

Leadership Development

THE
BRITISH SCHOOL
OF AMSTERDAM

Tough Conversations

15th April 2024





SCHOOL LEADERS TRAINING

THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF AMSTERDAM

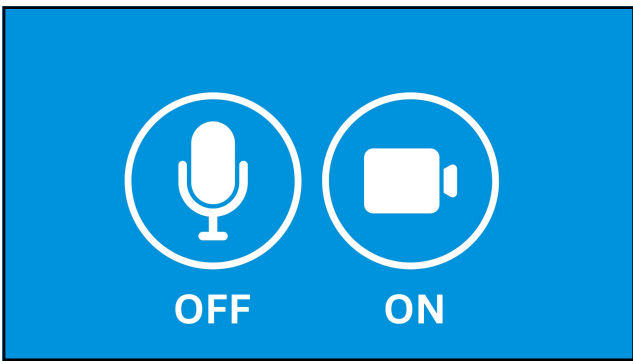
TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

(Planned and unplanned)
15th April 2024, 08:30 to 10:00 (CET)

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Background: Mike Crossley

- **Head** - 14 years (Prep School aged 4-13)
- **Deputy Head** - 4 years, large tied school (4-13)
- **Senior Master** - 4 years, large stand-alone Prep School
- Professional Development:
 - NPQH award, qualified as an ISI inspector, RI trained,
 - L7 Executive Coach and Mentor, **MHFA & NUCO Youth Instructor, Qualified Senior Designated MH Lead**
- Currently involved in:
 - **Running courses & training in wellbeing and leadership**
 - **Trained over 350 teachers and adults working with children as MHFA practitioners since 2016**
 - **Mentoring, supporting & coaching newly appointed Heads & Deputies; PGCE Tutor**
- Instructor for The Charlie Waller Trust

E: mike@schoolleaderstraining.co.uk



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50% of managers cite difficult conversations as their biggest challenge

Only 21% of managers feel confident at addressing difficult situations

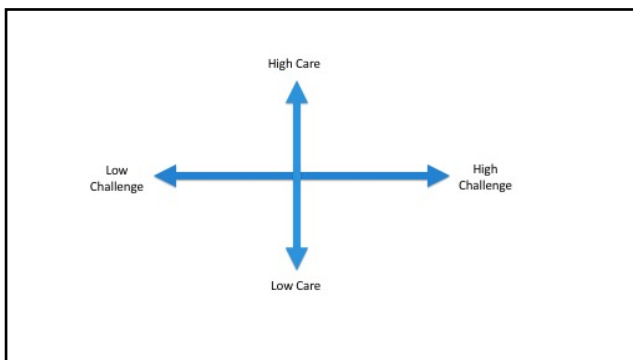
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OUTLINE

- 1) Why do we put off conversations?
- 2) Framework for planning a difficult conversation
- 3) Unexpected difficult conversations
- 4) Dealing effectively with parents



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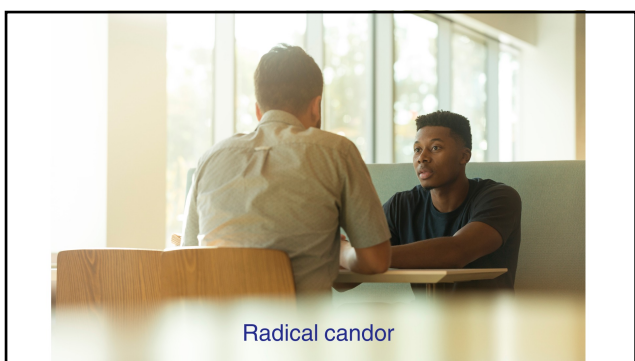
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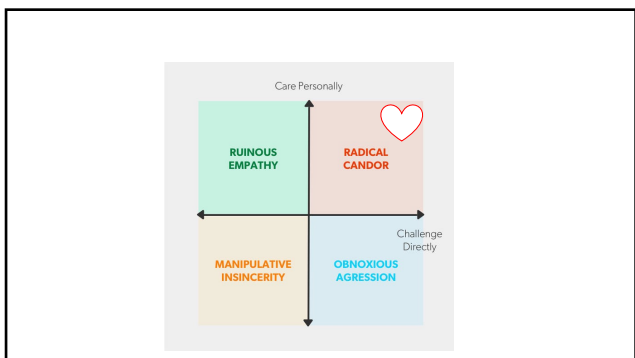
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Can you think of a time when you were acting in the zones of:

- (i) ruinous empathy
- (ii) manipulative insincerity
- (iii) obnoxious aggression

What could you have done differently?



