

**"Having Hard Conversations"  
NMSA Annual Conference  
Nashville, TN - November 2006**

**Agenda**

**Welcomes, Introductions, Overview of Session, Case Study**

**Why We Hesitate Having Hard Conversations  
Questions to Ask Yourself Before Deciding to Have the  
Conversation**

**Questions to Ask Yourself about How to Actually Have the  
Conversation - Generational Savvy  
External Factors to Consider, Scenarios, Etc.**

**Reflection and Feedback**

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"There are many people who think they want to be matadors, only to find themselves in the ring with 2,000 pounds of bull bearing down on them, and then discover that what they really wanted was to wear tight pants and hear the crowd roar."

Terry Pearce

# **Session Norms**

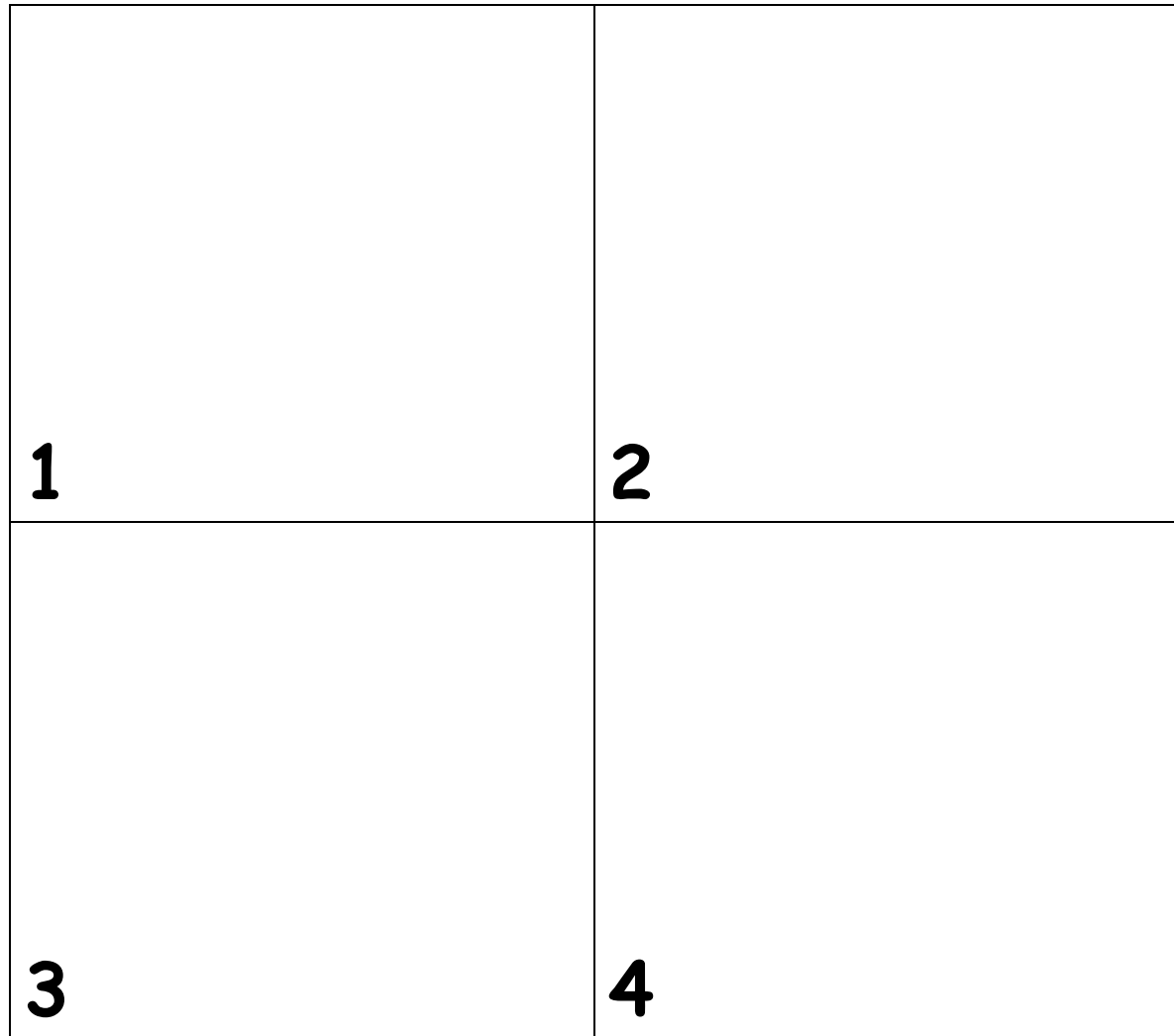
**Inquiry and Learning**

**Equitable Participation**

**Self-Determination**

**Confidentiality & Respect**

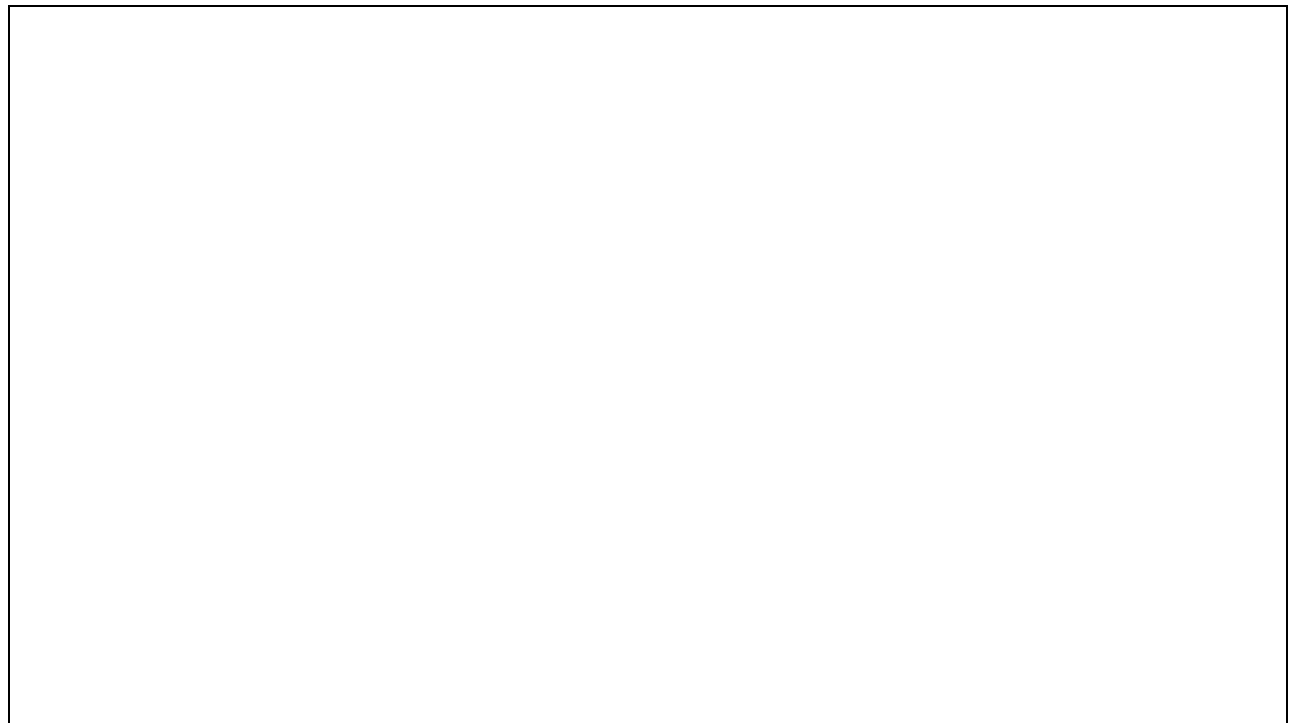
# Quadrant Partners



# Setting the Stage

Think about a hard conversation you haven't had with someone. What are the circumstances surrounding the concern? What is bothering you? What are some of the reasons why you haven't said anything yet?

You will be using this "case study" throughout the session so please pick a challenge you feel comfortable working on and sharing with others.



