



Catholic Education Office  
Archdiocese of Melbourne

SUPPORTING WOMEN *in their*  
Leadership Journeys

# RESOURCE **4** GUIDE

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## Building Relationships

- 4.1 Relational Leadership
- 4.2 Communication Skills – Listening
- 4.3 The Hard Stuff – Conflict

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*Relationship is everything.*

*Listening is the glue. Listen to hear what you haven't heard before.*

TRINIDAD HUNT, INSPIRING LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN PROGRAM

## 4.1 Relational Leadership

### EXPLORING THE ISSUE

The *Leadership Standards Framework* (CECV 2005) establishes the importance of relationships for leaders in Catholic schools. Its five guiding conceptions of leadership include building and maintaining relationships:

*The leader is persuasive, convincing others to join in the effort. He/she exercises the interpersonal and facilitative skills of listening, joint problem solving, honouring other people's ideas, and maintaining focus, but also knowing when to be decisive, to cut to the heart of something, to move the group forward to action* (CECV 2005, p. 5).

Relational leadership is also one of five approaches described in *Women and Educational Leadership* by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011).

Brunner (2000) is one of many researchers who argue that women tend to see themselves in relationship with others, rather than in charge of others.

*Women's conceptions of power are closely tied to the importance they place on relationships. Power used to help others strengthens relationships, while power used to control damages relationships.* (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011, p. 7)

Power is something to be shared in this case. Relational leaders use a leadership approach that is horizontal as opposed to hierarchical. They receive input from others and use approaches that empower others.

Leaders play a role in the learning of others through the relationships they

build. McCauley and Van Velsor (2004) propose that relationships built through mentoring and coaching can challenge people to continue their learning and live up to their potential. Leaders can develop others through the different roles they play within three areas:

- assessment – feedback provider, sounding board, benchmark, feedback interpreter
- challenge – dialogue partner, access to challenging assignments, accountability, role model
- support – counsellor, cheerleader, rewarder, companion.

### THE WOMEN SAY

Relationships were mentioned frequently by the *Round Table Forum* participants when they spoke about their leadership journeys. Many stressed the importance of the relationships and networking they had built through the *Inspiring Leadership for Women* program. They spoke of the relationships outside the school that provided them with support, such as a 'critical friend', principals or leaders who share the same work issues, family and friends and other organisations (charities, church, sports clubs, etc.).

Other comments made about the successful management of relationships were:

*'(When listening), empty the person of their information, for example, keep asking questions until the person has nothing left to say, then ask permission to provide feedback on some of the things said.'*

*'You cannot underestimate the importance of relationships with staff and community in the ups and downs of principalship. Build relationships – trust others.'*

*'You can't just have relationships with students and the people in your "box" ... just the people you trust.'*

*Round Table Forum* participants were introduced to neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), which explores the different styles that people use to take in information (visual, auditory or kinesthetic). The women completed an audit to identify their predominant style and learnt ways to use this knowledge to communicate with others, help build relationships and create rapport. An online program on communication skills is provided on [Trinidad Hunt's website](#).

### SHARING THE LEARNING

Building relationships is a key element of the *Inspiring Leadership for Women* program, with much of the program focusing on strategies for nurturing and sustaining relationships. The advice offered by the participants included:

- Deepen your communication and listening skills.
- Acknowledge people for work well done and contributions made to the team.
- Clean up 'broken promises' to people on your teams and in your schools.
- Follow through on commitments made.
- Keep your word or change it responsibly.
- Put more into your relationships than you take from them.
- Raise the energy rather than lower it.
- Ask open-ended questions to engage team members in thinking.
- Encourage people to the point that it helps them dare to do what is difficult.
- Build authentic relationships.

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## 4.2 Communication Skills – Listening

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### EXPLORING THE ISSUE

In the *Inspiring Leadership for Women* program, Hunt quotes Dr Ralph Nichols, founder of the study and development of the field of listening. He says, 'The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.'

