

Miracle question

Here's a strategy I just heard about from the book Reset, which I recently devoured. I've had some initial success with it, so I thought I would share the strategy with you!

The strategy is called the **miracle question**. Here's how it works:

You've got a problem you're grappling with. Imagine that a miracle occurs and your solution is solved. Like: You go to sleep with this problem, the problem is solved while you're asleep, and when you awake the problem is gone. However, since you were sleeping while the miracle occurred, you don't instantly know that the problem is gone. *What will cause you to realize your problem has been solved?* What would happen to indicate that the problem is no longer there. What would you see, or hear, or experience to tip you off?

For example: Let's imagine that your fifth period class is completely out of control. You've been fighting that battle every day all year since the start of school. It's so bad that you take it as a matter of course that the class will just be chaos. Every day: Pandamonium.

This happens on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday - every day, as it has for the entire year. But then: Wednesday night into Thursday the miracle occurs. So when you go into your 5th period class on Thursday, it *won't* be chaos. But you don't know that the miracle has occurred. So when you walk into class, you'll be expecting the usual situation.

What will happen for you to realize "hmmmm... a miracle has occurred here!"

Maybe it'll be: All the students will remain seated without randomly getting up to walk around the room. Or maybe it'll be: Instead of shouting out answers, students will be raising their hand and politely waiting to be called on. Or perhaps: students will voluntarily help each other out and tutor their peers until the entire class understands.

What is the point of the miracle question? It helps to clarify what the specific problem is, and what potential solutions are. Instead of a general sense of doom, or a loose feeling of "chaos," this activity illustrates that the real problems are that students randomly walk around the room, they shout out answers, and they are mean to each other. Solutions, therefore, involve remaining seated, raising their hands, and helping their peers. As the instructional leader, you now know what you have to do. You don't need to somehow fix everything. You just need to focus on enforcing a few simple procedures: Seating policies, hand raising protocols, and peer support.

Of course, some of these items are obvious if you stop to think about it. The problem is: In the hustle and bustle of busy life, we often don't stop to reflect, even on the most persistent pain-in-the-butt problems we encounter. The miracle question can help solve that. I'm not sure it'll work every time. But: Perhaps it can take a problem you've been muddling through for a very long time, shift you to action, and illuminate seemingly obvious paths forward.

One final note: Even though we're imagining miracles here, I find it helpful to keep it *reasonable*. In the scenario above, for example, I avoided saying: All the kids give me \$100 on their way into the class, they sing peaceful melodies in perfect unity, and I can teleport to the central office when I need to make more copies. We're dealing in miracles here people, but they're subtle miracles. And if you've been dealing with "chaos" all year, you don't need teleportation to qualify. Even a nice quiet classroom and respectful hands being raised constitutes a miracle. At least for the planning purposes the miracle question is intended to spur.

Make good choices, -Kevin

Bad decision of the week: Teacher pinches student