

e-Leading

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL LEADERS



Over recent years highly developed emotional intelligence is identified as an essential talent for current and emerging leaders

Embracing the benefits of constructive conversations

As educators our day is filled with conversations with staff, students, parents and/or colleagues across a range of topics, demands and issues. This may be through formal channels such as organised meetings, or informal situations, which are frequently responding to unforeseen issues. Our capacity and competence to respond with ease and humility will vary due to our personal talents, natural style, past experiences, guidelines and potentially school expectations.

Reflecting on these conversations is something rarely undertaken due to limited time, other responsibilities and personal vulnerability. The

opportunity for self-reflection is core in building a realistic sense of self and so developing our own emotional intelligence. Over recent years highly developed emotional intelligence is identified as an essential talent for current and emerging leaders due to its positive impact on overall productivity, engagement and retention.

Commercial businesses have long focused on these attributes within competency statements and holistic hiring processes. As schools continue to extend their internal human resources procedures, the evaluation and support of this area is essential.

Consider for a moment your personal journey



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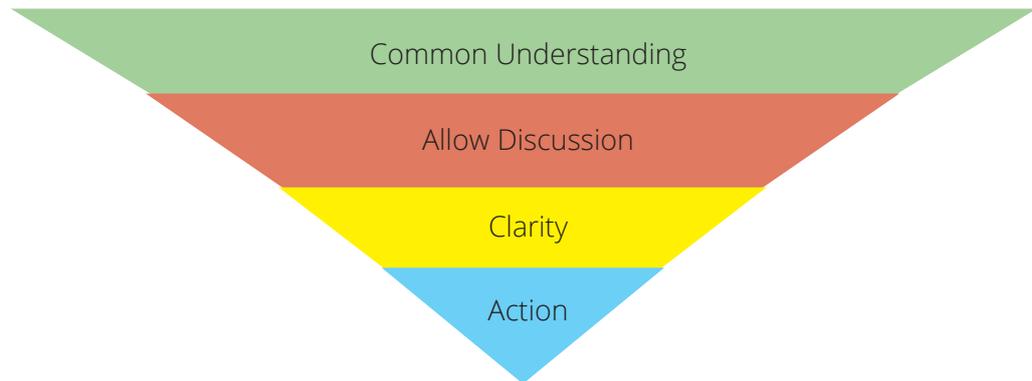
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Personal preparation and the creation of structure for reflection

Behavioural interviewing evolved as there was evidence that our past behaviours would be aligned to those in our future

to your current state. I am always inspired by the past experiences of those I work with, and how they utilise capabilities developed through seemingly unrelated paths within their present field. Reflect specifically on your experiences leaving school, your insight into particular abilities and your motivations for entering your first role or further studies.

Take your thoughts from your initial encounter with others in a professional team, through your specialised development to a position of guide, mentor or coach for others in your workplace.

Behavioural interviewing evolved as there was evidence that our past behaviours would be aligned to those in our future. Whilst these do not define us, they offer evidence of actions, reactions, drive, motivations, aspirations and methods of interacting with superiors. If we then align this thinking to our current role and involvement with colleagues, we can construct a framework for productive and action-oriented conversations.

A common statement received from educators is that we are time poor. Unfortunately this is a statement that resonates with many industries, especially in such a turbulent and fast-paced economy. Our personal preparation and the creation of structure for reflection will then support us in continuing to review our responses and reactions to improve our interactions, and to extend our professional competence. By doing so we will be well positioned to attain our career aspirations, perform with competence at formal interviews and present with confidence in meetings with those of influence.

To build proficiency:

- Allow time for **preparation**
- Utilise **regular** or formal meetings to get started
- Create a **structure** of conversation in a format that is **conductive** to your natural style
- Diarise **reflection** and refinement for continued improvement
- Involve those you trust so you can obtain independent **feedback**
- Ensure you give yourself **recognition** for your advances and achievements

Consider the diagram above as a framework for discussions.

1 Common understanding – set the scene

When meeting with others ensure there is a joint

understanding of the purpose of the discussion. For example:

“John, it’s great that we are able to have this time together to discuss the challenges you are having in writing your essays.”

From this statement of purpose we have a common agreement for the meeting, in addition to a joint value - that is, John is having difficulty in writing his essays. The discussion will allow time for him to address some of the concerns or “challenges” he has been facing. This identification of purpose will also assist the one leading the dialogue in remaining focused, particularly if they are naturally a more verbose or social person. As such it will support both parties in not becoming distracted or losing focus early on. It is of benefit to prepare this purpose and bring it in writing for your reference to commence the meeting.

2 Allow discussion

Often time-poor or problem solving individuals will seek to resolve issues as efficiently as possible. Remind yourself that the value is in the growth and so conversations will allow for questions, time to process and opportunity for healthy debate to result in consensus.

As this aspect takes the greatest proportion of time, encouraging dialogue will allow for:

- Broader thought about the situation
- Lateral options to resolve
- Deeper understanding of unknown or underlying issues

To create a comprehensive and productive exchange, ensure it encompasses the following aspects:

- a Commence with **open questions** including Who, How, When, Where and Why.
- b **Listen** for key themes, ensuring you note matters that raise emotion, are repeated or link to another area of investigation, a proposed solution, action or behaviour and so will assist in ascertaining a positive outcome.
- c Engage **investigation** to gather more information and detail on various comments. Utilise phrases such as, “Tell us more about...”, “Can you explain further?”, “That’s interesting, how could this align...?”.
- d Focus your **body language**, including eye

contact, posture and vocal skills, reinforcing positive behaviours and avoiding negative traits such as blocked poses, extended physical distance or avoidance.

3 Ensure clarity

Reflecting on your notes drafted throughout the meeting, voice key topics, phrases and repeated areas of the discussion. These references aim to link the initial purpose of the discussion to potential solutions arising from your time together. This will create consensus for next steps, actions and/or networks.

Your objective is to concisely summarise for those in attendance. It may sound like the following:

“That was a valuable discussion. From what we have discussed, would you agree it is fair to say that the core issue is? ...Today we have identified potential solutions as...”

If there is not an agreement at this time, reference should be made to points stated and examples given. This should be a rational discussion that does not create emotive responses other than calm in consensus. As teachers, leaders and coaches, our role is to draw common themes together and to find specific pathways drawn from others in the group. Great leaders will ensure that the participants feel heard and are rewarded for the efforts, involvement and insights throughout the exchange.

4 Actions

Utilising the points clarified, aim to set a few actions for specific people that are:

- Directly **related** to the purpose, i.e. core problem, issue or area of focus



- **Attainable** and practical for the people involved
- Able to be achieved in required **timelines**
- Translated into **SMART goals** for simplicity.

Relationships are made and broken through conversations so ensure you are adapting your style to suit those you are speaking with, focusing on being connected to the targeted purpose. Often we will become highly rational when setting actions so ensure you commence and conclude all meetings with pleasantries such as “hello” inviting everyone into the discussion, and also an appreciative, “thank you” to all involved. At the end of the day we are working with people; we all like to be treated with humility and compassion.

Relationships are made and broken through conversations so ensure you are adapting your style to suit those you are speaking with...

Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.

Plato

Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity. We can choose to use this force constructively with words of encouragement, or destructively using words of despair. Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate and to humble.

Yehuda Berg

The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.

Peter Drucker

Brevity is the soul of wit.

William Shakespeare

To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.

Tony Robbins

The two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through.

Sydney J. Harris

Everything becomes a little different as soon as it is spoken out loud.

Hermann Hesse