Tensions That Surface  
Why We Hesitate Having Hard Conversations  
(with thanks to Enid Lee)

Want to be Pleasing

- *I don't want to look mean.*
- *I want people to like me and to respect me.*

Safety

- *I want it to remain ok - no anger or tears.*
- *I would rather avoid any emotional or physical pain.*
- *I am intimidated. My colleague is very aggressive. It is scary to deal with him.*
- *If I say something it could reinforce the behavior and then lots of folks might get hurt.*
- *I need job security. I don't have it yet. Better not to speak up.*

Comfort

- *I like it easy emotionally and work-wise - no waves.*
- *It will take so much effort to do what I need to do if this starts.*
- *If I deal with it internally at least I don't have to deal with your stuff too - and that is easier.*
- *The culture doesn't address things head on. Why should I?*

Tensions That Surface  
Why We Hesitate Having Hard Conversations  
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No Sense of Urgency (for you)

- *There aren't enough kids in the room who are affected. So let's not make a big deal out of it.*
- *She's been through the workshop so let's give it time and see if things change. No big crisis yet.*

Perfectionism

- *I don't have the right words yet.*
- *I can't do it until I know more about him/her.*

Distrust - Of Self and Other

- *I don't trust my gut to be right.*
- *I don't trust I have built up enough rapport yet.*
- *I am too judgmental so maybe this is just another place...*
- *I don't have enough internal role "authority" or perspective and I have NO external role authority. So who am I to bring it up?*
- *I won't go out on a limb myself and others have never really backed me up...*
- *It is her choice to do what she wants. Who am I to tell my peer what is best for kids?*
- *I don't think she will be able to take it. It will overwhelm her.*

Tensions That Surface  
Why We Hesitate Having Hard Conversations  
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Too Big a Shift in Role Expectations

- *I thought I was here to work on classroom management and the external factors that make up a classroom. Now I am supposed to also focus on something personal and internal?*
- *This is a small town. She knows my dog's name. My kid plays with her kid. I need to keep this relationship the way it is and not rock the boat.*
- *I thought I hired someone who already KNEW how to do this. This wasn't what I anticipated.*
- *I don't agree with the program they are asking me to coach to and just feel awkward.*

Fatigue

- *Just don't have the energy today.*
- *Just cannot fight this battle again.*
- *They think I am too touchy feely and I am too tired to speak up again.*

Personality

- *But he is a nice person overall.*

Intent

- *He/she didn't mean it.*

## What Wins Out & What We Have To Deal With When We DON'T Speak Up - The Tolls of Ambivalence

### Pain and Guilt - Anxiety and Loneliness

- "If you want to see someone in real pain watch someone who knows who he is and defaults on it on a regular basis." (Pat Murray)
- By our own silence we are condoning behavior we don't agree with.
- *We may feel lonely - not with the system, not with the 'renegades' - we may feel like we don't fit.*
- "We feel fraudulent, even invisible, because we are not in the world as we really are." (Parker Palmer)
- We may feel like we're not fulfilling our obligations.

