

How to control 5th Graders...and the world - Opinion



The government mandated that business owners must enforce inhumane, medically dangerous, discriminatory edicts against the population. If people are caught inside a store or at an event without a mask or proof that they poisoned themselves, the business owner will be slapped with a massive penalty.

by [Rabbi Chananya Weissman](#)

Many years ago I took over a 5th grade class in the middle of the school year. By the principal's description, the kids were "swinging from the chandeliers". Most of them were on a 2nd- or 3rd-grade reading level. There was also a state exam in American history coming up in a few weeks that they were completely unprepared for, which was a looming disaster for the school.

To make a long and interesting story short, the class did very well on the state exam, by the end of the year many of them were on a 7th- or 8th-grade reading level, and almost all the kids had become solid students. Turning that wild bunch of kids into mensches was a constant challenge with many ups and downs. It is the teaching job I am most proud of, though I must acknowledge that the turnaround was beyond my control, and easily could have turned out differently. If we don't take all the blame when things don't work out the way we desire, we have to be consistent and defer the credit when they do.

Although much of the time I was flying by the seat of my pants (it was only my second year as a full-time teacher) I learned many things about human behavior that have implications far beyond a middle-school classroom. After all, there is not much difference between controlling a classroom, controlling a group of employees, controlling an army, controlling inmates in a prison, or controlling an entire society. The details are different, but the underlying strategies are essentially the same.

Before I get to what worked, here's what made no difference at all: everything I learned in graduate school. I spent three years toiling through graduate school, borrowed many thousands of dollars for tuition, housing, and overpriced textbooks, and learned almost nothing of practical value. I provided the desired responses to questions about theories of education, received passable grades, promptly forgot this information, wrote a paper or two, and participated in model lessons with fellow aspiring teachers that resembled an actual day in the classroom in no way at all, all while pretending that professors who couldn't even entertain us compliant graduate students would mold us into experts in taming a jungle.

At the end of this torturous process, I had very little useful knowledge, but I did receive a valuable piece of paper. This conferred upon me the right to boast that I have this piece of paper. I have a Master's degree in Secondary Jewish Education! This evidence that I had entered this torturous process of "higher education" and came out the other side brought

me esteem and the illusion of “expertise”. I could command a better job and a higher salary, at least in theory. Furthermore, for the rest of my life I could pull rank on anyone without equal “credentials” who expressed an opinion on education. I have a Master’s degree! I speak with authority!

Of course, there were even higher credentials available for purchase. I could have subjected myself to several more years of “higher education”, tortured myself to write a dissertation, dug a deeper pit of student debt, and then received a PhD. This would confer upon me the right to command an even better job and a higher salary (at least in theory), and even greater boasting rights for the rest of my life. No one with a mere Master’s degree would dare speak up in my presence.

I decided a Master’s degree would be enough torture and reward for me. Even with a PhD, I would still be expected to defer to those with multiple doctorates, or a PhD from a more prestigious institution, or winners of some award. Besides, I wanted to be a *rebbe* in a yeshiva, where teachers are generally viewed either as glorified babysitters or robots to be plugged into the wall. A Master’s degree would be sufficient to distinguish me as far as it mattered, with little to be gained beyond that. Being someone’s cousin or son-in-law mattered a lot more than any piece of paper from the high temples of education.

So what *did* work in that 5th grade classroom, against all odds, and how is it working for the tyrants of the world today? As I sometimes told my students with tongue in cheek, open up your brain and let me pour in some knowledge.

1. *Never let them know that you are flying by the seat of your pants. Always maintain the illusion of control.*

Once a teacher loses control of the classroom, he is in a desperate situation. If he fails to regain control quickly, he may never be able to hold onto it again. This is because the students will realize that they can seize control of the classroom *at any time* and there is virtually nothing the teacher can do about it. He is vastly outnumbered. He will have to run to the principal for support, which further exposes him as having no independent power.

The principal will then demonstrate the same illusion of control, issuing stern demands and warnings, but he too is vastly outnumbered. It is all a bluff. If the students maintain a united front, it is the teacher who will pay the price, not them. And if they keep it up, the principal will pay the price, too.

The greatest fear every teacher has is that they will lose control of the class. The elusive secret of how to control the classroom is the obsession of every graduate student, who will learn many advanced theories that will fail the minute he is faced with a difficult group of children. The teacher will then either figure out on his own that it’s all about bluffing and manipulating people, or he will fall.

