

James: A True Story

**A sixth grade class, laden with
twenty students identified as behavior problems,
was the first to test
Student Adopted Consensus Personal Goals**

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Writer's Note

After serving five years as a Teacher Advisor for Reading, Language Arts, and Classroom Management in thirty South Los Angeles elementary schools, I decided to return to classroom teaching. Across the region, too little progress was being made in reducing the numbers of students achieving below grade level. Many students were being bullied and punished. A new system was needed to improve student achievement while reducing their bullying and punishment.

The region's School Administrators had discussed using W. Edwards Deming's theory of Total Quality Management¹ (TQM), to empower teachers and parents to work in teams to improve school effectiveness. Research showed that TQM helped large corporations like Xerox and Toyota to improve the success of their businesses by empowering workers to work as teams to set goals for improving the quality and quantity of their product output, and evaluate their team progress.

A TQM replaces top down management with workers accepting ownership of their abilities to improve their work methods and outputs. In a TQM workplace, workers develop consensus goals for their work, and the quality of their output, and then work as a team to achieve their consensus goals.

Would TQM work with elementary school students? I decided to return to teaching to find out if student teamwork could reduce bullying and punishment, and narrow the Achievement Gap².

To improve the behavior and achievement of under-performing children, two things are needed:

- 1. We must change the way we view them.*
- 2. They must change the way they view themselves, and their peers.*

My Principal's Welcome

When we first met, my Principal's greeting surprised me: "Steve, I had to decide whether to do something good for you, or good for the school. I decided to put all our sixth grade behavior problems in your class. You can handle them. My other teachers can't."

"How many behavior problems would that be?" I asked.

"There are about twenty," he said. "Let me know if you need any help with them."

I had intended to tell him that I planned to test Deming's Theory of Total Quality Management with my class – having them set up and work toward consensus goals, but wondered if attempting that test with twenty identified behavior problems was a setting us up for failure.

Thinking that the Principal must have been joking, I asked the Office Manager if I could review my students' records.

The student Cumulative Records showed that twenty of them had repeatedly received unsatisfactory evaluations of their behavior and academics from grades K – 5, and their teachers' comments weren't flattering: "Needs to learn to work with peers. Needs to keep his hands to himself. Needs to raise her hand. Needs to be willing to share space and materials. Needs to solve problems in a friendly way. Needs to not tell others what to do. Needs to keep trying instead of giving up when work is challenging."

I wondered if this class could work as a team to achieve consensus goals?

Day One With My Class

I was making final preparations in the classroom, before the morning bell on the first day of school, when I heard a tremendous roar come from the schoolyard. It sounded like a crowd in a baseball stadium responding to a runner being tagged out at home plate. I'd never heard a sound like that in an elementary school! When the roar subsided, I heard two adults yelling: "Line Up! Line up! Line up!"

I immediately left the classroom to see if I could help, bringing the sign I had prepared so that my students would know where to meet me.

Mr. Bell Room 22 Grade 6

All the children on the schoolyard were in an immense silent circle, looking toward the center. No one was speaking or moving. Had there been a fight? Was someone lying injured at the circle's center? I had never seen a circle that massive, or that silent, on a schoolyard.

I held up my sign, a short distance away from the circle, hoping that some of my students would see it. In a couple of minutes, thirteen kids were standing in two lines in front of me. They had looks of shock and fear on their faces. Some were trembling.

I said "hello" to each of them, as they arrived, but not one of them returned my greeting. They didn't even greet each other. Like the students in the circle they had left, they remained silent.

The only sound that could be heard on the

yard was coming from two adults who were still yelling, urging the children in the circle to line up. The children weren't moving.

The shell-shocked looks on my students' faces, made it seem important to get them off the yard as quickly as possible, so I asked the students at the front of their lines to lead us to the classroom.

"But everyone isn't here yet!" A boy with great concern in his voice, protested.

Immediately I thought, "He can't be one of the behavior problems. He's thoughtful." His protest was the most positive thing that could have been said at that moment, but leaving the trauma on the yard still seemed the best thing to do.

No students were coming toward our lines, so I said, "The others will know where our classroom is. They can meet us there. Let's go."