### The Other Person Has Control and Power

- *The other person runs the show and runs us.*

### We Don't Live By Our Principles

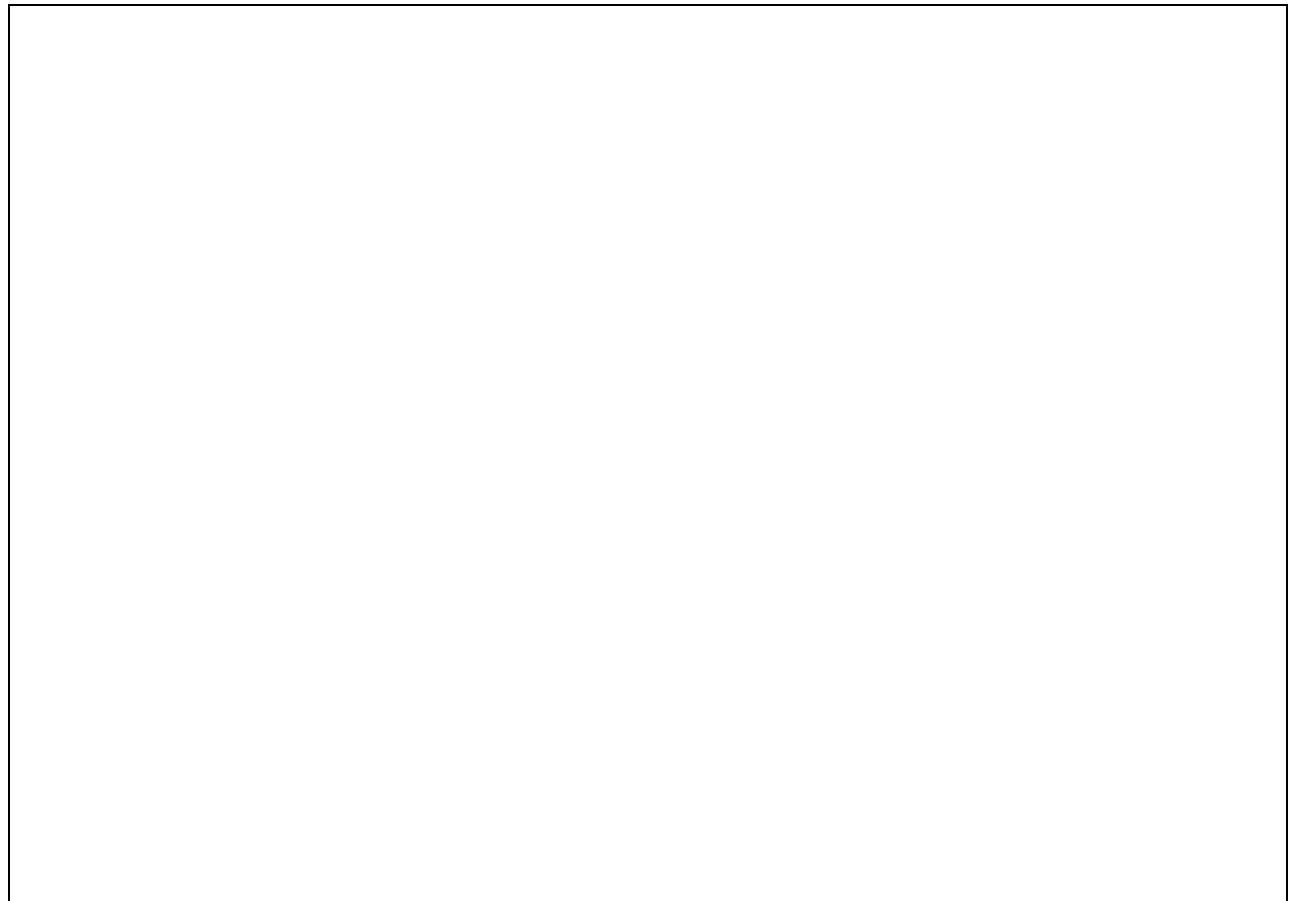
- *Bottom line values are being compromised.*
- *We may feel like a hypocrite - not walking our talk.*
- *"It is one thing to learn a method. It is another thing to commit to a philosophy." Asa Hilliard*

### Negative Impact on ALL Students

- *What actually happens to the students?*
- *What do they live with? What do they see?*

# Insights?

Think about the reasons why we hesitate and what wins out when we do. What connections are you making between your “default positions” and the concepts just shared?

