

# Good Conversations Process

Adapted from Scott (2004) and Abrams (2009)

## Overview

Relationships in our schools are varied and complex, and at the heart of our work are conversations. At Bright Morning, we believe every conversation counts. In our work, our relationships will be tested in myriad ways. As much as we want each day and situation to go smoothly, there are moments where we might run into dilemmas with colleagues, challenges with supervisors, obstacles with families.

The following process gives you a frame for entering trickier conversations so that you may collectively work towards a successful outcome that ultimately serves your students in their learning and you in your growth.

## *Steps of Good Conversations When Challenges Arise*

- **Determine the most pressing issue.** State the issue or problem.
- **Clarify the issue.** The issue/problem must include what people will not do and/or what is the desired behavior. This results in a data search that could include both quantitative and qualitative data.
- **Review the current impact.** Specify what is currently happening and, if applicable, what should be continued.
- **Decide what will happen if nothing changes.** Determine what will happen if there are no changes, and what would be your next actions.
- **Determine one's personal contribution.** Contributions can be covert and overt. One must determine what to say or do. Doing nothing contributes to the status quo.
- **Describe the ideal outcome.** One must be able to describe the ideal state. Unless this state can be detailed, it can never be reached.
- **Commit to action.** Plans should be made specifying to what you are committed and the related timeline. This is best done with a small group to elicit a specific commitment. If done with a large group like a faculty, only general commitments will be possible.

## **PREPARATION:**

Context: What is the context for this conversation? Who is involved?

Disposition: How do you want to show up to this conversation?

Framing: Use these steps as a scaffold to frame the conversation.

Name the issue: *"I want to talk with you about the effect \_\_\_\_\_ is having on \_\_\_\_\_."*

Select a specific example that illustrates the behavior or situation you want to change: *"For example, \_\_\_\_\_."*

Describe your emotions around the issue: *"I feel \_\_\_\_\_."*

Clarify why this is important—What is at stake to gain or lose for you, for others, for the team, or for the organization: *"From my perspective the stakes are high. \_\_\_\_\_ is at stake. And most importantly, \_\_\_\_\_ is at stake."*

Identify your contribution(s) to this problem: *"I recognize my role in this situation. I have/may have \_\_\_\_\_. For this, I apologize."*

Indicate your wish to resolve this issue: *"I want to resolve this with you (restate the issue)"*

*Example of what this might look like from a situation where a colleague wasn't holding up his/her/their end of a collaborative relationship.*

*I want to talk with you about the effect the struggles in our collaboration are having on my workload. For example, when you said that you would take care of planning this current unit, I imagined that you would be presenting us with a plan (and new materials) a week in advance of teaching it. I felt stressed the night before the lesson when I still hadn't received any materials, and all I got from you was a reading you were considering but hadn't settled on. From my perspective the stakes are high. Our curriculum and lessons—and how they serve our students—is at stake. Our ability to be thoughtful in our delivery of a good lesson is at stake; our collaborative relationship is impacted. And most importantly, the student experience is at stake. I also recognize my role in this situation. I may have said something sooner than today and shared my anxiety prior to this point. For this, I apologize. I want to resolve this with you and ensure we set up good protocols for collaboration that ensure everyone agrees to similar expectations. I sincerely want to understand your perspective on this as well.*

How did these words land with you?...

### **COMMUNICATION:**

- Practice what you are going to say. Imagine how the other person might respond.
- Give your partner time to respond by asking for their response to what you shared.
- Inquire into your partner's views. Use paraphrasing and ("Let me make sure I understand...") and expansive listening.
- Address any emotions that surface.

### **CONCLUSION:**

If possible, seek some sort of "resolution," even if that means to follow up at a later time. Some possible questions to consider:

- What was learned?
- Where are we now?
- What is needed for resolution?
- What was left unsaid that needs saying?
- What is our new understanding? How can we move forward from here, given this new understanding?
- Make a new agreement and have a method to hold each other accountable for it.