Thirteen somber sixth graders followed their line leaders to the classroom building, up the stairs, and to our classroom door. Before I opened the door I said, "You'll find your name card on the desk where you'll sit. A pencil and half sheet of paper are there for you to use to answer the question on the board."

The question written on the board was:

*What can you do, to enjoy school,
to learn as much as you can,
to make and keep as many friends
as possible, and to keep yourself safe?*

Please use "I will . . ." sentences to answer this question.

After finding their seats, only two students picked up a pencil. The rest just

sat idly, looking at me or into thin air as if in a stupor. One boy remained standing behind a desk in the last row.

"Did you not find your name card?" I asked.

With surprising force in his voice, he said, **"I found it, but I won't sit here!"**

Everyone turned to look at him. "What's wrong with that desk Michael?" I asked.

Pointing at the desk next to the one where he was standing, Michael said, "James' name is on that desk! He's a bully. He's a gang member. I won't sit next to him!"

"Oh no!" someone shouted. Other students groaned.

I offered Michael another desk.

A girl sounding motherly said, "You don't know who James is, do you?" Students quickly raised their hands.

"James was in that fight with a teacher on the yard this morning!"

"He knocked the teacher out!"

"No, he didn't knock the teacher out! He just knocked the teacher down!"

"His family is in a gang! One of his brothers is dead! His father's in jail! One of his brothers is in jail too!"

"He'll fight with anyone, even you! Does he have to be in this class? If he's in this class, I don't want to be in it!"

Heads were nodding agreement. Then everyone fell silent, looking for my response.

The roar on the yard, the looks of shock and fear that I had seen on their faces, their trembling in line, now made sense. "Thanks for all that information," I said.

Looking dissatisfied, wanting me to say something that showed an understanding of their horror, the class remained silent. I wondered what I could say, but I really didn't understand, because I had not had to attend school with James. I just wanted to say something that would help them move beyond what they had seen on the yard, something that would get our school day underway.

"If what you have told me is true, James won't be coming to class today. He may never come to our class. Let's try not to worry about James right now. Let's move on with what we need to do."

It amazed me that the tenseness in their faces seemed to relax a little. Perhaps they liked the idea that James might not ever come to our class, but I had said that, not because I believed it, but in the hope that they could stop thinking about James.

I asked Michael if he would read the question on the board, and then asked two other students to read it. "Please raise your hand if you understand the question," I asked the class.

Everyone's hand was raised.

"Good. Now please put a couple of 'I will' answers on your half sheet of paper. When you're done, put your paper and pencil at the top corner of your desk, so I'll know you are done."

Only a few students picked up pencils and got to work. Most sat idly, still in too much shock to concentrate. I didn't push them to get to work.

During the next few minutes, I greeted students who straggled into the room one at a time. I walked around the classroom to personally meet and shake hands with each student who was seated. Many of those children had faces with faraway looks. Some shook my hand without looking at me.

When the few working students had placed their papers and pencils at the top corners of their desks, I asked if someone would like to share one of their answers. Surprisingly, almost all of them raised their hands, even those who hadn't written anything.

As I wrote their answers on the board, students began to say things like: "That answer's like the second one that's already on the board!"

"You could add that to number four!"

So we combined or expanded the 'I will' statements recorded on the board, as the class deemed appropriate. (Instead of saying, "that answer is already on the board," I placed check marks in front of answers that were already recorded, as students offered their answers.)

When we had ten statements recorded on the board, I began to ask students to explain what each statement would mean to them, if they were on the playground, in the cafeteria, in the classroom, or in the restroom. I asked them to discuss which of the "I will" statements would apply, if someone asked for a favor, like to borrow a pencil, or if someone bumped into them. Most students had things to say; even students who had been identified as "discipline problems" participated. Our day was underway. The morning yard incident seemed to be behind us.

When it was time for recess, we had fifteen 'I will' statements on the board. I told the class that they would vote for their five favorite statements when they returned from recess. I explained that the five statements with the most votes would become their "Personal Goals" for the year.

Then, I told them that their goals would take the place of class rules. Some of their eyes opened widely, with looks of having questions or disbelief about that.

"We're not going to have rules!" Amber exclaimed.

"We'll talk about that after your vote, when your Personal Goals have been chosen," I said.

When the class returned from recess, they wanted to talk before voting. David said, "I don't want to vote for just five. I like them all!"

