

# Four Agreements for the Classroom

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When Miguel Ruiz wrote the **FOUR AGREEMENTS**, he once again brought the importance of forming agreements with ourselves to the forefront. As the school year begins across the U.S., educators and students alike are contemplating the upcoming school year. Fall is often a time of reflection and reorganizing our lives after the hustle

and bustle of a summer of adventure and vacation.

In successful classrooms, teachers and students are members of a team. Individually and collectively, they ask and answer three basic questions during the team-forming process: “Who am I?” “Who are you?” and finally, “Who are we?” In answering these questions, in building classroom agreements, teachers and students build a firm foundation for the upcoming school year. I believe that the most effective agreements are formed at the principles level of life. This is the level that answers the question, “Who do I want to be?” It is not the level that answers, “What am I going to do?” It is the level of opportunity, not obligation. It is the level at which I shift from thinking, “I have to do such and such.” to “This is an opportunity to be the mother, daughter, educator, I want to be.”

The four agreements that form the foundation for the school year are personal, social, role and goal agreements. The teacher and every student in a class must have a personal agreement that answers the question, “Who do I want to BE?” As they answer that question, they need to remember that they can’t possibly be everything. They need to limit their lists to three to five principles they want to use to measure their success. For example, my top three BEs are wise, generous, and spiritual. The list is used to self-evaluate who a person is being. The number one life skill is self-evaluation, and responsible self-evaluation measures how being aligns with agreements with self and involves evaluating what is within a person’s control. On a regular basis, a person needs to ask, “What did I do today to live my principles?”

The second of the agreements, the social agreement, answers the question, “Who do we want to be when we are together?” After we have each developed a personal agreement, after we are each clear on how we want to BE, then collectively we need to come to consensus on how we want to treat each other. To form a social agreement, we all must have a sense of connection to everyone else in the group, and there must be a modicum of trust amongs group members. In a school, social agreements may typically be summarized as, “We want to be learning, be respectful, be responsible and be safe.”

The third type of agreement, the role agreement, answers the question, “What is my role in getting us where we want to go?” In our family car, whoever sits in the shotgun seat (front seat, passenger side) plays the role of navigator. This has been our long-standing family agreement. In a classroom, it is best if all the adults and students involved in the room are present during role negotiation. The process of

discussion and compromise used in determining roles lays the groundwork for a successful school year during which many hazards and obstacles are avoided. Role clarification allows students to know what to expect and helps develop a safe-risk environment.

Goal agreements, the fourth and final kind of agreements, infuse district and state standards with students' needs for relevance. To develop meaning and relevance in content learning, and to enhance students' commitment to learning, teachers and students together develop essential questions for each of the major units of study and for the year. All learning is personal and constructivist by nature, and essential questions, if they are thoughtfully developed, encourage personal engagement with content. Students who are engaged and challenged, students who see real value in what they are learning, are more interested in learning and create fewer distractions in the classroom. Student goal setting moves easily toward student led conferencing.

When these four agreements are included in the beginning of the school year, processes then creating rituals and routines that highlight these agreements becomes the basis of effective task and relationship management in the classroom. Agreements take the guesswork out of expectations; they make what for many is implicit, explicit.