Student Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Class: B2 Upper-Int** **Score:** ____ / 14

MANAGING MARCUS (WITHOUT LOSING MY MIND)

A Reading & Fill-in-the-Blank Vocabulary Challenge • Level B2

Instructions: Read the story carefully. Fill in each numbered blank (1–14) with the most appropriate word or phrase from the Word Bank below. Each term is used exactly once. Pay attention to meaning, collocations, and grammatical forms.

approximations	**incompatible behaviors**	**at your heels / hovering around**	**full-blown**
do the trick	**launch into a tirade**	**pet peeve**	**die away**
least reinforcing scenario (LRS)	**mackerel**	**amused**	**excruciating**
nod	**nagging**	***(use each term once)***	***(context clues apply)***

PART 1: THE OPEN-OFFICE DILEMMA

Sharing an open-plan office with Marcus was an _____ [1] test of patience. Everyone has a _____ [2], but Marcus seemed to collect them all: pacing restlessly, humming off-key, and constantly _____ [3] the team about microscopic formatting errors on spreadsheets. Worse still, whenever a client deadline approached, Marcus would spend half the morning _____ [4], hovering right beside my desk and peering over my shoulder while I typed.

In my first month, I made the mistake of reacting to his anxiety. Whenever he paced near my chair, I'd snap or argue, which only escalated small hiccups into _____ [5] panics. One Tuesday, after a minor software glitch, he looked ready to _____ [6] about our department's doomed future.



Figure 1: Office Dynamics — Anxious pacing and hovering vs. calm focus at work.

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PART 2: BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS & RESULTS

Remembering an article on animal psychology, I decided to test a new tactic. First, I implemented the _____ [7]. The next time Marcus paced beside my monitor sighing dramatically, waiting for someone to ask what was wrong, I gave zero reaction. No eye contact, no frustrated sigh, no comment. I simply offered a polite, silent _____ [8] when our eyes met and went straight back to my screen. Without my attention to fuel his panic, his complaints slowly began to _____ [9].

Next, to keep him from lingering over my desk, I introduced _____ [10]. Marcus couldn't stand over my shoulder and distract me if his hands and feet were busy elsewhere. Whenever I saw him approach with that nervous energy, I'd immediately say, '*Marcus, thank goodness you're free! Could you walk these urgent client folders down to legal and grab two coffees from the lobby?*' Running errands made it physically impossible for him to hover. It _____ [11] every single time.



Figure 2: Positive Reinforcement — Rewarding approximations at work.

Zoological Principles:
- **L.R.S.:** Neutral silence starves drama.
- **Incompatible Action:** Diverts bad habits.
- **Approximations:** Incremental steps win.

Finally, I tackled his messy desk habits using _____ [12]. Marcus habitually dumped stacks of unfiled invoices onto the shared conference table. Instead of demanding a pristine desk overnight, I praised small, incremental progress. The day he stacked them into neat piles, I thanked him warmly. When he actually filed a single folder into the cabinet, I brought him his favorite iced pastry—my office equivalent of tossing a dolphin a _____ [13].

By winter, the transformation was remarkable. Marcus was calmer, the conference table was clear, and my stress levels had plummeted. When a colleague asked how I had managed to turn our most anxious teammate into a focused collaborator, I just smiled, secretly _____ [14] by the fact that professional animal training techniques worked just as effectively on corporate project managers.

PART 3: SPEAKING & CRITICAL THINKING (PAIR DISCUSSION)

1. Concept Evaluation: Which technique (*L.R.S., incompatible behaviors, approximations*) is easiest to apply in real human relationships? Which is hardest? Why?

2. Ethical Debate: The author modified her colleague's behavior covertly. Is applying animal training to people manipulative, or is it pragmatic emotional intelligence?

3. Personal Application: Think of a common **pet peeve** in your life (e.g., leaving dirty dishes, talking during films). How could you use *incompatible behavior* or *approximations* to improve it?

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