

## **Cultivating trust & change:**

A structure for having direct, difficult, & purposeful conversations

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**School Name:** South Decatur Elementary

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### **Background Leading to My Inquiry (Slide 2)**

As I reflect on my journey, this marks my eighth year in educational administration and my fourth year as Principal of South Decatur Elementary. Throughout these years, I have recognized that engaging in difficult conversations with both staff and parents presents a significant area for growth. My tendency to over-analyze situations, emotions, and potential outcomes often left me feeling apprehensive. With a commitment to fostering an environment of trust and positive rapport, I sought to develop a structured approach that would help my confidence in navigating these challenging dialogues while still prioritizing the well-being of my team and the families we serve.

### **The Purpose of My Inquiry (Slide 3)**

Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to develop a structure or format to follow when having difficult conversations. I knew that I needed to incorporate the facts, and the intended outcome - while remaining true to my harmonizer phase and the well being of my staff and parents.

### **My Wondering (Slide 4)**

With this purpose, we wondered if I could develop a system that clearly defines desired outcomes, ensuring I follow through the uncomfortable period of the conversation while also addressing the harmonizer phase? Could this establish productive change while maintaining positive rapport and trust with these person(s)?

## **My Actions (Slide 5)**

*My first* step was reading various books around difficult conversations and research efficient strategies that high level leaders use. I wanted to develop a system that I felt confident and comfortable implementing. I also needed a sense of ‘excitement’ to use this strategy to create positive change. Of course, in the back of my mind I knew I needed to take into account the emotional response (each party) that goes into the planning of the conversation as well as the follow-up.

*Next*, I began documenting how I felt leading up to the conversation. I had notes to use when preparing for the conversation.

*Then*, I documented how I felt immediately following the conversation and also the action steps needed to implement positive change.

*Finally*, I knew that I needed to add my own flair, in reaching out to see how I could help support them or if they needed anything during this expectation.

## **Data Collection (Slide 6)**

I collected data by reading books, reviewing graphics, and websites to better understand my implementation. I also documented how I felt before and after the meeting. I also wanted to document the different ways I support my harmonizer phase with the follow up and emotional connection.

## **My Data (Slides 7-9)**

I analyzed the quantitative data regarding the pre and post meeting. I also analyzed how I felt after the follow up I had with staff members. I used a template or ‘structure’ I used to preplan and then implement. This seemed to work well for me and helped my focus. I collected feedback from staff following these conversations. I also was able to review the data I had collected on myself: How did I feel before the conversation? Following? Did I find it easier to have the next one?

## **My Discoveries (Slide 10)**

- **Learning Statement One:** I discovered that a thought provoking process and template was very successful for me. It not only allowed me to think through the information and delivery, but also the intended positive outcome.
- **Learning Statement Two:** I realized the follow up was very important. It was very important to have the follow up regarding the piece of emotional well being.

• **Learning Statement Three:** I found that I was more focused, I stayed true to my intent and the difficult conversation was well received or at least understood.

I knew the template was necessary. This was the piece that kept my thoughts and focus in order. The follow up after conversation was crucial. I was able to check in about how they were doing and if they needed additional support. Finally - I was more focused and the end goal was clear. I felt more productive following the conversation and ready for positive change.

## **Where I Am Heading Next (Slide 11)**

I'm committed to continuing my progress and applying everything I've learned with this system. I'm excited about growing as a leader and becoming more confident and comfortable when these conversations arise. Going forward, my focus will be on addressing what needs to be addressed—no matter how tempting it might be to wait. The key is to just have the conversation. The more this happens, the more staff will recognize me as the same person who greets them with a good morning and checks in on them in the days that follow.

Now, I would like to take it a step further and document the action that was made after the conversation. With the difficult conversation complete, the personal well being checked on, it is now time to make sure there is follow through.

## **Bibliography (Slide 12)**

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2013). *Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high*. McGraw-Hill.

Gill, S. (2018). *Successful difficult conversations: Improve your team's performance, behaviour and attitude with kindness and success*. Hodder Education.

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& purposeful conversations

*South Decatur Elementary*

Nicole Stone

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## **Background Leading to this Inquiry:**

For the last 4 years, I knew that difficult conversations with staff and parents was an area of improvement for me. I often over analyze the situation, feelings, emotions, and the outcome. I wanted to focus on a structure that would help me feel confident in my abilities while still leading to trust and positive rapport with my staff.



