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### REFLECTION

Think of an important relationship in your life. Can you imagine that relationship without differences and at times outright conflict? Can you imagine not having the occasional challenging conversation?

Not likely.

The best relationships and organizations thrive on differences well resolved and can gain energy from challenges and conflicts. But this is the case only in organizations where participants have learned to address conflict and challenges in a positive way and where these inevitable events are viewed as a source of power and energy. The effective school leader understands this important fact and strives to both model and practice positive and effective skills for addressing challenges and conflicts. Organizations that are led well and have developed these skills achieve a level of collaboration that dysfunctional organizations can only dream about. The key remains, though, the effective, collaborative school leader who manages challenging conversations well.

## CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

- School leaders bring three core personal elements to a challenging conversation: their attitude and intentions, their interpersonal skills, and their knowledge of processes for meeting the demands of challenging conversations.
- Challenging conversations are most easily addressed in a school community characterized by respect, collaboration, and competence.
- School leaders are often judged by staff, students, and community on how they manage the challenging conversations that arise daily. One's skill in meeting these challenges can make or break a reputation. One's credibility and effectiveness are at stake.
- Dealing well with challenging conversations enhances trust in a school community and forms the basis of a collaborative school culture. It allows an organization to grow and prosper by providing a safe place to have the conversations that promote improvement.

*(Continued)*

4. Describe a situation in which you managed a challenging conversation well.
5. Describe a time that you avoided a challenging conversation. What would you do differently if you had a chance?

## CASE STUDY PRACTICE

We considered the situation of the Fun Fair with Sandy and Bert. Now it's your turn. Consider the following case study and develop a response to the following questions:

1. Which issues or concerns would you choose to address?
2. Which steps would you take in managing this conversation? Outline your goals and the actions you would take to meet those goals.

In the Resources section of the book some suggestions for addressing this scenario will be provided.

### **The Principal and the Bully**

*Principal Singh must return a call to the mother of Stacey. Stacey's mother is very upset because she believes that her child is being relentlessly bullied by other students and that the teacher and the school have done "nothing." This is the first time that the principal has heard about this bullying from the student, the teacher, or the parent.*

## YOUR PERSONAL CASE STUDY

At this point you have an opportunity to describe a challenging conversation that you have had recently. At the conclusion of subsequent chapters you will have the opportunity to reflect on how the content of the chapter may affect your interpretation of your conversation and how you might approach a similar situation differently in the future. The following page contains a template for organizing your description.

## **YOUR PERSONAL CASE STUDY**

**Describe the situation (who, what, when, where):**

**Barriers I must address:**

**Desired outcome:**

**Reflections—At the conclusion of each chapter you will have an opportunity to consider how the material in the chapter may affect your approach to your personal case study.**

## CHAPTER TWO

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# *Engaging in Challenging Conversations*

**I**n this chapter I will introduce a framework for engaging in challenging conversations and develop a process designed to increase our success in meeting the demands of challenging conversations.

First, consider the following scenario:

*It has been a long day with many meetings and other issues to address. Now it is late, and Tom, the well-respected principal of Meadowland School, is ready to go home and relax. As he is packing his bag, Tom hears a tap on the glass of the main office window. He sees Marv, an experienced teacher, standing outside the locked office. Tom, with a sigh, goes to unlock the door and see what Marv wants at this hour. The door is barely open before Marv sweeps into the office and demands that he and Tom sit down right now and talk about the new supervision schedule that has apparently upset the entire staff.*

*Tom listens briefly and then stops Marv abruptly. "It has been a long day. I'm tired and we aren't having this conversation," he says sharply. Marv steps back: "What do you mean? Everyone is really angry about this change—they didn't know it was coming."*

*"That may be so, but I am leaving now. We can talk tomorrow." Tom turns away and heads for the door.*

*Marv is left midsentence—gasping. This will have to be addressed another way, it seems.*