through the best educational writings of our day.

In the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius speaks about the characteristics of what he calls the “superior man.” He defines certain qualities and characteristics within a person that lead to excellence. Within the pages of this book, I hope to reveal what it takes to become a “superior educator.”

If you want to see any measure of success with your students, you must first look in the mirror and reflect on your own weaknesses. How would you need to change to become a superior educator? Give me your ear and some of your time, and together we will try to answer this question.

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# Molding Your Personality for Success

"If you can one day renovate yourself, then by all means do this each day. Yes, let there be daily renovation." Confucius 500 B.C.

Most problems you have in the classroom are directly related to your leadership style and personality. Did you hear that? It is worth saying repeatedly. *You must realize that most problems you have in the classroom are directly related to your leadership style and personality.* If you cannot change this, you are stuck with the same old problems and will continue to spin your wheels. Adapting your personality to a calm and assertive leadership style will be the key to unlocking your potential as a master teacher.

So what do we say about the child's behavior? Should the child's behavior factor into the equation of leadership style and personality? The answer is yes and no. It does factor in, but you have the ability over time to change behavior. There is no magic bullet that will cure all your discipline problems. Working on discipline is a constant part of your job.

Extreme educational situations are difficult, even for the best educators. You may find yourself thinking these suggestions may not work in your situation. Remember that one tool does not fit all problems. It takes a large tool belt.

You might ask, "What's so wrong with me that I need to mold my personality?" You can only address the answer to this question by understanding how your current personality and leadership style enhances or conflicts with the goals you have for your classroom and the basic needs of your students. As you read further, you will gain a better understanding of how this can work for you.

Whether you know it or not, your personality is an engrained habit. Habits are extremely hard to break. Understanding what a good leader does by routine will assist you in adapting your current weaknesses into strengths. To accomplish this will take much thought, reflection, and personal growth. Making good routines into habits is the goal. Being perfect in your area of knowledge is not enough. **Perfection without personality is merely content without delivery.**

There are certain habits that will be the most difficult for you to break or improve. These are the habits of the heart: optimism and pessimism. By becoming the glass half-full type of person, you can take charge of any situation. Remember that the sum total of who you are is made up of what you spend your time thinking about. If you dwell on the negative side of situations, you will always be defeated. If you deny the negative, you will increase your odds of success ten-fold. You are capable of amazing things when you believe you can succeed, so why do you still doubt?

Pause a second and consider this thought. If drugs, alcohol, or other self-destructive behaviors are present in your life, then you should consider what I said in the last paragraph. The sum total of who you are is made up of what you spend your time thinking about. These destructive behaviors are what lead your life and may be your main problem in the classroom. Growing beyond this dilemma is nearly impossible because it is the very thing that occupies your thoughts constantly. This will also be true for your students. You may not be able to control this in them, but you sure can control it in yourself.

Having optimism in the darkest times can be difficult. Since optimism is related almost directly to self-esteem, finding ways to improve your self-concept becomes the focus for improving optimism. Your level of optimism and self-concept will determine whether you are more or less depressed and will define your capability to perform above or below your potential. The worst circumstances will merely bounce off

you if you have amazing optimism. If your optimism is beaten down through years of poor classroom management, you may find renewed hope within the pages of this book.

To improve self-concept is to improve achievement. This is true for you and it is true for your students. If your leadership abilities were a math equation, then by taking all the skills you have learned in your life up to this point and adding this to your personality, then the sum would equal your leadership ability. Think of optimism as taking that number to the power of your level of optimism. The equation would look like this:

**(Skills + Personality)** (to the power of optimism) = **Leadership Potential**

The equation for pessimism would be the opposite. Pessimism takes your leadership potential away. The equation would be:

**(Skills + Personality) - Pessimism**=**Less Leadership Potential**

Anything that you can do to improve your leadership style should be practiced. Reading books on leadership, motivation, and business success is a good starting point. Using your planning time or professional days to observe other teachers is another effective idea for improving your leadership style. Use any means necessary to sharpen your axe!

I'm reminded of a trip I took to San Diego a few years ago. My principal approached me about a free trip that was being offered by the Marine Corps to observe Marine training at Camp Pendleton. I might not have taken the trip, but it was in the middle of our state proficiency test, so the students would not be in class anyway. I agreed to the trip and spent a week in California.

While I was there, I was in downtown San Diego on our evening free time and noticed that the San Diego

Community Wind Ensemble was performing a few blocks away. I took a taxi to the park and bought a ticket to the concert. I noticed from the program that the Navy Band Southwest director was going to be the guest conductor for one number.