Listening forms empathy and is crucial for building relationships and communicating effectively with others. Hunt explains that listening is the glue that holds relationships together because:

- listening demonstrates caring
- focused listening makes the other person feel appreciated
- it is giving up what you want to say
- it is letting go of your personal agenda
- it is self-forgetting for a moment
- we listen to understand more deeply
- we listen to learn more thoroughly.

In her article 'Top 10 leadership tips for women on campus' (2005), Lord Larson emphasises the importance of communication:

*You must be able to communicate in a way that inspires others to help you reach your goal ... If you look over your shoulder and no one is behind you, you are not leading. Communication involves both good speaking and effective listening. Being able to listen to different voices and bring about consensus or resolution is an important skill in leadership. Listen first, and then act.*

Davies (2006) talks about engagement with others to build relationships and

notes that individuals are connected through the conversations they have. If these are strategic conversations, a unique and powerful perspective can be developed to enhance the school. Davies emphasises that:

*Leaders need to take the informal opportunities to interact with others to discuss the problems of the present, but also to engage in a dialogue about the challenges of the future. The conversation over coffee or walking to the car park can be just as important as more formal meetings (p. 61).*

### THE WOMEN SAY

Listening is an aspect of the *Inspiring Leadership for Women* program that has a deep impact on the leadership practices of the participants. Listening is at the heart of relationship building. It is a theme woven through the three-day program and is encouraged in every activity and discussion. During the , learning about the skill of listening was reiterated with phrases such as:

*Listen with your whole self.  
Honour others when listening.  
Listen with love.  
Listen with eyes as well as ears.*

### SHARING THE LEARNING

In the *Inspiring Leadership for Women* program, Hunt introduces participants to the listening symbol, which is used to demonstrate how to improve listening skills. It is developed more fully in her work, *Learning to Learn: Maximizing Your Performance Potential* (Hunt 1992).

The different parts of the symbol refer to:

- listening with your ears and eyes
- listening with undivided attention

- listening with a positive attitude
- listening with the heart.



In her [Listening](#) e-seminar, Hunt provides a 'Listening Inventory' to map listening styles and to identify skills for using listening as a strategic advantage. Hunt talks about old habits that prevent us from listening well. She emphasises the importance of listening as a strategy for building teams.

Mowat (2010), in his online article, [Conversation skills – Avoid the 10 ways to kill a conversation](#), advocates that when listening to a person:

- listen for them (in spite of how many habits you have that drive listening to yourself)
- believe in them (in spite of how hard this is sometimes and how much you want to give them the answer)
- unconditionally respect them (in spite of how hard they might make this).

More advice from Mowat on this matter is presented in [Appendix 1](#).

Mowat et al. (2009) explore listening styles in their book on growth and leadership, titled, *The Success Zone: 5 Powerful Steps to Growing Yourself and Leading Others*. The authors emphasise that engagement and influence are high when we detect that someone is listening to us *for us*, and less when we detect them listening to us *for them* (pp. 102–103).

The first step to improving our listening as leaders is to identify the purpose of our listening. Mowat et al. (2009) caution that you should *not* be listening:

- to only get the information that you want
- to external distractions
- to your own thoughts and not listening to other person at all
- for how you can benefit
- for a gap to say something
- for an opportunity to
  - sound intelligent
  - say something funny
  - make yourself sound important
  - one-up the other person
  - undermine the other person's point of view or position
  - change or end the conversation.

Mowat et al. (2009) present two models of listening. The first is **observational listening**, which focuses the listener's attention on feeding back what they hear and see to the speaker. The second is **optimistic listening**, where we listen with the expectation that the speaker has responsibility for the solution to the issue.

*Optimistic and observational listening are universal habits of unconditional care and love: they apply to and enhance any relationship or engagement ... (p. 125).*

Try listening with the intent of not speaking at all (other than to encourage the speaker). Letting go of the urge to speak ourselves enables us to free our mind to listen with full attention to the other person. In her [Listening e-seminar](#), Hunt calls this 'self-forgetting' or 'stepping aside from the ego'.