## **Purpose of This Inquiry:**

Develop a structure or format to follow when having difficult conversations. I knew that I needed to incorporate the facts, and the intended outcome - while remaining true to my harmonizer phase and the well being of my staff and parents.

## **My Wondering:**

Can I develop a system that; clearly defines desired outcomes, ensures I follow through the uncomfortable period of the conversation while also addressing the harmonizer phase? Could this establish productive change while maintaining positive rapport and trust with these person(s)?



# My Actions:

My first step was reading various books around difficult conversations and research efficient strategies that high level leaders use. I wanted to develop a system that I felt confident and comfortable implementing. I also needed a sense of 'excitement' to use this strategy to create positive change. Of course, in the back of my mind I knew I needed to take into account the emotional response (each party) that goes into the planning of the conversation as well as the follow-up.

I began documenting how I felt leading up to the conversation. I had notes to use when preparing for the conversation. I documented how I felt immediately following the conversation and also the action steps needed to implement positive change. I knew that I needed to add my own flair, in reaching out to see how I could help support them or if they needed anything during this expectation.



# Data Collection:



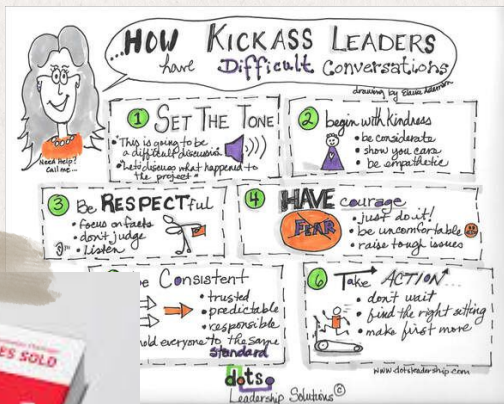
a change of heart

## SUCCESSFUL DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN SCHOOL

Improve your staff's performance, behaviour and attitude with kindness and success



SONIA GILL



### 5 Ways to Structure Difficult Conversation



- I feel...
- I fear...
- I need...



- I like...
- I wish...
- What if...



- What you'd like them to stop doing?
- What you'd like them to keep doing?
- What you'd like them to start doing?



- Outline views on Situation,
- Outline views on Behaviour,
- Outline views on Impact.



- State the specific event, action or behaviour (and frequency).
- State the impact of that behaviour.
- Next time/new behaviour, "I'd like to encourage" or "I wish..."

### Difficult Conversations Preparation Map



Considerations	Details
Identify the situation and describe different points of view.	
What is the purpose of the conversation?	
Describe the impact the situation may have.	
List the other person's beliefs, mood, etc. that might impact the outcome.	
Describe any concerns with having this conversation.	
What are some options for time and location of the conversation?	
Describe the desired outcome for this conversation.	
Is this conversation worth having?	