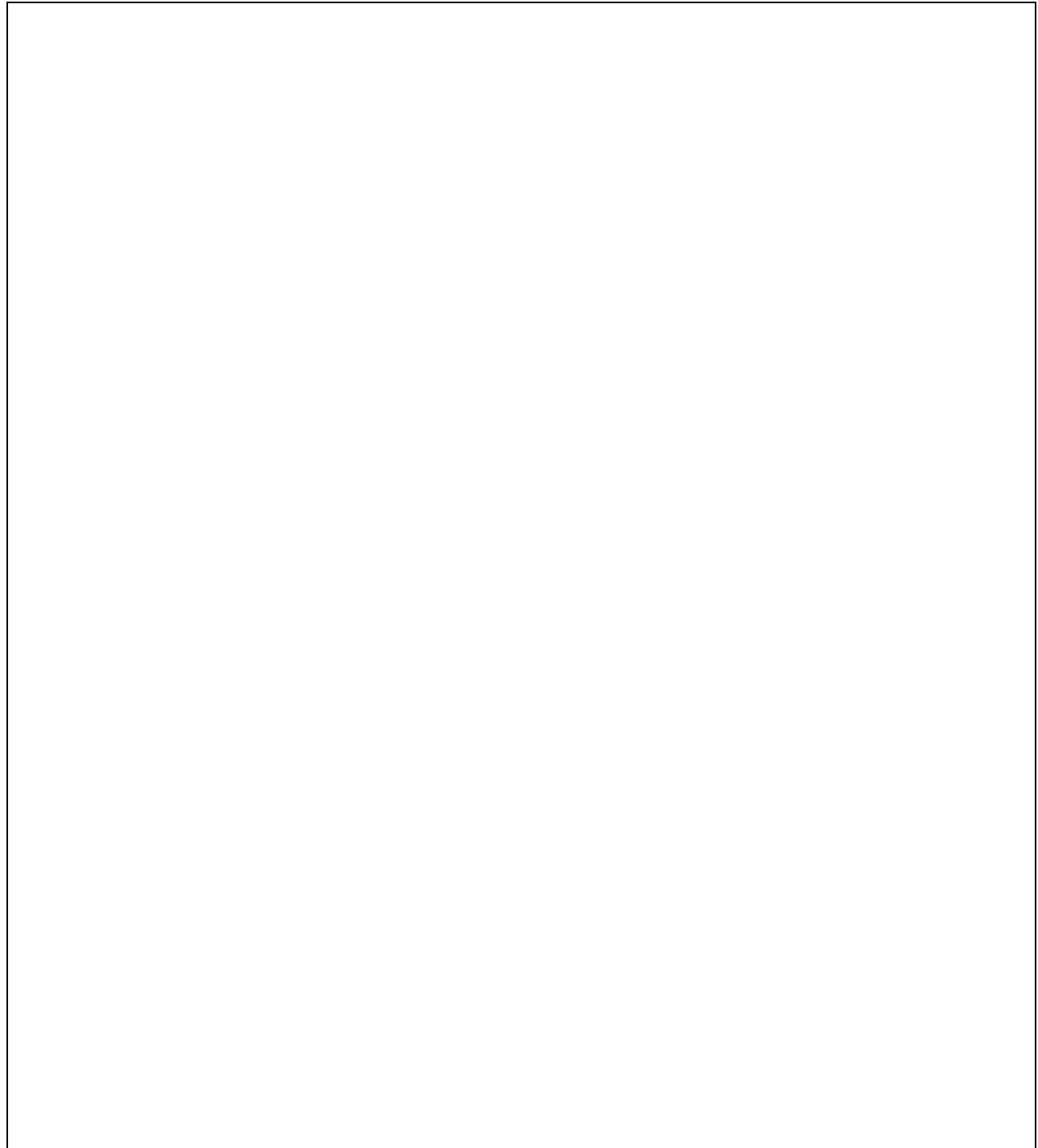


Two of the most significant barriers to the realization of human potential - resignation and dependency - are also often invisible to the casual observer. By recognizing and naming them, we begin the process of shifting from resignation to possibility and from dependency to a sense of personal power.

Dennis Sparks - Leading for Results

**Doing the Hard Thinking Before the Hard Conversation**

**What questions do you ask yourself as you figure out whether or not you should even have a hard conversation?**



**Questions to Ask Yourself Before  
Having the Hard Conversation  
With Thanks to Debra Meyerson's Tempered Radicals**

**Timing**

Is this a good time to take a risk and pose a challenge?

Do I have to say anything or will it fix itself on its own?

What is the intensity of this need? Does it need to be handled now or can it wait?

Am I in the right frame of mind to say something or will I become too emotional?

Is this the time for the teacher to hear this? Can he/she hear this now? Or is his/her stress level so high it wouldn't be heard?

Do I have enough information and accurate information about this situation?

Do I prioritize this conversation before another one?