Improving our listening skills can only be done by practice, and leaders are encouraged to get out into their staffrooms at lunchtimes and other times to really listen to their staff to see things from their perspective.

## 4.3 Conflict – The Hard Stuff

### EXPLORING THE ISSUE

Research tells us that conflict is a normal part of life and relationships – it is the way that it is resolved that is important. Schooley (2004) writes:

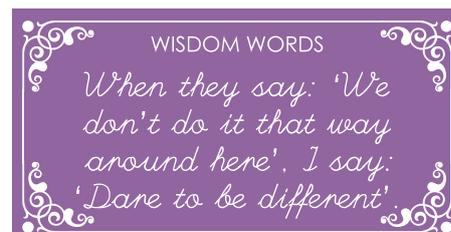
*Managing conflict is an essential life skill. Well-managed conflict contributes to the improvement of personal relationships and the productivity of organisations for which we work (p. 221).*

It is important for leaders to find ways to prevent conflict from escalating and to have tools to help them to resolve conflict. They may not have been exposed to effective models of conflict resolution and so need to find ways to manage conflict that suit their own style of leadership.

In their online article, '[Conflict resolution: Resolving conflict rationally and effectively](#)', Manktelow and Carlson (n.d.) identify the benefits of resolving conflict as: increased understanding, increased group cohesion and improved self-knowledge. Schooley (2004) identifies benefits such as problem awareness, improved solutions, organisational change, knowledge development, and personal growth.

Segal & Smith (2013) explain that conflict occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires. When you can recognise the legitimacy of conflicting needs and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens pathways to creative problem solving, team building, and improved relationships.

Myatt (2012) states that people in leadership need to be able to deal with conflict in a healthy, productive way. 'The ability to recognise conflict,



understand the nature of conflict, and to be able to bring swift and just resolution will serve you well as a leader.' He writes that most conflict arises from poor communication or the inability to control emotions. It is essential for organisational health and performance that conflict be accepted and addressed through effective resolution processes.

People tend to have a preferred conflict resolution style. Styles can be better suited to some situations than others. There are a number of conflict-resolution-style inventories and surveys that people can use to determine their preferred method of dealing with conflict. Thomas and Kilmann (1974), in their 'Conflict Mode Instrument', identify five different styles:

- competing – assertive, uncooperative
- avoiding – unassertive, uncooperative
- accommodating – unassertive, cooperative
- collaborating – assertive, cooperative
- compromising – intermediate assertiveness and cooperativeness.

Once people's styles are identified, they can begin to learn more appropriate methods of conflict resolution.

### THE WOMEN SAY

Dealing with conflict is high on the agenda for women in leadership. This was a concern that arose frequently in the 'World Café' discussions at the *Round Table Forum*. Participants talked about the stressful nature of the conflicts they faced. Conflict with staff and parents was of the highest concern.



## SHARING THE LEARNING

Myatt (2012) suggests that conflict in workplaces can be avoided or reduced by defining acceptable behaviour and being clear about position descriptions, delegation of authority, professional learning, communication channels and how decisions are made. Leaders can be proactive about recognising where conflict may arise and intervene in a just and decisive way. It is important to understand other people's perspective and what motivates them.

Segal & Smith (2013) claim that the ability to successfully resolve conflict depends on your ability to manage stress, while remaining alert and calm. Successful resolution also involves controlling your emotions and behaviour, paying attention to feelings and words, and being aware of and respectful of differences. The authors also offer the following useful tips for ensuring that the resolution process is as positive as possible:

- **Listen for what is felt as well as said.** When we listen, we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people.
- **Make conflict resolution the priority rather than winning or 'being right'.** Maintaining and strengthening the relationship should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint.
- **Focus on the present.** Rather than holding on to grudges based on past resentments, and/or assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
- **Pick your battles.** Conflicts can be draining, so it is important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of your time and energy.
- **Be willing to forgive.** Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive.

