



Leadership Development

Anywhere, Anytime

Practical Tips for School Leaders – #46

October 9, 2020

Reminders of Conscious Communication

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”
Viktor Frankl

How does a leader consciously ‘pull in ideas’ during conversations? Are there specific strategies to employ to enrich conversations, exchange meaningful ideas and work as a productive team in face-to-face and virtual platforms? Michael J. Reidy, Interaction Associates, September 2020, reminds us all of the following conversation enriching processes:

1. Be aware of the context of the conversation. A growth mindset in any conversation can help with inquiry and has the potential to develop trusting relationships. People need to know their ideas are valued.
2. In the classroom we ask teachers to use wait time, so students have an opportunity to reflect, process and comment with thoughtful responses. Adults may be uncomfortable with the silence that is needed to foster deep conversations. During the pause team members should reflect and process the ideas of the speaker. Listeners use the time to expand thinking and determine how the information the speaker has shared can be incorporated into the response/practice. How do the words of the speaker alter your thinking?
3. “Yes, and ...” - Acknowledge the points made by the speaker and expand the conversation to include your thoughts. This is an opportunity to be creative. Consensus begins with small agreements along the way.
4. Mirroring – Use of this technique requires the listener to repeat exactly what the speaker has said. If this technique is used with sincerity the speaker knows they have been heard.
5. Paraphrasing – Rephrase the speaker’s words in your own words.
6. Check for perception – This technique helps the listener restate what the speaker said to check for understanding. Checking in with this tool helps determine the emotion behind the words.

7. Use of open-ended questions – Invite the speaker to say more and expand the conversation.
8. Negative polling – This works best in an environment of trust as the leader is asking team members if they can 'live with' the idea or agreement. All participants need to feel safe sharing their true thoughts. With big decisions or large initiatives that require people change their practice it may be wise to 'go slow to go fast' over the course of time.

These conversation techniques assist in 'pulling' team members into the conversation. As you know, people work more effectively when good relationships have been established up front. Team members need to know that decisions made which impact them will be discussed. Remind stakeholders through your practice, that their involvement is important in the solution and implementation process.

How do you use these strategies to engage people in discussions? In a virtual team environment, the facilitator might make use of the chat box, ask attendees to turn on their cameras, pause for people to reflect and respond or ask participants to use the hand signal so they can be recognized for comments. Providing wait time is important and must be intentionally encouraged.