The students must never see that you are rattled and confused. Even if the principal marches into your classroom and dresses you down in front of your students – the most unprofessional and counter-productive thing a principal can do – you must maintain your composure and appearance of control.

A successful teacher is an award-winning actor.

It is the same with those who control society. It is all one big bluff. They too are vastly outnumbered, and they live in constant terror of losing control. Sometimes they have detailed “lesson plans” and sometimes they are flying by the seat of their pants, but maintaining the illusion of control is their primary obsession.

If they lose control for a short period of time, they will panic and scramble to regain control before the inmates see through the facade. If the inmates maintain a united front for an extended period of time, the “teachers” in the middle will be the ones who pay, and they will be replaced with other teachers to mollify the populace and reset the situation.

No matter what happens, the people cannot be allowed to believe that the leaders stand on very shaky ground, live in terror of them, and are desperate to maintain control. They must always convince the people of just the reverse – that the people are the ones in trouble.

2. *Convince the students that you are on their side, and you are their best hope.*

One of the first things I did when I took over the class was make it clear that I wanted them to succeed, and they needed to cooperate with me in order to succeed. In the beginning they would gloat about having gotten the previous teacher fired, and implied that they could do the same to me. I acknowledged that theoretically that was possible, but I had no intention of quitting as the previous teacher had essentially done, and in any case if I were replaced it wouldn't benefit them in any way. They would still be stuck in the same classroom, with the same requirements to advance, and the same trajectory in life before them. At some point their antics would boomerang on them. The next teacher wouldn't be better than me – definitely not – so they would only be shooting themselves in the foot.

They tested me for a little while – there were good days and bad days – but then they really accepted me as their teacher.

Those who control society attempt to do this as well. Every politician claims that they are on *your* side, that they will “fight for you”. Who would you want to be alone with in a dark alley more than them? No one! In fact, no one else can possibly protect you. Only they can get the job done.

I really was on the side of my students and I really did get the job done. But when it comes to those who control society, it is never true. During election season they will run around shaking hands, taking pictures with people, visiting different communities to meet the regular people, take their questions, and learn about their needs. Because they care so very much.

Once the election is over, try to speak with them or arrange a meeting with them in your community. I'm sure they will never be too busy to meet with regular people, take their questions, and learn about their needs. Because they care so very much.

3. *Carrot and stick*



You don't want to use a hard-handed approach unless you absolutely have to. It is a tool best used sparingly and responsibly. If it backfires it exposes your weakness, and if it succeeds it still breeds resentment. Though the students must know you pack an iron fist, they must see it only rarely and think of it frequently.

If you make my life easier, I will make your life easier. I rewarded good performance from my class with pizza parties, extra recess, and other perks. At the beginning of the class I told them exactly what I needed to do with them that day. If they would cooperate, we would finish early, and I would give the rest of the time back to them. They could have recess for the rest of the day, do their homework in class, or just hang out with me until school was over.

If they didn't cooperate, the job still needed to get done, but it would be a lot less fun. No recess, extra homework, the regular school lunch, no fun and games. If you don't let me teach, I am not going to go hoarse from screaming. I will simply stop, turn around without a word, and add homework to the whiteboard. This will continue as needed. If I cannot finish the day's lesson, I will not reward you by trying again tomorrow. You are on your own, and tomorrow I will do tomorrow's lesson. If you can't keep up, hire a tutor.

Again, there were good days and bad days. They tested me. It took them time to change their habits. One student was thrown out of the school. It actually had nothing to do with his behavior in my class, and I wasn't even informed of the expulsion by the unprofessional administration, but I used this example to put the fear of God in the rest of the class. Eventually they got used to the idea that cooperating was a much better idea. Not only was life more pleasant, they actually learned, succeeded, and enjoyed it.

The people who control society use the carrot and stick as well, but the carrots tend to be rotten and the sticks have rusty nails on them. Unlike a good teacher, they despise you and have no interest in your personal success. Consequently, you should have no interest in their carrots or their sticks, and seek to replace them with shepherds who truly care for you.

4. *Make them believe you are on their side. Give them a small victory.*

As a teacher, this was easy, because I really was on their side. I didn't need to fake it.

The people who control society need to fake it. Your personal success is no goal of theirs, and may represent a threat to their agenda. So while the people in charge are actively working to impede your success, to complicate your life, and even to destroy your life, they must make you believe that they are your greatest ally.

They will generally employ rhetoric, because talk is cheap, efficient, and effective most of the time. They will lull you to sleep with oratory, assuage your pain and difficulties by acknowledging that we are "going through difficult times" ("we" meaning you, not them).