**Stakes**

How high are the stakes for the different parties involved? Is this a fight worth picking?

If I speak up, who or what else will this affect? What is the ripple effect?

Are the negative effects greater than the potential gains if I choose to speak out?

How important is it for the students that I bring this up?

Is what is going on in the classroom unsafe or damaging to students?

Is this something that the "higher ups" need to know about? Is this a contractual situation? What rights do I have? What rights does he/she have?

How vulnerable am I willing to get?

Is this imperative to talk about or just somewhat important?

What would happen if I didn't have the conversation?

**Questions to Ask Yourself Before**

## **Having the Hard Conversation** **With Thanks to Debra Meyerson's Tempered Radicals**

### **Likelihood of Success**

How promising are the hoped for results?

Have I thought through enough what the real problem is so I have it well articulated myself? Has it come up before? Is it a pattern?

If I bring this issue up do I have an action plan thought out? Can I support the teacher through the changes I would like to see made? Do I have a game plan in mind?

If I say something, is it going to move the teacher's practice forward?

### **Options**

Are there better alternative responses to those that would pose a less significant risk?

Are there responses that will enable me to take a stand without overly jeopardizing my credibility?

Has the teacher been given the opportunity to self-discover this issue and is it on his/her plate? Have I tried to bring it up before and what was the response? Is there a way I could help them see it is a concern without going into "hard conversation mode"?

Can this issue be brought up via email or another medium? Which medium would be most effective? Does it need to be said face-to-face?

How do I feel about offering this criticism? Does it give me pleasure or pain? If I am feeling pleasure, is there someone else to speak to the teacher because I will "act out" my attitude and it will be seen?

What am I trying to accomplish and if I speak up will it move me toward or away from that goal?

What are some other ways of thinking about this? Has this always been the case or have there been times when something different has happened?

## **Questions to Ask Yourself Before**

## **Having the Hard Conversation** **With Thanks to Debra Meyerson's Tempered Radicals**

### **Consequences for Failure**

What are the worst possible outcomes of the different choices? How bad are they, and how likely are they to occur?

No matter the outcome is this something I have to say because I have to say it?

Am I willing to experience the discomfort that might come as a result of bringing up this topic?

### **Personal Association- Personal Perspective**

Will this be seen as only "my issue"? Am I outside the interaction and yet commenting on it with "heat"?

Can I say what I want to say and still project acceptance of this teacher?

Do I have a positive, trusting relationship with this teacher so I can bring up this concern and have it heard?

Is the teacher doing something that is really bugging me because it is a pet peeve of mine/a style difference or is this something that needs to change because it is affecting students?

Do I model the correct behavior I am looking for so after I say something I will know I am already walking my talk?

By my silence does this person think I agree with his/her perspective/behavior? Is that ok?

Is there a cultural lens I am wearing that I need to acknowledge and deal with?

How do my beliefs guide me to think this way, and how might other beliefs alter my thinking?

If I trusted this person's intentions would I interpret his/her responses differently?

Why do I hold on so strongly to this view?

## **Questions to Ask Yourself Before**

## **Having the Hard Conversation** **With Thanks to Debra Meyerson's Tempered Radicals**

### **Do-ability**

Does a response feel do-able? Is there a response that is not overwhelming; that I can help implement even more effectively and would be as helpful?

Is there specific and reliable evidence I can share? How would I present that in a way that can be heard?

If I do bring up the concern, is there enough time to really deal with it or will it just cause problems?

Have I thought through why the teacher might be behaving in this way?  
What external or internal factors are affecting the teacher? Motivations?

Positive presupposition: Why would a reasonable, rational and decent person be doing what he or she is doing?

Is the behavior I am proposing to as a substitute do-able/teach-able for this individual?

