

The Workers Start the Day

In a fifth grade class and a high school business class, students start the class, rather than the teacher. To see how this is done, go to the **Going Beyond** folder for Chapter 15 at EffectiveTeaching.com.

Ed Lucero of Albuquerque teaches high school business education. His students show up on time and start the class, not him. He teaches a skill the students will need when they go out into the job world. It is the worker who starts the day.

It wasn't always this way. Eleven years into teaching, he shares,

“If I would have had procedures in place, and more importantly practiced them, leaving the teaching profession would have never entered my mind.”

He realized there was no structure in his classroom. **He was miserable!** Students weren't paying attention. He constantly repeated himself. Students would ignore his instructions and at times talk back. Some students would attempt to call him “bro” instead of Mr. Lucero.

Every day was a challenge to keep his students on task. He felt he was a “**glorified baby sitter**” in true survival mode day after day. He realized that he was not doing a very good job of teaching. It was time for him to leave teaching or take drastic action.

He Thought About Leaving the Profession

Ed felt like leaving teaching after his eleventh year in the classroom. Ed promised himself he would not have another year like he'd just had. If the situation did not change, he would leave teaching and practice public accounting, for which he was qualified. He realized,

“If I stayed, I knew I had to make some radical changes.”

Ed made a choice to become a better classroom teacher. He chose to develop the passion for teaching again.

His Classroom Is a Real Life Office

His wife Ruby, who is a support teacher for the largest school district in New Mexico, saw and felt his misery. She suggested Ed read ***The First Days of School***. He spent the greater part of the summer reading the book and researching its many ideas.

From his reading, he had an inspiration—an epiphany. He was teaching business education, so why not make his classes more businesslike? This corresponded with the classes that he was teaching—Business, Marketing, and Finance.

This idea took some advance preparation of materials such as daily log sheets, work procedures and computer procedures. **But he was prepared; he was structured; he was ready for his new first day of school.**

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- He communicated to his students that school is the equivalent of “their **job**.”
- The classroom is their office; teachers are their **supervisors**; and the students are the **employees**.
- All employees (students) are scheduled to **work** Monday through Friday.
- Passing periods are **short breaks** between assignments (classes).
- Employees (students) work up to **six different shifts** in one day.
- In their “office” the **work shift is 56 minutes**.
- Their report card is the equivalent of their paycheck and their **compensation** is tied to their work effort and productivity.
- They get weekends, holidays, and ten weeks off during the summer. Not a bad deal—as many employees get only a two-week annual **vacation**.
- As in a “real” job, employees (students) may get docked if they do not work the entire shift or are absent. This implies that employees (students) must be **on task** the entire “shift.”

Very quickly, Ed discovered, “**For the first time in a long while, I feel like I am truly making a difference in the lives of students again.**”

“After implementing many of the strategies and ideas from *The First Days of School*, I am having the best year of teaching—ever!”

Implementing the First Day of School

Preliminary Paperwork: As students enter their office (classroom), Ed stands outside the classroom door and greets every student. As they respond, he hands them an Information Sheet to complete when they get to their seats. The sheet asks for their personal information such as contact names and numbers, school schedules, interests, hobbies, extracurricular activities, etc. Students enter the classroom and find their desks from the seating chart posted on the wall.

Students not on his original “Employee List” are assigned a seat, and proceed to complete the Information Sheet. It provides Ed with important information on each “employee” and can create a basis for additional communication to get to know his employees better in a very efficient manner.

A few students are surprised that a seating chart has already been made up; thus, not allowing them opportunities to sit by their friends. Just as in a real work situation, employees are often unable to choose their work stations.

While students fill out the Information Sheet, Ed takes roll, adds any new students to his roster, and updates the seating chart.

Job Orientation: Approximately ten minutes into class, Ed introduces himself and explains “work” expectations, procedures, and attendance/tardy policies. He also tells them that this is going to be **one of the most beneficial classes in high school** because it is modeled after “real life” work experience.