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

a fable about communication

## Difficult Conversations Don't Have to be Difficult

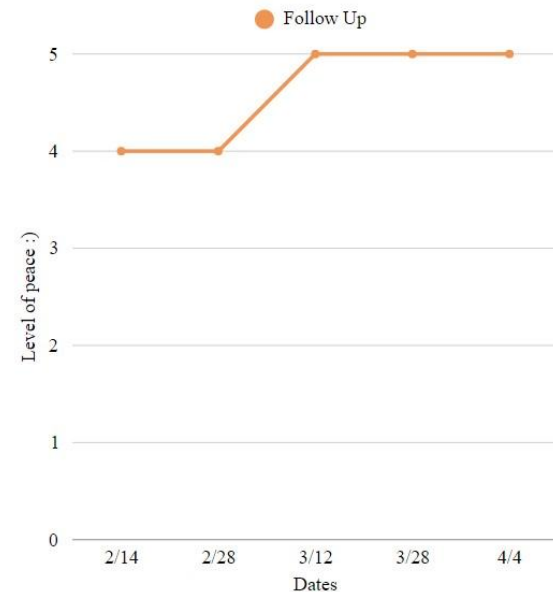
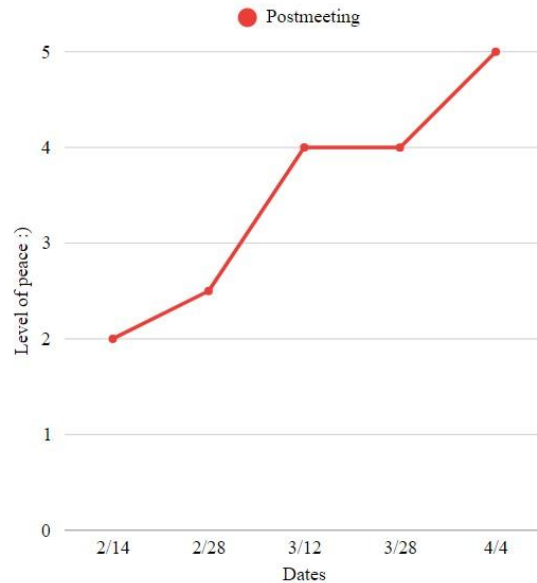
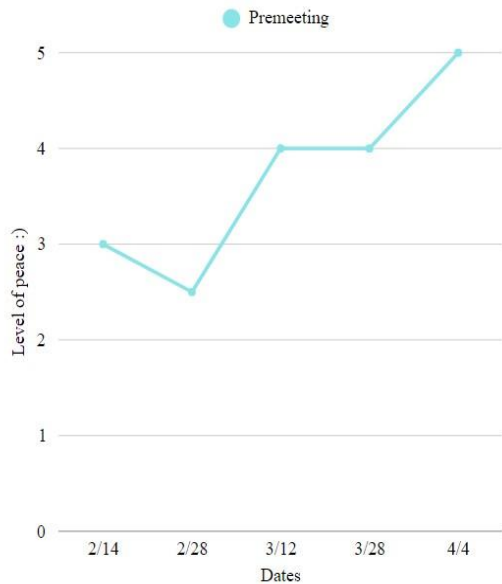


A SIMPLE, SMART WAY TO MAKE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS AND TEAM BETTER

Jon GORDON  
Bestselling author of  
The Energy Bus

Amy P. KELLY  
Bestselling Co-Author of  
The Energy Bus Field Guide

# My Data:



# My Data:

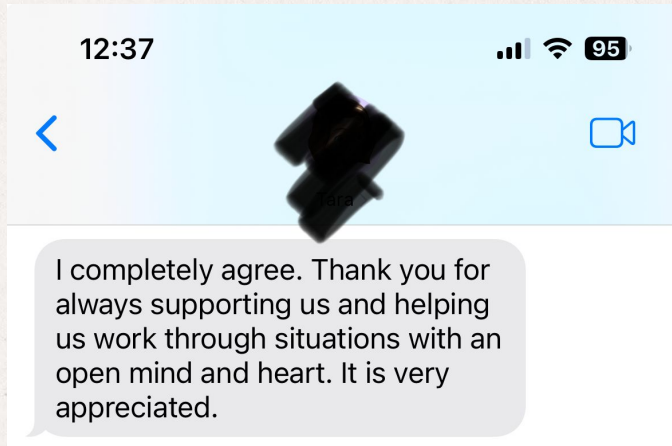
## NOTES:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principle #1: Start with Heart.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principle #2: Learn to Look/Listen.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principle #3: Make it Safe.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principle #4: Master your plan (facts)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principle #5: State your Plan.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principle #6: Invite Dialogue and listen</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principle #7: Move to Action.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nicole's Follow Up:</li></ul>

# My Data:

One thing you would like administration to know, see, or hear:

Thank you for the wake up call and meeting you scheduled last week. I needed to have someone push me and you did that. I appreciate your willingness to listen and always follow up.



## SDES Mental Health Check-in



Please look at the image above and pick your color.

- ☐ red
- ☒ orange
- ☐ yellow
- ☐ green
- ☐ blue
- ☐ purple



## **My Discoveries:**

I discovered that a thought provoking process and template was very successful for me. It not only allowed me to think through the information and delivery, but also the intended positive outcome. It was very important to have the follow up regarding the emotional well being. I found that I was more focused, I stayed true to my intent and the difficult conversation was well received or at least understood.

## Where Am I Heading Next:

I'm committed to continuing my progress and applying everything I've learned with this system. I'm excited about growing as a leader and becoming more confident and comfortable when these conversations arise. Going forward, my focus will be on addressing what needs to be addressed—no matter how tempting it might be to wait. The key is to just have the conversation. The more this happens, the more staff will recognize me as the same person who greets them with a good morning and checks in on them in the days that follow.



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*Thank you!*

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