## **Identifying People's Generational Profiles**

Think about each generation's "take" on the following concepts:

<b>The Delineators</b>	<b>Boomers</b>	<b>Xers</b>	<b>Millennials</b>
Perspective on work	Career	Job	
Communication style	Diplomatic	Blunt	
View of authority	Impressed	Unfazed	
Need for approval	Seek validation	Indifferent	
Perspective on resources	Abundant	Scarce	
Response to policies and procedures	Protective	Mistrustful	
Relationship to team	Team-oriented	Self-reliant	
Work ethic	Driven	Balanced	
Focus on work projects	Relationships and results	Tasks and results	
Relationship to technology	Acquired	Assimilated	
Entitlement	Experience	Merit	

Adapted from The Xers & The Boomers

### **Processing Prompt**

Look at the professional standards sheets from before and the work-related concepts above. Now think about how all the generations of employees you work with would relate to these ideas. What are some of the implications of this thinking for you as a leader in this district?

**Language and Communication with All Generations**

<b>Traditionalists</b>	
<b>Persuasive Language</b>	<b>Turnoffs</b>
Authority	Profanity
Discipline	Slang
Dependable	Emotional language
Great	Disorganization
Respect	Lack of respect for tradition
Sacrifice	Poor grammar
Consistent	Disrespect for experience
<b>Baby Boomers</b>	
<b>Persuasive Language</b>	<b>Turnoffs</b>
Consensus	Brusqueness
Human Rights	Unfriendliness
Involvement	Not showing interest in the person
Relationship/Trust	Shows of power and one-upmanship
Team	Political incorrectness
Tolerance	Sports and war metaphors
Equal/Fair	
<b>Gen Xers</b>	
<b>Persuasive Language</b>	<b>Turnoffs</b>
Alternative	Schmoozing
Independent	Inefficient use of time
Efficient	Flashiness
Pragmatic	Hyperbole
Results	Incompetence
System	Bureaucracy
Competent	Complex Policies
<b>Millennials</b>	
<b>Persuasive Language</b>	<b>Turnoffs</b>
Achievement	Cynicism
Challenge	Sarcasm
Collaborate	Unfairness
Community	Condescension
Discovery	
Future	
Positive/Fun	

Adapted from Connecting Generations: A Sourcebook for a New Workplace - Claire Raines

## Doing the Hard Thinking About the Whats, Wheres and Whens, Etc.

*What questions do you ask yourself or what do you need to keep in mind as you plan and actually have the conversation?*

*(Timing, location, phrasing, space, etc.)*

## Questions to Ask Yourself That Will Help You Be Effective During The Hard Conversation

What will my phrasing be? Have I scripted out my first few sentences?  
Do I know how I will begin?

Have I considered the personality of the teacher and decided on the tone and phrasing that will work best in getting the message heard?

Do any of these sentence stems help?

"The research says...."

"If I were your evaluator...."

What would happen if...."

"Let me press you a bit about..."

"I would like to plant a seed..."

"Some teachers might find that..."

"If we look at the students' needs..."

"How is this affecting the students?"

"Just a thought..."

"Can I push/challenge you on this point?"

"I believe you don't intend to teach in an inequitable way so let's make your actions align with your intentions."

"What you just said pinched me a bit..."

"I have been sitting with something for a while and it isn't going away so I would like to share it with you."

Am I offering suggestions, recommendations or expectations?

Does the teacher know the difference and am I being clear myself?

Where will I share this concern? In the teacher's room, in a private room, in the main office?

Where will I sit/stand in relationship to the teacher? What will my body language be? If I am sitting am I across from the teacher? Is there a desk in between us? Am I on the same side of the desk as the teacher?

Do I want to bring in data? How should it be written out? How should it be presented? Will I have notes? Do I need notes?

## Questions to Ask Yourself That Will Help You Be Effective During The Hard Conversation

Remember: think about the teaching standards and not the teacher

Remember: the ol' "kiss me- kiss me -kick me" way of getting to the point feels manipulative - be sincere and clear -

Remember: watch "I" and "you" language and use it deliberately

Watch your "ands" and "buts"

Do you have enough time set aside for dialogue?

What is the right time of day or the right day of the week to bring this up?

Remember you are on a journey, not in a final performance -  
you will not be perfect, but you will be consciously practicing your principles.

Remember inquiry vs. inquisition - aahs...vs. oohs

Keep your eyes on the prize. Remember who we are in service to - the kids.

Try to hold your energy in the midst of resistance - know some coping strategies for when you might feel anxious if the other person cries or gets angry.