Sometimes, however, when your lives are really going to pieces, and especially when this is their direct fault, they will need to persuade you even more convincingly that they are on your side. When they propose a new draconian measure against you – the passage of which is a fait accompli – they will allow you to submit your opinion, which of course they



will take into consideration, because your opinion matters.

They will allow you to protest – only in a time, place, and manner that you first receive permission for, of course – because you are allowed to make your voice heard. If the time, place, and manner of your protest is inconvenient to them, expressing your voice will land you in prison, because your voice is otherwise harmful to society. If protesting at all becomes too inconvenient to them, or they have consolidated power sufficiently, they will disallow protests entirely, because this too is best for society (their society).

They will take away your livelihood and right to work, but they will print monopoly money and give you some. They will confiscate all natural resources, but ration out “your fair share”. They will appropriate whatever is useful to them, but only so they can protect it for you. They will destroy your home, but promise to take care of you. They will force greater and greater tyranny upon you, but always provide an exception so you will see that they are reasonable. They will leap ten steps forward, then go one step back, so you will think your voice matters and you scored a victory.

They will utterly control you by allowing you to choose the collar around your neck and the mask on your face.

Israeli citizens face government-mandated boycotts against them if they refuse to submit their bodies and their children’s bodies to medical experiments and potentially lethal injections. However, the tyrants in power have threatened [serious repercussions to an ice cream company](#) for refusing to sell their products in certain parts of our land. “Israel will act aggressively against any effort to boycott its citizens,” declared Bibi 2.0.

Remember, they fight for *you!*

5. *Unite the people around you.*

What better example than the one just cited? The media decides what we should care about and for how long. The same day the media decided that we should care very much about an ice cream company, making this the most important story, urging us to be all up in arms about this outrage, another development occurred that received far less attention.

The government mandated that business owners must enforce inhumane, medically dangerous, discriminatory edicts against the population. If people are caught inside a store or at an event without a mask or proof that they poisoned themselves, the business owner will be slapped with a massive penalty. The business owner must serve as a private arm of the government and police his customers on their behalf. He will not receive a salary like actual police officers; his only compensation will be the “right” to continue operating his business, which he formerly believed was inherent.

This incredible development, this outrageous encroachment on decency and human rights, received scant attention in the media, which was entirely by design. We are not to concern ourselves with decency and human rights, let alone be outraged by assaults against them. That would be selfish, and ignorant, and the result of misinformation, and display a gross lack of concern for human life.



No, we must be obsessed with an ice cream company pulling its mediocre products from some parts of the country, because *that* is simply unacceptable. We must channel our righteous outrage in that direction, create memes, write letters, and make it clear that we will *not* be trifled with.

Most of all, we will rally around our heroic leaders, who proudly stand up for us in this time of crisis.

At the same time...

6. Get them to keep each other in line.

Something special happened one day in my 5th grade class, and I knew that I had won. A few students were being disruptive. Without missing a beat, I turned around and added some homework to the whiteboard. There were groans from other students. It wasn't fair. Why was I punishing *them* for what a few clowns did?

The disruptions continued. I stopped again, and there was silence. They knew what was coming next.

Suddenly one of the good students, a hard worker and emotionally sensitive child, yelled at the troublemakers to stop. He represented the overwhelming majority.

The troublemakers stopped.

Once the students had bought in to the extent that they were disciplining each other for me, my job was a *lot* easier. I would now only have to step in for extreme infractions, or occasionally give a reminder, but otherwise I would have no serious problems with controlling the classroom. They were controlling it for me.

This is the dream of every teacher, and the dream of every political leader.

They only have so many officers and soldiers they can deploy to enforce their cruel edicts. They cannot be everywhere all the time, and, contrary to what they want you to believe, they'd really rather not. They would much rather condition you to do the dirty work for them. Scream at people for not wearing a mask. Shame people for not being pin cushions for amoral maniacs in lab coats. Refuse to let them into your store, or into your home, or into your place of worship, or into your school. Hate them with all the pent-up rage and sanctimony you have stored inside you. Unleash it upon these fellow inmates instead of on your captors.

Then your captors can turn their attention to bigger things, instead of fighting tooth and nail to enforce their edicts. They will only have to trouble themselves for extreme infractions and provide occasional reminders that they are the boss.

Their plan all along was to turn their hostages against one another. This is what they have always done. As soon as people bought in to the extent that they were disciplining each other, they knew that they had won.

As soon as this stops, they will become very afraid.

Everything I always wanted to know about ruling the world, I learned in 5th grade.

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