- **Know when to let something go.** If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

## Crucial Conversations

Patterson et al. (2012) describe crucial conversations as those we have when the stakes are high, opinions vary and emotions run strong. These are the types of conversations we have when conflict is involved. The authors present a 'Model of Dialogue' for dealing with crucial conversations. The model has at its centre what they describe as the 'pool of shared meaning'. When people enter crucial conversations, they do not have the same pool. It is essential that leaders make the space safe to enable people to share perceptions and feelings and to state what they want as an outcome. Such sentiments are added to the pool of shared meaning. This pool enables people to make choices based on accurate and relevant information, which in turn improves the quality of decisions.

The 'Model of Dialogue' also points out that negative reactions to conflict can be divided into Silence (withdrawing, avoiding, masking) or Violence (controlling, labelling, attacking). We can fuel this by the stories that we tell ourselves, which then justify the way we feel.

The model provides a way for leaders to develop skills in conducting a crucial conversation objectively and calmly. See [Appendix 2](#) for more information.

## Conflict just is!

In the *Inspiring Leadership for Women* program, participants are given a card entitled Conflict just is! (Élan Enterprises 2000) which states:

*Conflict is unavoidable. As long as there are human beings, there will be conflicting thoughts, feelings, and points of view. The critical skill in conflict is not avoidance, nor is it simply the ability to get along. The most important skill that we can develop is the ability to 'argue' well, the ability to disagree in a healthy manner.*

Conflict provides an opportunity to enrich the dialogue around issues or subjects, but certain steps need to be in place to deal with conflict in a proactive, positive way. People can deal with conflict in different ways – avoidance, defence or attack – but can choose to break this response. Hunt suggests that we:

1. freeze frame for a second and take a deep breath
2. use a non-confrontational style to open the dialogue with the other person
3. establish the goal, ask and listen to understand the other person's values, interests and perceptions
4. brainstorm together to find a higher common ground.

(See Trinidad Hunt's website, [Teaching and Learning Cards.](#))

Properly managed, conflict produces higher order restructuring. As we learn to view conflict as an opportunity and as a means to enrich the dialogue around issues or subjects, higher levels of creativity and innovation become available to those involved.

JAMES 1: 19

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*

PHILIPPIANS 2: 4

*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

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## Appendix 1

### 10 WAYS TO KILL A CONVERSATION

There are many ways that we can disengage another by applying conversation-killing habits. Oftentimes we don't even know that we have reduced the engagement. The secret element of connection with another person is **attention**. Not just any attention – authentic attention on them *for them*.

Each of the conversation killers listed below act in some way to drain your available attention, or allow you to use the available attention for yourself, not the other person.

- **Killer #1:** Distraction – attention on your own thinking, activities or needs.
- **Killer #2:** Assumption – assuming where the conversation is going, what they need or finishing sentences for them.
- **Killer #3:** Judgement – making value judgements on them, their thinking or actions.
- **Killer #4:** Interruption – not allowing them to finish.
- **Killer #5:** Not listening to them – listening for your chance to say something, listening to yourself.
- **Killer #6:** I have the answer – a common form of assumption.
- **Killer #7:** You must be wrong – a common form of judgement.
- **Killer #8:** Total Control – you need to steer where the conversation goes.
- **Killer #9:** Dominate – you do more talking than listening.
- **Killer #10:** Focus on yourself – you are more concerned for your outcomes than theirs.

NOTE: Ways to combat these conversation killers can be found in the work of Mowat, Corrigan and Long (2009), *The Success Zone: 5 Powerful Steps to Growing Yourself and Leading Others*.

