**6 TIPS for Creating a Culture of Candor**

1. **Establish participation ground rules.** Agreeing upon ground rules early in the process supports open dialogue (Roberts, 2008). Taking this into consideration, the team leader, usually the principal at the school level meetings or the superintendent the district level, engages the course participants in generating a list of participation ground rules. The list should consist of clear bullet points, be no more than ten items long, and is posted during every planning meeting where it is clearly visible to everyone. Course ground rules may include stay on topic, do not over participate, agree to disagree, listen, respect others’ ideas, assume good intent, and be brief. The value of establishing a clear set of participation ground rules to encourage candor cannot be overstated. The responsibility for monitoring and maintaining adherence to the ground rules should be shared by the team leader and the participants. Setting these ground rules during the first meeting sets an expectation of participation, open dialogue, and candor.
2. **Hold back.** Where candor is prevalent, people listen first and tell second. Participants shut down and do not offer their own views when perceived authority figures provide their comments and opinions first. In order to overcome this conditioning and draw out candid original thought and insight, the principal or superintendent might want to be the last to comment on a topic. It’s okay to allow for the discomfort.
3. **Ask the right questions**. Holding back does not mean the team leader abdicates involvement in the meeting. Rather, that role takes a new form. In order to stimulate participant input, team leaders should avoid the trap of projecting too much of themselves or their beliefs onto the group (Wardale, 2008). Instead, the principal or superintendent should constantly pose second level questions such as: What is your experience with that? Do you have an example? What are the ramifications of your idea? What do others think about that comment/idea? Does anyone have a contrary view? This type of questioning stretches the thinking and encourages higher levels of participation. This type of questioning is crucial to the establishment of candor in the meeting.
4. **Shut “dominant participants” down**. One of the most difficult issues to contend with when trying to establish a culture of candor among a group is how to manage overly dominant participants. Invariably, overbearing participants stifle group candor by simply dominating the discussion time. The more hesitant participants will hold back and the free flow of ideas and opinions across the group is brought to a veritable stand still. Because of this, it is imperative that team leaders are forthright in their approach to shutting dominant people down. This is aided to a great extent by establishing clear participation ground rules as described in item number one above. However, once ground rules are established and the expectations of enforcing them are set, when sensing that someone is over participating then team leaders can respectfully and candidly say to the person – “Thanks for the comments, we have heard a lot from you, so I am shutting you down for a little while.” Once the instructor deems that the individual who has been shut down should join back in the exchange, it is simple to invite the person to participate again.
5. **Be comfortable with silence.** For candor to truly take hold, everyone should participate at some point. Silence is an excellent tool to encourage candor and open participation from even the most reluctant participants. A natural tendency for team leaders to break the silence is by answering their own question or by asking the question again in a different way just to fill the dead air time. A better way to break the silence is to let the silence linger. It does not take long for participants, even very reluctant participants, to become uncomfortable with the silence of the group, thereby compelling them to offer a response to the question that was asked.
6. **Accept all input.** During meetings poor ideas and substandard input to discussions are a reality. But, team leaders should not allow that to stop the candid flow of input. They can address obviously substandard input by looking for some merit in those comments or ideas (e.g., the goal of the suggestion rather than the content, or a similar idea that might have worked in another environment than the one being discussed). They can also ask participants to think through ways flawed suggestions might be implemented in order to draw out potentially ill-fated ramifications of those ideas. It is important to remember that candor opens up the free flow of ideas and comments – both good and bad.

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