Sam was a normal guy. He was a math teacher who knew what he was talking about. Many would call him an inspirational teacher since he had to overcome adversity to get to where he is now. But there was always something missing for him. He could never reach ALL of his students. Sam wanted his students to truly appreciate the wonder that is Calculus. His students always seem to learn only to forget all of the information after the AP test.

One day, Sam was approached by one of his colleagues, another math teacher by the name of Ron. Ron told Sam that he was suddenly able to get his students to pay attention in class and grasp the material. He just used his “special phrases” to get them to pay attention. These “special phrases” could make students pay attention despite how dry the material actually was. Ron told Sam these phrases that he used.

Sam decided he would try out one of these phrases in his classroom. He started his class the same way he always did, by asking the class what questions they had on the previous homework assignment. He slipped in one of those “special phrases” and suddenly a sea of hands rose. He got questions on logarithms, derivatives, and even limits. He could see that his class was so much more engaged in the curriculum and that they were genuinely interested in what he had to say. He was so happy that his class was understanding his lecture that he ended class 20 minutes early. He did this because he saved so much time not having to deal with distractions.

The next day he was in the teacher’s lounge before class and Ron had approached him again. Ron told him that he noticed that despite using those special phrases that his class did terribly on their homework. He told Sam how their understanding was only superficial. It didn’t really seem to sink in. Ron showed Sam a random student’s homework assignment. The assignment was on limits and the students didn’t show any work or write anything to do with limits. Instead, the whole page was full of admiration for Ron or “Mr. Collins” as the page said. And, as if it was calculated, Sam and Ron realized simultaneously that these special phrases made the students pay attention because of their admiration for the instructor, not because they actually are learning the curriculum. This seemed odd. But considering that one of the special phrases was “look at me everyone” this sort of made sense.