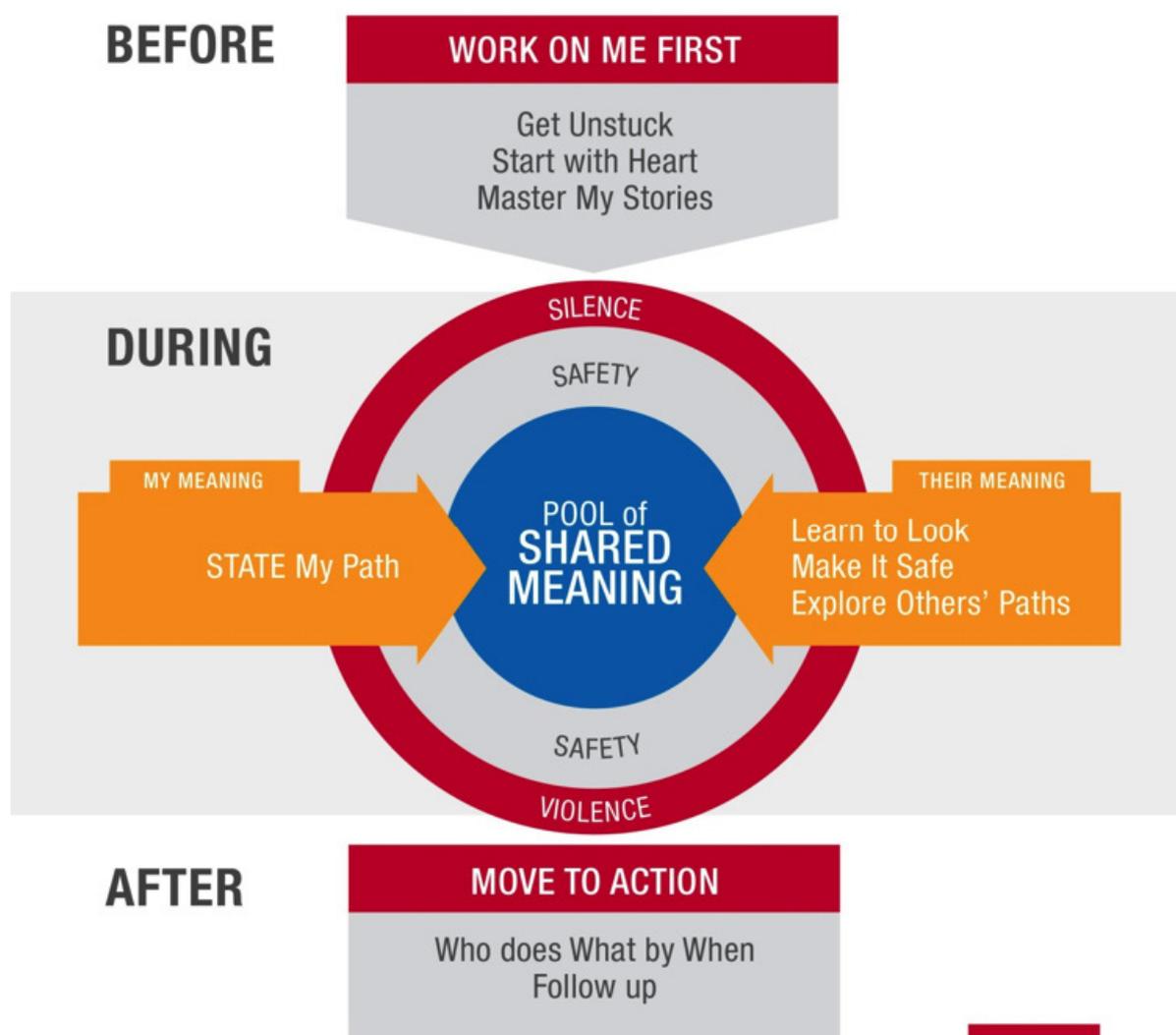
Source: Andrew Mowat 2010

An excerpt from [Conversation skills: Avoid the 10 ways to kill a conversation](#).

# Appendix 2

## MODEL OF DIALOGUE

### CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS MODEL



**VitalSmarts**  
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VitalSmarts 2012 Model of Dialogue from Crucial Conversations Training Program [www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com), and Patterson, K, Grenny, J, McMillan, R and Switzler, A 2012 Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes are High, McGraw Hill, USA.