Know what your bottom line is - what must you say before you go - and then know your steps - what is this step and then what is the next.

How would you want to be told this information? Think Golden Rule.

What will your body language be?

What is my own baggage going into this? How will I remember when it is my baggage and when it is the concern I am talking about?

What facts vs. opinions am I sharing? Do I know the difference?

Be aware of space and gender. Be aware of space and culture and ethnicity.

## HHC - A Telegram

**In 30 words or less, what is/are the key point(s) you are taking away from this session?**

## Having Hard Conversations - Other Resources

**If you can't articulate where the teacher is stuck and you need some help with pinning the issue down and helping to move him/her along:**

"A New Way of Thinking: Beginning Teacher Coaching Through Garmston's and Costa's States of Mind" - Jennifer Abrams  
([www.cognitivecoaching.com](http://www.cognitivecoaching.com) - CC Literature/Readings)

Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. - Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston, Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 2002

**If you can articulate the problem and you need some help to think about the solution more deeply:**

The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups - Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman, Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1999  
([www.adaptiveschools.com](http://www.adaptiveschools.com))

"Getting Unstuck: Using an Outcome Map for Effective Problem Solving" - Jennifer Abrams ([www.updc.org](http://www.updc.org) - UPDC Library, Utah Special Educator, November, 2003)

Critical Friends Groups - Chapter 9 - Powerful Designs for Professional Learning - Lois Brown Easton, editor - National Staff Development Council, 2004

**If you need help with scripting protocols:**

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When The Stakes Are High - Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler, Mc Graw Hill, 2002  
(State My Path Chapter)

Crucial Confrontations: Tools for Resolving Broken Promises, Violated Expectations and Bad Behavior - Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler, Mc Graw Hill, 2005

Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work & in Life, One Conversation at a Time - Susan Scott, Viking Press, 2002 ([www.fierceinc.com](http://www.fierceinc.com))  
(Confrontation Model)

"Communicating Concerns Directly" - a protocol in the New Teacher Center's training, Improving Student Achievement Through Teacher Observation and Coaching  
([www.newteachercenter.org](http://www.newteachercenter.org))

## Having Hard Conversations - Other Resources

**If you need help designing an action plan once you have had the conversation:**

The Skillful Leader: Confronting Mediocre Teaching - Alexander Platt, et al, Ready About Press, 2000, ([www.ready-about.com](http://www.ready-about.com))

**Other resources for language, protocols, support:**

Assessment Strategies for Self-Directed Learning - Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick, Corwin Press, 2004

The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life, Parker J. Palmer, Jossey-Bass, 1998

Data Driven Dialogue: A Facilitator's Guide to Collaborative Inquiry - Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, Miravia LLC, 2003 ([www.miravia.com](http://www.miravia.com))

The Dance of Connection: How to Talk to Someone When You're Mad, Hurt, Scared, Frustrated, Insulted, Betrayed or Desperate - Harriet Lerner, Harper Collins, 2001

How The Way We Talk Can Change The Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation - Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, Jossey-Bass, 2001

How to Make Supervision and Evaluation Really Work - Jon Saphier, Research for Better Teaching, Inc., 1993

Mentoring Matters: A Practical Guide to Learning-Focused Relationships - Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, Miravia LLC, 2001 ([www.miravia.com](http://www.miravia.com))

On Apology - Aaron Lazare, Oxford University Press, 2004

Tempered Radicals: How Everyday Leaders Inspire Change at Work - Debra E. Meyerson, Harvard Business School Press, 2003

Success with the Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense - Suzette H. Elgin, Prentice Hall, 1989

Words That Hurt, Words That Heal: How to Choose Words Wisely and Well - Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, William Morrow, 1996

Our conversations invent us.  
Through our speech and our silence,  
we become smaller or larger selves.  
Through our speech and our silence,  
we diminish or enhance the other  
person, and we narrow or expand  
the possibilities between us. How we  
use our voice determines the quality  
of our relationships, who we are in  
the world, and what the world can  
be and might become. Clearly, a  
lot is at stake here.

Harriet Lerner, The Dance of Connection