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“Clear is kind; unclear is unkind.”

Brené Brown (Dare to Lead)


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Planning an opening statement-7 steps*


1. **Name** the issue;
2. Describe an **Example**;
3. Describe your **Feelings**;
4. Clarify why this is **Important** and what is at stake;
5. **Accept** your part in contributing to the issue;
6. Indicate the desire to **Resolve**;
7. Invite **Them** to Respond



*Susan Scott, Fierce Conversations

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What could come next?

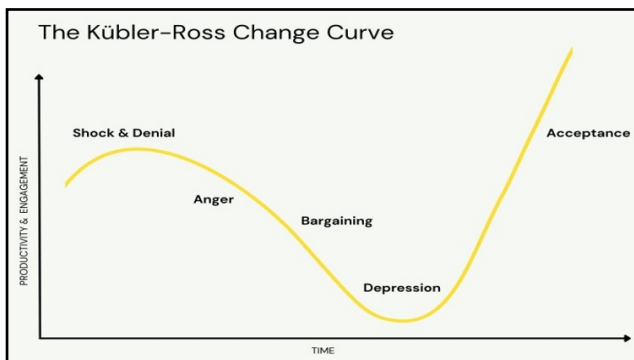


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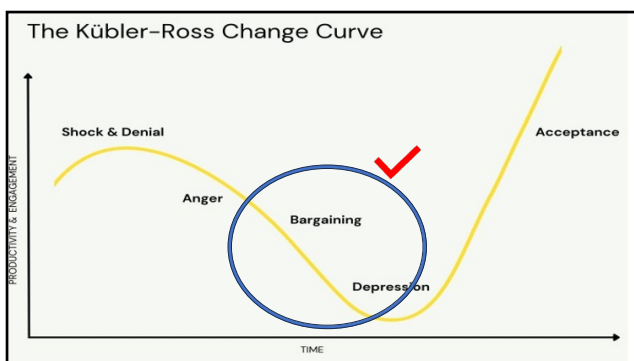
Your turn to use the NEFIART model – plan for no more than **90 seconds of delivery**. Choose one of the following where, as their line manager, a member of your team has been:

- Regularly late for meetings, events and even classes
- Unprofessional in their discussions about another colleague behind their back causing a lot of upset and unrest
- Failing to mark pupils’ books in line with school policy and ‘moonlighting’ as a bartender several evenings a week without the school’s knowledge.
- Blatantly copying and pasting reports with the result that the wrong names are on some reports despite being warned about this previously
- Sharing unhelpful information with some parents... but not all

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There will be times when you have little or even NO time to prepare for a difficult conversation...

- Be ready to 'allow the emotion' to flow - Let them run out of steam
- Listen to all they have to say - No pre-judging
- What information do you need? - Prepare as best you can!
- What is my goal? - Desired Outcome
- Lay out and where to sit and stand - Room set up & verbal cues

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FINAL SECRET:
THE POWER OF CURIOSITY

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Dealing Effectively with Parents

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Parents are important

"In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools." (Desforges 2003 p 4)

Up to 80% of the difference in achievement relates to children's lives outside of school (Save the Children 2013)

"The lives parents lead today means that it is more challenging to secure their engagement in learning, but it still remains the factor that can make a significant difference to a child's educational attainment and subsequent life chances." Harris et al 2007

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Teachers can find parents to be hard work

Teachers rank the handling of parents as more difficult than finding enough funding, maintaining discipline or enduring the toils of testing. (Gibbs 2005; Keyes 2002; Miretzky 2004).