"Can we have more than five?" April asked.

"We'll start with five Personal Goals, because you'll have to memorize and remember them. We can add goals after a couple of weeks, if you believe more are needed." I said. The class seemed satisfied.

When their votes were tabulated, the statements with the most votes were numbered, and given the following heading: "My Personal Goals"

My Personal Goals

To be proud of myself, and my class, I will:

1. Respect all people and their property.
2. Keep my hands and my feet to myself.
3. Follow my teacher's directions.
4. Leave gum, candy and toys at home.
5. Always try to do my best."

My students copied their Personal Goals from the board, as I charted the goals for posting on the wall next to the Flag.

The class chorally recited their goals, and I told them that they would recite their Personal Goals like that, each day after the Flag Salute.

Students raised their hands again. They didn't think that five goals were enough. Karen said, "Those goals are good, but we really need more!"

"Yes," Amber added. "What about raising your hand before you speak? That's really important, but it isn't up there!"

"Doesn't number one cover that?" Michael asked.

"How does the first goal cover that?" David asked.

"Respecting all people means we don't butt in when they are talking. We take turns. We raise our hand." Michael said.

"O.K., I see that," Amber agreed. "We respect the teacher, so we don't interrupt when the teacher is talking. We raise our hand for permission to speak."

"Those look like rules!" Malik declared.
"Those are rules, aren't they?"

All the students were listening attentively. Their seriousness about their newly stated goals was a bit surprising. It didn't sound like it was coming from students with serious behavior issues.

"Malik, there's a difference between goals and rules." I said. "Rules are what someone *tells* you to do. Rules are like laws that you must obey, but goals are things that you say you want to do."

"You said we aren't going to have rules. Why aren't we going to have rules?" Monique asked. "We need rules!" Everyone was quiet, waiting for the answer.

"Is there was a rule, that you believe you need, that would not be covered by one of your goals?" I asked.

Several students raised their hands. "Keeping our hands and feet to ourselves *is* a rule. It's always been a rule. We aren't supposed to *want* to keep our hands and feet to ourselves, we're supposed to do it! ***It's a law, not a goal!***" David asserted.

"David's right!" Malik said.

Monique raised her hand. "We get punished if we break a rule. If we put our hands on someone we get punished. What happens if we break that goal? If we don't keep our hands and our feet to ourselves, do we get punished?"

"Right Mr. Bell! If someone kicks me, what's going to happen to them?" Karen asked.

"If someone does that, Karen," I replied, "it probably won't be someone in this class, because everyone agreed that they would do their best to achieve that goal. It's a goal you will work to achieve every day, because you voted to do it, but sometimes, by accident, you might bump into someone. You might touch someone when they don't expect it. That's when you'll discuss your goal with them, and make sure that no one misunderstands what happened."

"But if someone hits or kicks you, whether they are in this class or not, something will happen to them. You will tell me about it and I'll help you. Whoever they are, they will have to do something to fix the problem they created by kicking you. They are going to have to promise to never do that again. We're not going to permit anyone to hurt anyone else."

Mark, one of the students identified as having behavior issues, spoke for the first time. "What if someone wants to fight with us, Mr. Bell? What are we supposed to do?"

"We're not going to let anyone bother or hurt you, Mark. If someone wants to fight with Mark, what should he do?" I asked.

Amber raised her hand. "If someone wants to fight, we should say, 'Why do you want to fight? I don't want to fight.' Then you just walk away. You don't have to fight just because someone wants to. Just walk away!"

"That's what I do." David responded. "I just say that I'm not going to fight, and I walk away. Fighting is stupid. I won't play with anyone who wants to fight. They can have the ball if they want it. I won't play with them."

"This is all fine and good," Karen responded, "but what about someone like James? He's a bully. He's a gang member. He's mean. If he wants to hit you, or take your stuff, he'll do it. Rules don't mean anything to him. The Personal Goals won't mean anything to him. What are you going to do about that, Mr. Bell?"

"You're right, Karen. That's a problem, but James isn't here, and we don't know if he'll ever be here. You chose your goals, and you're going to work to achieve them. If someone gives you a problem with that, if someone wants to bother you, you'll do what you can to avoid the problem, and you'll let me know about it. It's my job to be sure you are safe to work on your goals. That's what I'm going to do."

