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FOUR CONDITIONS FOR TRUST

Building trust takes time and patience, as well as a common language so people can talk about this construct. Where do we begin?

In a review of the literature and research on trust, Vodicka (2006) discovered and defined four conditions that comprise trust in schools: consistency, compassion, communication, and competency.

FOUR CONDITIONS OF TRUST IN SCHOOLS

1. *Consistency*: The messages for different audiences—parents, staff members, students, and the community—carry the same meaning.
2. *Compassion*: The act of caring for another; in a relationship, it implies there is a semblance of protection, and that one person will not do harm to the other person.
3. *Communication*: Citing other researchers, Vodicka characterizes communication as offering and requesting feedback on performance within safe conditions.
4. *Competence*: Displaying and counting on one another to complete a task with efficiency and efficacy.

When these four conditions are present, schools can expect the following outcomes:

- A more positive school climate
- An increased orientation to innovation
- Improved collaboration among faculty (Vodicka, 2006)

High levels of trust also have academic benefits. In one study, “schools with high levels of trust between school professionals and parents, between teachers and the principal, and among teachers were *three times more likely to improve in reading and mathematics* than those schools with low levels of trust” (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, my emphasis).

To initiate the development of trust, it starts with us as leaders. In one study that Vodicka (2006) reviewed, “how much teachers trust their principal is wholly

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dependent on the behaviors of the principal” (p. 28). In other words, we must take that first step in developing positive relationships with each of our faculty members.

Building trust may take years to establish and sustain. Yet teachers deserve our faith in their capacity to change. We have no crystal ball, so let us assume renewal is possible.

An example: In one school where literacy consultant Routman (2014) had led several weeklong professional learning residencies, a reluctant teacher finally shared his thoughts aloud during a whole faculty discussion. When she asked him what took so long to contribute, he responded, “I’ve been watching you. I had to be sure I could trust you” (p. 21). Routman noted that this was their third year of working together and that the teacher’s students finally began to make modest gains because he had started participating in the professional learning and trying some of the ideas in his classroom.

When we convey trust, we communicate “I believe in you” and “You can do this.” The rest of this chapter describes specific actions leaders can take to foster these four conditions. Our end goal is to create a sustainable, self-directed school of leaders and learners. We begin by shifting some of the power to where it belongs: with the teachers and the students in the classroom.

ACTIVITY 3.1

ANALYZE YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL EXPERIENCE

I have conducted this exercise with leaders during workshops, to help them understand how limited our experience is in our respective schools. This activity gives us perspective and helps us understand how important it is that we trust in and learn with our teachers.

1. Draw a table.
2. Include a row for every grade level or subject area taught in your school.
3. Add columns representing years of teaching experience.
4. Put an “X” in the box for the number of years teaching in a grade level or subject area.

Here is what my table looks like.

Grade level	Years of teaching experience						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4-year-old kindergarten							
Kindergarten							
Grade 1							
Grade 2							
Grade 3	X						
Grade 4	X						
Grade 5						X	

As you can see, I have one year of teaching in grades 3 and 4, and six years of teaching in grade 5. I have no experience teaching at the primary level. What this tells me is I have much to learn, and that the teachers in most of our classrooms likely hold considerably more knowledge about instruction at their level. Trusting our teachers in their instructional decision-making is what leading like a coach is all about.

- What did you discover from this exercise?
- Where do you have much to learn?
- What are ways that you can serve as a coach to teachers who have more teaching experience than you in a certain grade or subject area?

CONDITION 1: CONSISTENCY

Students benefit from consistency. This goes for professionals too. Being consistent, such as through daily and nonjudgmental classroom visits, helps others predict the future. A sense of knowing what is likely to come reduces anxiety and increases confidence.

Consistency is not by itself a trust builder. (Devin Vodicka recommends that all four conditions of trust—consistency, compassion, communication, and competence—be present at the same time.) As leaders, we want to aim for the kind of predictability that effectively supports teachers and students. This requires understanding how we are perceived by staff when we speak, communicate

information, and act. The following practices can help you achieve greater consistency.

Collective Commitments

To build a trusting environment, a school can develop collective commitments. Collective commitments define our beliefs and values, how we behave, and what we know to be true (DuFour et al., 2016).

In my first year at my current school, I invited interested teachers to help craft statements as potential collective commitments. Relevant professional articles were read prior to help initiate the process. Here are the seven statements we crafted together and presented to our colleagues for consideration.

Our Collective Commitments: What a Trusting School Looks Like

- 1.** I will be open to and ready for learning from others as professionals and colleagues.
- 2.** I will hear others' ideas in various learning communities and be willing to try a variety of practices.
- 3.** I will assume best intentions in our colleagues (positive presupposition) and help create a sense of belonging.
- 4.** I will honor the whole child by treating them with respect and care and attend to their social and emotional needs.
- 5.** I will listen to the concerns of our students' families, address their needs to the best extent possible, and make them feel welcome in the school.
- 6.** I will utilize more promising practices to deliver a coherent and relevant curriculum across all grade levels.
- 7.** I will hold all students to high academic and behavioral expectations regardless of background, label, or past experiences.

To ensure agreement around the commitments, I asked teachers to respond to each statement with a rating of 1 to 5, with a 1 being "I cannot commit to this statement," a 3 being "I am fine with this statement," and a 5 being "I will champion this statement." If the average for each commitment was a 3 or

above, we considered that consensus. We did not need everyone to be a 5, but we did need everyone to have input and know they could live with these commitments. (We did accept all commitments as written.)

These commitments are now referenced during staff meetings and classroom visits. They provide parameters for the work. For example, when I noticed a teacher guiding students to set their own learning goals, I asked her how she learned about this promising practice (Collective Commitments 1 and 6).