The Sociology of Teaching, W. Waller (1932)
 "parents and teachers are natural enemies."

However:
 "A partnership based on the premise that one party is a problem is likely to be doomed from the start."
 (Hornby)

Keeping parents at arms' length is not going to work!

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The term 'Parents' does not refer to a homogeneous group - they do not all exhibit the same beliefs, desires, skills, behaviours...

And in international schools this is compounded.

"When people believe you understand them, they give you permission to influence them."
 Richard Mullender

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SCHOOL LEADERS TRAINING

WHAT DO PARENTS WANT? Dealing with Demanding Parents

(please mark an 'X' on the scale)

Teachers who believe in their child as an individual		Teachers who believe in conformity
High expectations of behaviour		Low expectations of behaviour
Lots of homework		Little homework
School discipline policy enforced strictly		School discipline policy loosely enforced
Goal of independent learning using metacognitive strategies		Pupils regurgitate facts
Active learning		Pupils sit and listen, learning from a textbook
Exciting lessons		Teaching to tests and exams

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WHAT DO PARENTS WANT?

Dealing with Demanding Parents

	(please mark an 'x' on the scale)	
Teachers who believe in their child as an individual	_____	Teachers who believe in conformity
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Active learning	_____	Learning from a textbook
Exciting lessons	_____	Pupils sit and listen

Prevention is better than cure

Find opportunities to talk. Are you visible and approachable? Could you be more so?
Share good news, not just bad 'No one likes nasty surprises'
When is the last time you undertook a survey asking for parental suggestions & input?
How do you demonstrate you care? How do you build credibility?
Embrace & celebrate inclusivity
Manage expectations and offer workshops/webinars/events on a range of topics
Use email with caution....and NEVER late in the evening after a glass of wine!
Goal is not 0% complaints

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Parents; when things start to go wrong

WHAT IS THE OVERALL AIM?
To move to a future state of improvement
Follow school policies and procedures.
Listen
NOT: "I'll talk. You listen. We'll have a good chat until you finally understand that I'm right."
"The thrill of being right is a drug that few can resist" (Bill Purdin)
People find it far easier to forgive others for being wrong than being right.

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Case studies

A parent requests a meeting with you. She says that her son received a 'D' grade on the recent report card. Her issue is that she emailed the teacher concerned a few weeks before the report was issued, and the teacher reassured her that her son was doing fine. What do you do next?
A pupil has played in the A team all season. The tournament however is for a maximum of 7 players however instead of the normal 11. It appears that no one mentioned this to either the pupils or the teacher before the team list was posted. Mrs X wants to meet with you.
You are aware that there has been a lot of criticism levelled at one of your teaching team through a parents whatsapp group. The contributions seem to be increasing by the day. Do you have a strategy at this point and if so what might it be?

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"Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings, or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behaviour."

Brené Brown




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SUMMARY

- 1) Why do we put off conversations?
- 2) Framework for planning a difficult conversation
- 3) Unexpected difficult conversations
- 4) Building professional relationships with parents

Do not underestimate the power of listening and curiosity.

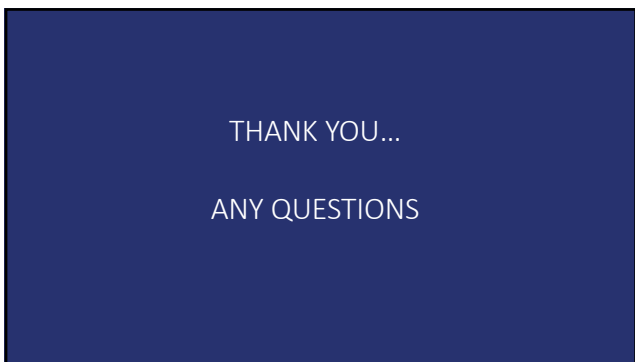


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"My life has been filled with terrible misfortune; most of which never happened."

Michel de Montaigne

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