"If following your goals and walking away doesn't work, if you are attacked, and no one is there to help you, you'll do what you need to do to protect yourself, but you'll let me know what happened and I'll help you."

"I'll ask the person who is bothering you to decide what he or she will do to fix the problem between you. There is always a way to fix a problem. That's what we are going to do – fix problems."

"If the person bothering you is in another class, or even another school, they can be found. I will talk to them, or I'll talk to their Principal. They will have to answer for what they did."

Karen seemed satisfied. The class was silent. No more hands were raised.

"Tomorrow, you'll take home a letter about your Personal Goals, so that the people at home will know about your goals. The letter will ask them to help you

remember your goals. It will ask them to ask you how you are doing with your goals."

"Are we supposed to work on our goals at home?" Kevin asked.

"Is there a goal that won't help you at home?" I asked.

Kevin didn't answer. Ann raised her hand. "If you change parent for teacher in number three, it works for home too."

I waited.

Michael raised his hand. "That's a good idea, Ann. We can change teacher's directions to adult's directions and number three works anywhere."

"You have good ideas about these goals," I said, "but we don't have to change the words for you do the right thing. Let's continue to think about whether your goals can help you outside of school, and we'll talk about that tomorrow."

"For homework, I'd like you to practice writing your goals. On Friday, we'll have a spelling dictation test on your goals. I read your goals, and you'll write them to see how many of the words you can spell."

A sheet of paper was passed out for copying their goals at home. Our conversation to develop and discuss the goals, had taken us nearly to lunch, so we began a Math assessment before lunch and completed it after.

There were no incidents on the yard at lunch. After completing the Math assessment we returned to the yard for Physical Education.

The first day of school ended without a behavior incident in our classroom, or on the yard, except for James that morning. Given the behavioral reputation of the nineteen identified behavior problem students in class that day, it seemed that a problem free day was a miracle, but students typically are “on their best behavior,” the first day of school.

The Principal’s Office was my first stop, after class dismissal. I wanted to know what had happened with James.

“James was suspended for two weeks,” the Principal said. “You won’t have to worry about him until he returns. If he gives you a problem, let me know, and I’ll deal with him.”

“Did he fight with a teacher?” I asked.

“He hit a teacher, but the teacher is o.k.,” the Principal said, turning away to look at papers on his desk.

It seemed that he didn’t want to discuss James, so I left his office. I would not mention to the class that James was returning in two weeks.

Day Two

My students began their second day in class by reciting the Flag Salute, and then their Personal Goals. As promised, we discussed whether the goals would be useful outside of school.

“I think the goals will be just fine at home. We don’t need to change any of the words.” Amber said. No one else had anything to say.

“Please raise your hand if you think your goals will work for you at home?” I asked. Everyone raised a hand.

“Raise your hand if you think your goals will be good on your way to and from school?” Again, all hands were raised.

“That’s good.” Monique said. “But what we are supposed to do if someone is waiting to fight with us after school?”

Amber responded. “We said we would say we don’t want to fight, and we will walk away.”

“That won’t work!” Michael said. “Try telling that to someone like James! You are just going to get beat up!”

“What do we do about that, Mr. Bell?” Malik asked.

“Like I said yesterday, you’ll try to follow your goals. You’ll say you don’t want to fight and you’ll walk away. If you are attacked, you’ll try to defend yourself, but you’ll let me know about it the next day. I’ll find the person, and we’ll deal with it.”

“No one will be waiting after school to fight with you,” I continued, “unless something already happened in school. If something happens in school, you’ll let me know, so we can get that problem settled before you go home. If it’s a person in another school, I’ll call their Principal, and we’ll deal with it that way.”

Monique asked, “Are you saying you’ll do that if someone at home threatens us?”

“If you have a problem away from school, you can tell me about it, and I’ll help you. Helping you might mean talking to someone. Just tell me about the problem,

but please don't tell anyone that you are going to tell me. Remember your first goal. Respecting other people means you don't threaten them."

I paused. No hands were raised. "Today, you'll take home a letter about your goals. The letter will explain why you have these goals. The letter says that if they have questions about your goals, they can call, or come to see me about it. We want everyone to be comfortable with your goals."

