



CEO INITIATIVE™

Classroom Starter Guide

A first look at teaching the capacities behind behavior — not just responding to it.



The Idea in One Page

Every teacher has seen it: a student who can tell you exactly what they're supposed to do — wait their turn, regulate frustration, start the assignment, stay focused — and still doesn't do it consistently.

Sometimes the issue isn't simply knowing what to do. A student may understand the expectation but still need more practice with the capacities required to carry it out consistently under real conditions.

CEO Initiative's approach starts from a simple shift:

"How do we respond to this behavior?"

↓ becomes ↓

"What capacity needs to be practiced so a different response becomes possible?"

That shift moves the work upstream — from managing behavior after it happens, to building the capacity that makes better behavior possible in the first place.

The two activities in this guide are a small, practical starting point. They're not a full program — they're a way to try the approach with your own students this week.

**1**

Activity One: Name the Capacity

WHAT IT BUILDS

Self-awareness of which capacity is actually being asked for in a given moment (attention, patience, regulation, etc.) — a first step before practicing it.

TIME

5 minutes, any point in the day.

HOW IT WORKS

1

When a moment comes up where a student is struggling to do something they already know they're supposed to do, pause before correcting the behavior itself.

2

Ask privately and calmly: *"What were you supposed to be doing just now?"* If the student can identify the expectation, follow with: *"What got in the way of doing it?"* — not as a trap, as a genuine question. Common answers: "I got distracted," "I was mad," "I forgot to wait."

3

Name the capacity out loud, neutrally: *"So that's a focus moment,"* or *"That's a patience moment."* No judgment attached — just naming what was actually being asked of them.

WHY IT WORKS THIS WAY

Naming the capacity separates the *behavior* (what happened) from the *identity* (who the student is). A student who struggled with patience in one moment isn't "an impatient kid" — they had a patience moment. That distinction changes how the conversation is framed: from labeling the student to identifying a capacity that can be practiced.



2

Activity Two: Practice Before the Moment

WHAT IT BUILDS

The capacity itself, practiced in a low-stakes setting before it's actually needed — rather than only being asked for it in the middle of a high-stakes moment.

TIME

5–10 minutes, once or twice a week.

HOW IT WORKS

- 1 Pick one capacity your group struggles with most often (from Activity One, or your own observation) — for example, waiting, staying focused, or managing frustration.
- 2 Build a short, low-stakes practice round into a normal part of the day — for example: a timed “focus round” where students work silently for a set number of minutes before a break; a “waiting round” where students practice raising a hand and waiting to be called on, even for something small and low-pressure.
- 3 After the round, ask one reflection question: “*What did you notice about doing that?*” Keep it short — the practice matters more than the discussion.
- 4 Repeat regularly. The capacity is built through repetition in a calm setting, not through a single lecture or a single high-stakes moment.

WHY IT WORKS THIS WAY

It's much harder to practice a new capacity for the first time in the exact moment it's needed most (mid-conflict, mid-frustration). Practicing it ahead of time, in a lower-stakes setting, gives students a chance to build the capacity before it's tested.



What's Next

These two activities are a starting point, not the whole approach. CEO Initiative's full curriculum builds a structured, sequenced set of practices like these across a school year — with more capacities, more depth, and more implementation support than a starter guide can cover.

Tried one of these activities? Reply to the email that brought you this guide and tell us what you noticed. If you'd like to explore what CEO Initiative could look like in your classroom, school, or youth program, we'd be glad to continue the conversation.

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