

Problem behaviour in the classroom

In our Spring/Summer issue, we discussed how instructors can deal with a variety of problem behaviours displayed by cadets in corps and squadron classrooms. This issue looks at more problem behaviours and the right way to respond to them.

Here are some suggestions for managing cadets who socialize, distract, arrive late, sleep or become preoccupied during classroom instruction.

SOCIALIZERS

Socializers engage in side conversations during classroom presentations. Their conversations may, or may not, be relevant to the topic. This could lead to problems, as socializers may distract others from learning. You cannot allow these little pockets of conversation in the classroom.

A common mistake in dealing with this problem is to single out and embarrass these cadets.

Subtle techniques, such as switching to group activities or changing group membership, may lessen side conversations.

Posing a question to either the socializer, or to a member of the monopolized side group, may help. If subtle techniques do not work, seek a private conversation with the cadet.

DISTRACTORS

Distractors ask questions to lead you away from a lesson topic. They often interrupt directions. They are easily distracted and seldom focus on the lesson. You and other cadets may become irritated with these cadets. These cadets crave attention and may suffer from a lack of self-esteem, or find classroom instruction difficult.

Don't take this behaviour personally. Don't ignore the behaviour, but don't give it too much public time

and attention either because this reinforces the behaviour.

The best thing to do is discuss the behaviour privately with the cadet, emphasizing appropriate and expected behaviours. You may even want to develop a 'work contract' to hold the cadet to any decisions made during private discussion.

Assigning some physical tasks to these cadets in the classroom as part of the lesson (such as distributing handouts) may give them the break they need to stay focussed.

It also helps to stand close to these cadets when giving instructions, make frequent eye contact and give positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviour.

Sleepers may be insecure about their academic abilities or may just be in need of rest. Inadequate sleep may be the result of the cadet's actions, or a physical problem that needs to be addressed.

LATE ARRIVALS

These cadets come late, or return to class late after breaks. They may be one-time offenders, or chronic offenders. If allowed to go unchecked, their behaviour may affect the entire class.

These cadets may be seeking attention or lacking in self-confidence. They may feel insecure, or be indecisive.



Interrupting a lesson in progress to discipline these cadets is a mistake and may cause greater disruption. Belittling or shaming these cadets will create an uncomfortable atmosphere in the classroom and will garner disrespect. It may also cause the cadet to continue being late out of spite.

A good way to deal with this problem is to ensure that cadets are aware of timings. Make punctuality a classroom rule.

If it is a one-time situation, find out the cause and carry on with the class.

If it is chronic, find out the cause, advise that a recurrence is not acceptable and deal with the situation to the best of your ability. Start every lesson as though you expect the cadet to arrive. Place hand-outs on the cadet's desk to minimize disruption when they do arrive. Don't stop the lesson. Wait for an opportunity in the lesson, such as during group work, to talk privately to these cadets. Remind the cadets of their responsibilities.

SLEEPERS

Cadets may doze off or actually fall asleep during lessons. They may hide behind books or daydream. When awake, they may display a lack of interest and look bored. This causes problems for the classroom, distracting other cadets who may view the cadet negatively. This behaviour undermines the importance of whatever you planned for the lesson.

Sleepers may be insecure about their academic abilities or may just be in need of rest. Inadequate sleep may



be the result of the cadet's actions, or a physical problem that needs to be addressed.

Don't allow this behaviour to continue; however, don't disrupt the class, or embarrass the cadet. Sleeping in class cannot be treated as a straight discipline problem. Discover why the cadet is sleeping.

Make [preoccupied cadets] aware of the impact of their actions on the rest of the class. Confront their reservations and allow them to express themselves and get the problem off their chest.

As inconspicuously as possible, waken the cadet. Privately discuss the problem at the break or end of class and try to discover why this is occurring.

Also, consider that there may be a problem with the lesson or how it is being given. Varying your voice pattern by changing volume, rate, tone or pitch may help. Change activities or adjust seating arrangements. This could be your cue that you have not varied your activities and instructional styles enough.

If only one cadet has the problem, try seating the individual near a window, or give the cadet physical classroom duties to complete.

PREOCCUPIED CADETS

Preoccupied cadets are not focussed on learning. They may not respond to questions, may not participate, may have facial reactions when spoken to, may doodle in class, write letters, or read books and other material during class. Instructors should react as quickly as possible to these cadets to regain their focus.

Again, don't take this behaviour personally and be careful not to ignore it.

Enlist the leadership support of these cadets in activities. Although it may be frustrating at times, give them opportunities to become involved in the class.

A private discussion with these cadets may be effective. Make them aware of the impact of their actions on the rest of the class. Confront their reservations and allow them to express themselves and get the problem off their chest.

Adapted from the CIC occupational training course that will be delivered to CIC officers in the future.

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If you respond quickly to problem behaviours in your classroom, you will create a positive environment where cadets will enjoy learning.