

REWILD SCHOOL

YES OR NO CHECK-IN

I was navigating through a huddle of La Ceiba students when Ehren touched my elbow and asked, "Dr H, can I speak with you?"

"Of course," I answered.

We stepped outside of the classroom for some privacy.

"I'm going to withdraw from La Ceiba," Ehren said. "Now is just not a good time."

"We're going to miss you," I said, "but let's work on another project together in the future."

With that, we shook hands.

Ehren withdrawing was a loss for us. He was an inspiring participant in the Two Dollar Challenge the spring before. I personally recruited him to join us. However, given his course load and other things going on in his life, he knew that he would struggle to meet our high expectations.

His decision to withdraw was generous. It was the best thing for him and us.

I was inspired. So much so that every semester after that, I sent my students the following email around week three of the semester (before the official course withdrawal date):

Hey LC,

The work we do together brings us together. It binds us. It makes us a tribe. If someone will not or cannot do the work, then they will not and cannot become one of us. And if someone does not do the work, they hurt us, the clients, and our reputation. But ultimately, they hurt themselves. So, it's time for you to honestly assess your semester's workload:

- How many credit hours are you taking?
- How many hours are dedicated to work-study or a part-time job(s)?
- How many hours are dedicated to extracurricular activities?

Having seen how hard we need to work, ask yourself:

- Are you stretched too thin this semester?
- Is this the best time in your life for this class?

We are only 13 weeks away from the end of the semester. This sounds like a lot of time, but it is not. So, I need you to ask yourself the following question before our next class:

- Are you committed?

Here's my preferred ranking of your replies:

- You say "YES," we go on to do incredible work together
- You say "NO," we shake hands and go on to work on another project at another time together
- You say "YES" because you want to say "YES," but the answer is really "NO," and you produce mediocre work

Think carefully before answering. If your answer is "NO," do not be concerned about leaving us in a difficult situation. We are resilient. If your answer is "YES," we expect great things from you.

Do the work. – dr H

Attached to this email was the following "Yes or No" document. I asked my students to print it out, choose their response, and turn it in before our next class meeting.

YES

I AM READY TO COMMIT.

I AM READY TO BE VULNERABLE.

I AM READY TO TAKE ON MY FEARS.

I HAVE MADE THE 11 PROMISES, AND I WILL KEEP THEM.

X_____

NO

I AM NOT READY.

WE WILL SHAKE HANDS AND COLLABORATE AT ANOTHER TIME OR ON ANOTHER PROJECT.

X_____

Over our ten years of operations, only two students ever said "No." That number should have been higher. We had more than a few say "Yes" but mean "No." Of these, some were overconfident in what they thought they could accomplish. Others did not believe we were serious about our standard of excellence. We were. Others felt that we would not hold them to account. We did.

I cannot say with confidence which of the listed reasons (or some other) led a particular student to say "Yes" when they meant "No." However, I do know that they paid an emotional price for their unwillingness to commit. Namely, they let themselves down. More painfully, they let their friends and those sitting around them down.