After the concert, I went to the front of the stage and spoke with him. We talked for some time about the program and about where I was from. When I told him that I was visiting Camp Pendleton, he told me that I should get in touch with the Marine Band there and speak to the director. He gave me his phone number, and the next day, I broke from the group and got to spend some time with the Marine Band.

As it turned out, this became one of the most rewarding professional development activities of my career. They invited me to conduct the band at the noon rehearsal. We worked on several of the songs that would be played for the colors ceremony the next day. This event is the graduation ceremony for the current group of Marines who make it past basic training.

The best part of the whole experience happened next. The director of the Marine Band asked me to direct one piece of music in the ceremony the next day. As part of the ceremony, I received a picture of the event and a shirt to wear from the gift shop. I conducted "God Bless America" by Irving Berlin. It was an original, yellowed copy of the song that may have once been used in a performance for a president. That was what I had imagined anyway.

Conducting the Marine Band was an amazing experience but not quite as eventful as what happened earlier in the week. While I was in downtown San Diego one evening, I thought it would be a good idea to get a haircut. I was in an open-air mall and noticed a salon called Jocco's where at least ten amazingly beautiful women were cutting hair.

I made my appointment and sat in the waiting area for about fifteen minutes for my turn. I tried to guess which one

of the nice young ladies would be cutting my hair. One of the girls came to get me, and we made our way over to one of the corner stations. I was so excited! This had been such a great trip. I just knew my wife would appreciate seeing me with a new haircut when I got home.

After my stylist had prepped me, she went around the corner to the back of the salon. A few minutes later, another hair stylist greeted me. I believed him to be Jocco, but I never was quite sure. He was a very large and flamboyant Mexican man with the biggest curly hair I had ever seen. Although I didn't have trouble with a Mexican man cutting my hair, the prospect of having my delicate hairs cut by Jocco himself was just not as pleasant as what I had first imagined. I wasn't sure what was going on, so I just sat back and let life happen.

The next twenty minutes taught me a few very valuable lessons. The first lesson is that Jocco—although not what I expected—could really cut hair well. He had some of the most interesting stories to tell. I looked even more beautiful than before and came away with a rich experience that I will always remember.

I also learned that the dreams I dream and the reality I live may not necessarily match. The important goal is making the most of each experience and enjoying the people I meet along the way. Individuals that cross my path may not always fit my ideal, but they will always teach me something new about myself. I can be sure that everyone has value, even if I cannot imagine what that value might be.

This trip was an outstanding opportunity. I learned so much from going on my journey, and when I got back to town, it was what I talked about to my kids for the next month. Just being able to see the Marine style of leadership was enough to make the trip invaluable to me. Conducting the Marine Band was the icing on the cake. Receiving a haircut from Jocco—priceless! These types of educational opportunities are just what it takes to improve your leadership style and

give you a larger view of your world. A complete diary of this trip can be found on my web page, [www.bolivarmusic.org](http://www.bolivarmusic.org).

### **Classroom Questions and Activities**

1. List a few negative aspects of your own personality that need to change.
2. How is each of these personality traits likely to affect your classroom management?

## About the Author

Stephen T. McClard



Stephen McClard has been the Director of Bands at Bolivar High School since 2002. Mr. McClard graduated from Southeast Missouri State University in 1990. He started his teaching career in Southeast Missouri before moving to Illinois where he taught band for 8 years.

Mr. McClard's bands have consistently received superior ratings at contest as well as many other awards and accolades. Since 2002, the band has traveled twice to Chicago, where they won 1st place class 4A and 1st place overall at the Midwest Music in the Parks Festival. The band also traveled to Cincinnati in 2006, receiving the same honors.

In 2006, Mr. McClard was named by SBO Magazine as one of the 50 Directors Who Make a Difference. In 2006, 2008, and 2009, Bolivar R-I School district was named one of the "Best 100 Communities for Music Education" in America by the American Music Conference. Mr. McClard was previously featured on the cover of the 2003 issue of *School Band and Orchestra Magazine* for his work with music technology.

In addition to his career in education, Mr. McClard maintains an online woodworking business and is a third-generation piano technician. His woodworking creations include custom bass guitars, which have sold all over the world and one-of-a-kind computer desks made from old pianos. His piano desks have been featured in magazines such as *Business 2.0* and *Piano Technicians Journal* and in many other newspapers and television news features.