

## **Managing a Noisy Class: Gandhigiri at Works**

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### **Managing a Noisy Class**

The faculty in Management schools faces many problems in handling classes. It could either be the atmosphere in the institution, or the discipline prevailing in the institute, or the quality of the students, and also the demographic profile of the students, etc. One of the major problems faced by them is the interference in their thought processes because of noise, created by the students, when they tend to talk to each other during the sessions. This is more so when there are about sixty students in the class the faculty finds it difficult to synchronize the thought process when dealing with a subject.

### **The Problem**

I would like to share one of my experiences in this article. In one of the Institutes of management, the BBA (Bachelor of business administration) classes would normally be noisy. This is not to point out to any specific institute, but in general the faculties who have been taking BBA classes in Indian Business schools know this. In particular some of the areas where the institute is situated, there would be many students from the business community coming there solely for the purpose of getting a more prestigious Bachelor Degree rather than settling down for some B.A. or B.Sc. course, which are more basic in nature.

It has been a problem for the faculty in that institute to manage the class when most of the students keep chatting even when the class is in progress. The faculty would find the student concentration to be almost lacking. As a visiting faculty I was given a course to this BBA batch. I have been mainly teaching MBA (Master of business administration) courses and for me also this was a new experience to control a class which is talkative and quite noisy

Initially I was at a loss to understand how should I go about. I started trying out various methods to bring in calm one by one. My initial response was to request the students to be calm and help me explain the importance of classroom teaching to convince them that they should concentrate on the lecture. There were not many takers for this suggestion. Since the class was having strength of sixty, my request went unheeded. The next thing that I tried was to use a threat. I sent the students (who were found talking) out of the classes and marked them absent. Even then it did not help, since I could not send a majority of the students out of the classes.

### **Gandhian Solution**

Then I thought of Mahatma Gandhi's principles, recently brought for well by the recent film starring Sanjay Dutt, which is 'the principle of Gandhigiri.' I decided that the silence in the class can be brought about with my silence. After all noise, can be silenced by the opposite, 'the silence.'

Whenever I found noise in the class, even in case if only two students talking, I stopped my lecture and announced that I would not proceed further unless I see a totally noise free class when I could hear a pin drop. This, of course, was too much to expect. But I started doing the same. Whenever I heard two or a group of students talking amongst themselves, I stopped. And I waited till the class became absolutely noise free. This went on for quite a few classes when I used to stop for about 10 to 20 minutes to restore order. Still my dream of a Pin drop silence classes was far from achievable. In one class, I decided to try the extreme. In a two hour class, I was silent for an hour! This started the surprise action from students. From the next class, I had pin drop silence. Many of the faculties wondered about the 'silent' class that I was taking. But I had known that this 'Gandhigiri' was doing the miracle. Next time you are in a class which is talkative, do try this out. It really works.

(Note: The method tried by the author is quite effective. I have been using it for several years in India as well as in the USA. My rule is: Either you talk or I talk- and let the student make that decision! – Editor)