Our discussion of the Personal Goals ended within ten minutes, and we had a normal school day. The students had agreed that they would work on their Personal Goals wherever they were.

Before leaving the classroom for recess, and lunch, I asked the students to remember their goals. When they returned from recess and lunch, I asked if they had any problems on the yard. No one raised a hand.

Before dismissal, I asked if anyone would like to commend someone for the way they followed their goals that day. The students seemed surprised by the question. No one responded.

Before dismissal on Wednesday, I again asked if anyone would like to commend someone for the way they were working on their goals. Aaron commended Malik.

"I bumped into Malik by accident in the Cafeteria. He dropped his tray. I told him I was sorry and helped him pick up his food. He didn't get mad. He followed his goals. We went to get him another tray."

"Aaron followed his goals too," Malik said.

"What goals did Malik follow, Aaron?" I asked.

"The last goal. He did his best. He didn't get angry. He picked up the stuff that fell on the floor. He didn't get mad at me for bumping into him. He followed the second goal. He kept his hands and feet to himself."

"What goal did you follow, Aaron?" I asked.

Aaron didn't answer. David raised his hand. "He followed the first goal - 'I will respect all people and their property.' Aaron respected that the lunch was Malik's property. His lunch was messed up. Aaron helped him pick it up and get a new lunch. That's respect." The other students were smiling.

On the days that followed, students seemed proud to be using Personal Goals to describe each other's behavior. Things were going well. In four days we had no behavior problems, but James had not yet returned.

On Friday some students had difficulty completing their spelling dictation, but by the end of the second week all students were able to write their Personal Goals from dictation without errors. This was surprising, because many of the students' reading and writing skills were markedly below grade level.

The first two weeks of school ended without a single student having a behavior issue. None of the students' "needs" documented in the cumulative records had been exhibited. No one brought me a problem from the yard or from outside of school.

No parent had called to discuss the letter, the goals, or anything else. This was astounding, given what the Principal had said about these students.

Week Three – James Returns

On Monday morning of the third week of school, what appeared to be an adult male was standing a few feet behind the class lines when I arrived on the yard. He was stocky, nearly six feet tall, and no one was speaking to him.

My students, in line, were not moving, or speaking to each other. As I got closer, I noticed the same look of shock and fright that I'd seen on the first Monday, on the children's faces.

Walking to the end of the lines, I said, "Hello James." He was looking away, and looked out of the corner of his eye at me, without turning his head. He didn't speak.

When we arrived in the classroom, James found his name on his two-person table desk. Everyone remained standing for the Flag Salute.

After the class recited the Pledge of Allegiance, they recited their Personal Goals more loudly and forcefully than usual, as if to make a point.

When they were seated I said, "Boys and girls, let's welcome James." The class remained silent. "Let's say hello." I insisted.

Students rolled their eyes as they said, "H e l l o J a m e s!" in a long drawl, with a tone of reluctance.

The class began writing an answer to the question written on the board: "*How have your Personal Goals helped you?*"

While the class was working on an answer to that question, I asked James to copy the Personal Goals from the wall chart. He complied.

When the class finished writing, some students read their answers: Malik reminded us about what had happened in the Cafeteria when Aaron bumped into him. Jason told us that his goals had helped him stay out of trouble.

Ann said that she thought she was doing her best most of the time, because of her goals.

While I taught Math to one group, James worked on a Math skills assessment. Before recess, I approached his desk to ask if he would stay in the room, for a few minutes, so we could talk. I said that I wanted to explain the five Personal Goals to him. Looking at me through the corner of his eye, he nodded (yes).

When the class lined up to go to recess, I explained that I would not be going with them to the yard, but would be staying with James so that we could have a talk about the Personal Goals.

Students looked at me disapprovingly, some with their mouths agape.

"Are you sure you want to do that, Mr. Bell?" Amber asked.

"I'll see you on the yard after recess. Remember your Goals." I replied.

Looking like they didn't expect to see me again, the class filed out of the classroom. Their objections were appropriate. Remaining alone with one student in a classroom would be inappropriate, even if that student wasn't James.

With both classroom doors propped open, I asked James if he would join me at a table near the front of the room. He refused. "You can sit here!" (at his desk) I chose not to argue about that.