These commitments also give educators a common language when engaging in any professional dialogue, whether they are formal collaborations or informal conversations in the hallway. If someone's words or actions stray from these agreements, we can reference them to redirect any discussion that might be less than professional. But this is easier said than done, which is why schools also need collaborative norms to achieve consistency.

If collective commitments describe what a trusting school looks and sounds like, then collaborative norms define how people convey trustworthiness.

Collaborative Norms

If collective commitments describe *what* a trusting school looks and sounds like, then collaborative norms define *how* people convey trustworthiness. Collaborative norms are coaching skills: ways of listening, responding to one another, and sharing ideas productively. These actions help professionals open lines for successful communication.

The collaborative norms we use in our school come from the world of Cognitive Coaching (Costa et al., 2016).

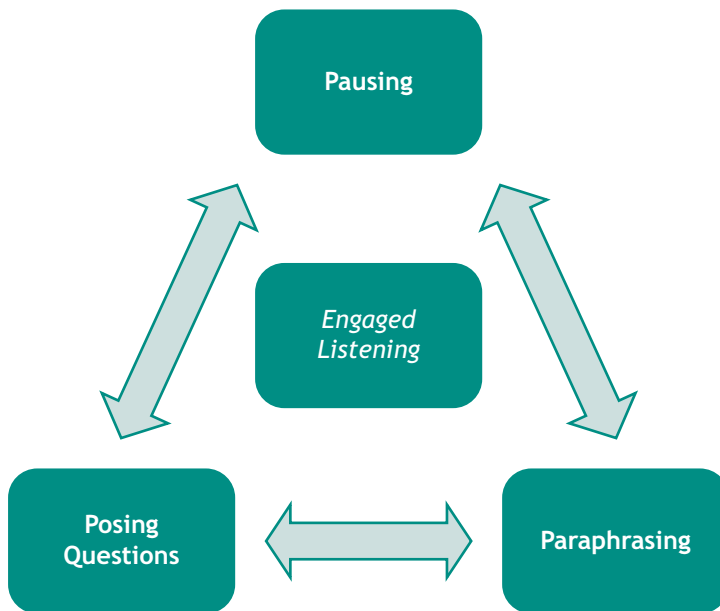
Our Collaborative Norms: How We Will Convey Trustworthiness

- 1. Pausing:** To provide wait time/silence for the other person to think and to process their thinking
- 2. Paraphrasing:** To restate what the other person said in the way you heard what was shared
- 3. Posing Questions:** To ask questions to clarify what is shared, to cause someone to think differently about the situation, or to reflect on an experience

4. *Putting Ideas on the Table*: To offer suggestions to choose from for next steps
5. *Providing Data*: To share information from an experience as evidence for analysis, evaluation, and reflection
6. *Paying Attention to Self and Others*: To be mindful about our own actions, language, and thoughts as well as others' actions and language
7. *Presuming Positive Intentions*: To assume someone's actions come from a positive place

The first three norms—pausing, paraphrasing, posing questions—are the key coaching skills to utilize in our interactions with others. These three norms can be thought of as the legs for a stool that supports our larger goal: engaged listening. This concept is summarized in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Engaging listening/key coaching skills



What do these collaborative norms look like in action? Next is a series of interactions between a teacher and me that took place during informal classroom visits in his freshman English class. In this first step, I engage with the teacher by simply being present to his questions and ideas. (Note: This is from my first year in administration, as a secondary level assistant principal. What I could not remember specifically, I had to “invent the truth” [Zinsler, 1998] as I recalled this experience. Additionally, I was not using instructional walks formally, but I did engage in coaching conversations with teachers.)innovate and take more risks.

EXAMPLE 3.1: BEING PRESENT TO DISCUSS PRACTICE AND POSSIBILITIES

We were engaged in our first professional learning session as a whole faculty. The teachers were exploring the book *Classroom Instruction That Works* by Marzano et al. (2001). This text had been selected by the leadership team for the school, made up of department heads. The teacher leaders decided to focus on three instructional strategies per year over the course of three years (there were a total of nine). Our school’s vision was aligned with this commitment: to employ teaching practices with evidence that they could lead to improved student learning.

After reviewing our norms for professional dialogue, the facilitator for the session gave each group time to discuss the information that was just presented. My table neighbor and freshman English teacher Jason asked me what I thought about these ideas. “There seems to be a lot of research to support the practices, and nothing here really surprises me as being effective.” We chatted more about one of the strategies of focus, “Nonlinguistic Representations.”

Agreeing that graphic organizers could be helpful for Jason’s students to monitor their thinking while reading and organize their writing, he shared that he would start with this instructional strategy in the fall. “That sounds like a great plan—start small and experience some success. Let me know if I can be of help.”

SPECIAL NOTE: THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY WHEN SUPERVISING INSTRUCTION

During my first attempts with instruction walks, I used an iPad, a stylus, and a notetaking application. There was a convenience found in saving my digitized notes in the cloud and emailing my observations to the teacher. However, I found myself more focused on notetaking and less attentive to fostering professional rapport. In addition, the teachers were sometimes unsure if my visits were instructional walks or formal observations because of the technology present. (I always use a computer when observing instruction as part of our teacher evaluation process.) The technology may have been undermining the trust I was trying to build with faculty.

On reflection, I went back to handwriting my observational notes and then physically handing them to the teacher after scanning them in with a smartphone app (Evernote, www.evernote.com). Physically handing over my notes to the teacher reminded me to engage in a conversation with the teacher about their instruction, which over time led to increased confidence in asking follow-up questions and offering constructive feedback for possible improvement.