Once the first day procedures are explained, the “training” begins. The students discuss and practice the procedures for beginning each “work shift.” These are some of the procedures:

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1. Students pull their **Time Card** (folder) as they enter their office. This indicates they have punched in and are now on the clock to begin work.
2. Students log their **Daily Business Agenda** sheet, which includes a “Business Smarts Activity,” the class objectives, and assignments for the day.
3. Students begin their **Business Smarts Activity**. The Business Smarts Activity is a “small” job (the equivalent of bellwork). It could be reading a short business article, watching a small segment from a video, or simply taking notes regarding the day’s tasks. This allows Ed to take attendance and perform other necessary tasks before beginning the core assignment (job).
4. Students are briefed on the **business tasks/work objectives** for the day.
5. Upon completion of their jobs for the day, students must begin working on additional “jobs” (assignments). All students have a copy of an **Additional Assignments List**. It contains ten possible assignments they can work on. This idea has worked effectively and has helped eliminate wasted time in the classroom. As in real life employment, employees will get reprimanded or penalized if they are on the clock and doing nothing.

Students do get **bonuses** (extra points) for completing these additional assignments. More importantly, students better their business skills and/or keep up to date with current events in the world of business. Surprisingly, Ed also has learned a great deal from the additional assignments students have submitted. It’s like having grad assistants who perform research for him.

6. Students understand that when they **file their folder**, they have just punched out and can go on break before they go to their next job and supervisor. However, they can only punch out after they have completed their fifty-six minute shift!

All students have a hard copy of the classroom procedures. It is a six-page “Employee Handbook” that explains how to do things during the “work shift” (class).

[Click here](#) to view Ed’s Handbook.

Teaching Gets Better Each Day

Ed no longer has to repeat himself or answer redundant questions from students. Instead, he simply says, “**And what’s the procedure, please?**” Periodically, he has the class revisit and practice a procedure again to get everyone “back to the fundamentals.”

Implementing procedures the first day of school is very important. It sets the tempo for the entire school year. Students learn what is expected of them from day one, **which is why they can start the class on their own.**

Teaching Gets Better and Better

Ed shares, “I wish that I had read ***The First Days of School*** before my first year of teaching.

“If I would only have had **procedures in place and practiced them**, leaving the classroom and teaching would never have entered my mind.

“**My school year has been great.** I feel good that students are utilizing every minute of class productively. I am so glad that my wife, Ruby, introduced me to ***The First Days of School***. I continue to get more and more ideas each time I pick up the book, and I have begun to share the ideas and strategies with many of my colleagues.

“I never knew that teaching could get better with time!”

And it got better for Ed Lucero because four years later he became a National Board Certified Teacher.

Her Students Start the Day

Shirley Bert Lee teaches elementary school in California. Her students also start the class on time and on their own.

Shirley Bert Lee has been named “Teacher of the Year” several times. She has been repeatedly recognized for her *effectiveness* in the classroom. Furthermore, students want to be in her class and parents pressure administrators to have their children assigned to her class.

You can understand why Shirley’s fifth- and sixth-grade classes are so effective when you see how efficiently she opens each day of her class.

- She has a posted morning routine for students to follow.
- She posts her assignments every day.
- She knows how to develop routines with her students.

On the first day of school, this is what she tells her students:

“Mrs. Lee does not start the class. The bell does not start the class. **YOU** start the class.

“This is what will happen when you come to class each day. There is a morning routine you are to follow. You immediately go to your seat, you get out your materials for work, and you get to work on the assignment.

“The assignment will be posted on the chalkboard in the same place every day. For instance, you may be given a set of seven questions and some new vocabulary words.

“Please get to work on the questions and the vocabulary words when you come in.

“Do not wait for the bell to ring or for the teacher to signal you to get to work.

“You will have ten minutes after the bell rings to get the assignment done.”

Shirley Lee's class is a joy to behold. She doesn't even have to open her mouth when the bell rings. She may say, "Good morning," or compliment the class for behaving appropriately, but while the students work quickly and quietly, she completes the chores that typically must be done by all teachers, such as taking roll.

Yes, **she takes roll *after* the students have begun their work.** A teacher's first priority is to get the students to work, not to take roll.

And work they will, if there are consistent procedures.