I turned a chair around, from the desk in front of his, and placed it at the side of his two-person desk, next to the empty space beside him. I told him that I was glad he was back in school, and that we had missed him during those two weeks.

James again looked at me through the corner of his eye, this time with his lips curled in an expression of skeptical disbelief.

"Would you like to tell me what happened on the yard that first day of school?" I asked.

James shook his head (no). I didn't ask again.

"I don't want you to be suspended again, James, so I'd like to make you an offer." (He looked straight ahead, not at me.)

"If anyone bothers you, if you think that someone is going to give you a problem, whether they are a student or an adult, I'd like you to let me know about it, so that I can take care of it for you. Then you won't have to get into trouble, and be suspended again."

James turned to look directly at me, and forcefully said, "**I don't need your help. I can take care of myself.**" He turned to the front of the room, again, a look of anger in his eyes.

"I know you can take care of yourself, James," I said. "Everyone knows you can take care of yourself, but if you have a problem with an adult or a student and take care of it yourself, what's going to happen?"

"I might get suspended again, but I don't care about that!" He declared.

"I care, James. I'd like you to be in school, not suspended again. Will you let me handle any problems you might have, so that you can stay in school?"

"I told you no!" James said, moving as if he intended to get up from his chair.

This effort to make an agreement with him, was failing. If he attempted to leave, I could not stop him.

Hoping that he wouldn't get up, and succeed in being defiant, I asked, "Would you like to go out to recess, James?"

"Yes!" he said, looking surprised, his anger replaced by an expression of happy confidence, like he had won.

"I'd like to know that you'll be coming back, James. Can we have a deal? If we have a deal, you can go."

He didn't stand up, but looked at me and said, "O.K. Deal!"

I extended my hand for him to shake, and he shook it. "Let's keep this deal, James,

so you can come back from the yard, and not get suspended again.”

He stood up to leave. I didn’t know if he meant what he had said. He walked to the doorway and stopped. “You said you were going to explain the Personal Goals to me.”

“I don’t need to explain them to you, James. The kids can explain them to you. Go on outside. I’ll see you after recess.” He turned and left.

I met the class on the yard after recess. Again, James was standing at the end of the line, but this time just an arm’s length behind the person in front of him. No one was speaking, but none of the students had a look of distress on their faces.

The rest of that day and the next day proceeded without incident. We recited the Personal Goals in the morning, and I asked if anyone had any problems at recess or lunch. No one did.

At the end of each day, I asked if anyone wished to complement someone for the way they followed their goals. No one had anything to say.

On Wednesday, James’ third day in class, he asked if he could stay in at recess, to talk with me. I agreed.

When the class left, he asked if I could use a film projector, a tape recorder, a map, a globe, or a set of encyclopedias.

“You have things like that?” I asked.

“We have a garage full of those things.” James replied.

“And your family is o.k. with you giving those things to me?”

“They’d be happy to get rid of them.”

“Well, if I can’t use something, would it be o.k. if I gave it to another teacher to use?” James shook his head (yes).

The next day, before the morning bell, James and his older brother came to the classroom carrying a film projector and screen. I thanked them, and James’ older brother asked if I’d like more.

When they left, I noticed that each item was marked with the name of the school from which it had been taken. During lunch, I asked the Principal if he would allow the Plant Manager to receive and return the equipment to the schools where they belonged, without saying anything about it to School Police. He agreed.

James and his brother continued to bring school equipment to my room each morning before school, each of the remaining days that week.

James’ first and second week back at school ended without James or anyone else causing a behavior problem in class, on the schoolyard, or outside of school. Neither James, nor any other student asked for assistance in dealing with a problem. It seemed as though they were having no problems.

On Wednesday of my fifth week with the class, my Principal told me that the Region Superintendent wanted me to give him a call. When I called, he said that a request was made for me to fill a consultant’s job in the District Office.

I thanked the Superintendent, told him that I appreciated the offer, but my students and I had bonded. I explained how twenty of them had records of serious behavior problems, but that none of them were exhibiting any of those problems now. I said that I thought it was important to follow through with these students.

The Superintendent's response shocked me. "I thought you wanted a career! You can stay with your students, but if you turn down this offer, there's no assurance that you'll get another one. Think about it, and get back to me in a day or two."

A prior boss and mentor said, "We know how important those students are. You have to decide which opportunity you are going to pass up."

My Principal showed no surprise, when I discussed the job offer with him. "I can't help you with that. You'll have to decide what you're going to do." He said.

Feeling awful, I called a friend, Janet, who I had worked with at the Region Office, explained the situation, and asked if she'd help me prepare a "good-bye party" for my students the following Friday. "What should I bring?" She asked.

The following Friday, the end of my sixth week with the class, Janet and I decorated the classroom with balloons and streamers during the lunch period.

At the end of lunch, when I opened the door for the class, and they saw the decorations, one of them asked, "Why are we having a party, Mr. Bell?"

When I told them the reason, their excitement turned to disappointment. In

the hallway I explained how everyone has a boss, and that we must do what our boss asks us to do.

When I invited them to enter the classroom, they didn't move. They stood motionless in the hallway.

"You're all going to graduate the sixth grade, and go to Junior High. I'll come to see you graduate. I'll come to congratulate you. Let's celebrate that now. Let's have some ice cream to celebrate that. I need some helpers. Who'd like to help?" Nearly everyone's hand went up.

Plates and napkins were already on each student's desk, so students distributed ice cream and cake. We played music and danced.

When it was near the time for dismissal, monitors cleaned up the classroom. I said that I'd like to shake everyone's hand at the dismissal gate, before they left.

Janet accompanied us to the dismissal gate, where I shook the line leaders hands, and said good-bye. From the back of the line, James shouted, "**S T O P !**"

Everyone turned to look at James. "Let's say our Personal Goals, one more time, for Mr. Bell!" He suggested.

Immediately, the class began chanting their Personal Goals. They recited their goals so loudly, other classes stopped moving toward the dismissal gate to listen.

Janet leaned over and said into my ear, "I've got to go! I can't take this!"

I grabbed her hand and said, "I need you!"

As Janet and I stood holding hands, listening to my students shout their Personal Goals, a teacher came over and asked, "What's wrong? Did someone die?"

Holding back tears, I said, "Yes, me."

When the class finished shouting their Personal Goals, I told them that I was proud of them, and proud of what they had accomplished with their Goals. We shook hands, hugged, and said good-bye.

Afterword

Yale's Infant Cognition Center research on infant morality³ proved that young people prefer good over bad, right over wrong, and fair over unfair, and that they will make highly appropriate choices when given the opportunity, regardless of race or economic class. James and his sixth grade classmates proved that Yale's research findings were valid beyond Yale, and beyond infancy.

W. Edwards Deming showed that workers didn't need traditional management controls and evaluations, but when respected with the opportunity to set consensus goals and evaluate themselves, they would improve the quality and quantity of their work, and their manner of working together. Deming insisted that typical workers aren't lazy, or selfish, but understand each other's needs and would do what needed to be done for each other's good and for the good of their company. James and his classmates proved that what Deming thought corporate workers could do was true of school kids as well.

A six week test of the impact of students' consensus personal goals on student behavior and achievement may be insufficient to draw convincing conclusions, but years later, a nine-year test of an elementary school student body's consensus personal goals, duplicated the results seen in James' story. A description of that student body test of students consensus personal goals, can be found in Kevin's Story:

<https://www.facebook.com/4SuccessInSchools>

Notes

¹ William Edwards Deming (1900-1993) is widely acknowledged as the leading management thinker in the field of quality. He was a statistician and business consultant whose methods helped hasten Japan's recovery after the Second World War and beyond. He developed a philosophy and method that allowed individuals and organizations to continually improve themselves, their relationships, processes, products and services. His philosophy is one of cooperation and continual improvement, avoiding blame and redefining mistakes as opportunities for improvement.
<https://www.bl.uk/people/w-edwards-deming>

² National Center for Educational Statistics, Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2017, pgs. 46-47, 50-51, 68-70, 108-117,
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017051.pdf>

³ In 1990, Yale's Infant Cognition Center began to research what babies know about good and bad, and what they prefer in the behavior of people around them. An extensive listing of their current projects, and of media reports about their work can be found at:
<http://campuspress.yale.edu/infantlab/>

A thirteen-minute 60 Minutes report on the Infant Cognition Center's findings with regard to infant morality, "The Baby Lab," can be seen at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRvVFW85IcU&feature=youtu.be>