

## CM Toolkit

*Corps members often express feeling overwhelmed and displeased as a result of the situations they experience and requirements they have from their campuses, with certification partners, and with Teach for America. This feeling of stress is contributing to CMs' emotional, spiritual, occupational, and sometimes physical health. The purpose of this toolkit is to help Teach for America corps members improve their skills in navigating difficult, stress-inducing situations and tensions with stakeholders to ultimately improve their overall wellness. This toolkit seeks to prepare CMs to have difficult conversations about situations with misaligned values, advocating against inequitable policies, excessive pressure, and lack of support/strategies.*

*The toolkit is comprised of four components:*

1. **Self-Exploration Protocol:** Prepare to address tension with stakeholders by reflecting through the lens of TOL
2. **Planning for Difficult Conversations:** Brainstorm for the timing and content of the conversation
3. **Tips for During the Conversation:** Toolkit will include tips for ensuring professionalism during a difficult conversation
4. **Build Resilience/Take Action:** Reflect on the outcome. Take action or build resilience
- 5.
6. Before or after the conversation as a coaching tool and the person needs to be willing.
- 7.
8. What can you control that needs to shift in order for this to happen? What needs to happen for this to occur

## Self-Exploration Protocol

### What is the problem/conflict/tension you're seeking to address:

State the problem and what you believe to be true about it. Share any relevant context to better help you prepare for the conversation you'll be having.

- What do you know about the problem?
- What do you know about why the problem exists?
- What are the implications of not addressing the problem?
- What are the implications of addressing this issue?

### Acknowledge the limitations of my perspective:

- Am I allowing my knowledge of TFA, beliefs, or limited experience in this setting short-circuit the listening I ought to do?
- What relevant and diverse points of view am I missing?
- What are my awareness gaps? How much do I actually know about the problem/issue/tension?
- What additional knowledge do I need to fully understand the issue?
- Am I really hearing dissenting opinions? Have I gotten the other person's perspective?

### Recognize and respect people's narratives, experiences and assets:

- What do I know about the other person's experiences in this professional setting? What do I know about the role they're in?
- What do you know about this person's background or culture? How might this be impacting communication?
- What do you know about their "why?" How might that play into what you've observed so far?
- What strengths does this person possess? What are their assets?

### Examine how privilege and oppression operate systemically, inform my worldviews, and influence my interactions with others:

- How did I come to believe what I believe about myself, others, and the world at large?
- What biases do I hold in this situation?
- Where do they come from, and how might they be hindering my work towards equity, specifically in this instance?
- What is it about me (my background, experiences, race/ethnicity, gender, age, or other) that might be an **asset** in this conversation/encounter?
- What is it about me (my background, experiences, race/ethnicity, gender, age, or other) that might present a **challenge** in this conversation/encounter?

### Cultivate self-awareness about my strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, and my impact on others:

- What is it that I am good at?

- Where do I have room to grow?
- How do others perceive me?
- What does this mean for how I work with other people?
- How am I feeling about this situation right now? And how might that impact the way I show up in a conversation?

**Regularly reflect on the alignment between my values, decisions, actions, and impact:**

- What are my values?
- How do have the values I hold been driving my decisions, actions, and inaction?
- How is the impact I am having aligned with my values?
- How do you want your values to show up in the conversation/interaction you want to have?

## Planning the Conversation

### Know your timing:

- When is the best time to approach the other party? Why?
- Schedule an in-person conversation.

Send an email:

I would like to have a meeting to discuss

### Be clear about what you want or need from this interaction:

- What outcome do you hope to achieve from this interaction?
- What is the best case scenario?

### Focus on Solution(s):

- What is the problem?
- What solution(s) are you seeking or proposing?
- What back-up solution can you think of?

### Consider the impact of the solution(s):

- What are the potential impacts of your solution on money, time, space, and people?
- How will this positively or negatively impact student achievement?

Money:

Time:

Space:

People:

### Consider other perspectives:

- What are the five most logical questions or concerns the other party would be likely to ask?
- What are the answers to those questions? (During the conversation, preemptively address these concerns).

### Focus on the facts:

- What data, evidence, and personal experience(s) do you have to back up your position, beliefs, and/or solution?

**Connect to vision/goals/beliefs:**

- How does your proposed solution connect to the school's goals, the principal's individual values, the mission of the campus/organization?

## Tips for During the Conversation

For the conversation: ***Strategic action subpractice: Operate with courage, integrity, authenticity, and respect***

Operating with courage means we act on our beliefs and values, especially when it is hard, and that we center our efforts on the aspirations of our students and their families.<sup>1</sup> Operating with integrity means we do what we say we will and we keep our promises and commitments. Operating with authenticity means deciding to be who we are and knowing that being ourselves is important to the work. We strive to show up as our most natural and inherent way of being given the situations we are in.<sup>2</sup> Operating with authenticity is not synonymous with bringing one's "full self" to work. We do not have to share every detail of our lives nor every facet of our multiple identities in order to demonstrate leadership, though we may decide to do so. Requiring someone to be their full selves overlooks the reality that sharing certain experiences or identities, including but not limited to sexual orientation, documentation status, and/or religion, can come with formidable risks that cannot and should not be forced.

Operating with respect means that we act with humility and seek to hold people in high regard, acknowledging the nuance of any given situation or context. We consider our potential impact, intended or unintended, with other people when determining what actions to take and how we might take them. Leaning on courage, integrity, and authenticity alone without respect can too easily lead us to focus on our own values, interests, and motivations over those of other people.

We operate with courage, integrity, authenticity, and respect even and especially when we are under pressure. When, for example, we, alongside others, seek to disrupt longstanding practices which have not honored or built upon the brilliance of our students<sup>3</sup>, we will need to take action that may not be popular and we lean on our courage, integrity, authenticity, and respect to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> Teach For America "[Foundations](#)"

<sup>2</sup> Be and act consistently with who I hold myself out to be for others and who I hold myself out to be for myself; giving up "looking good." [Souba](#) pp. 45-55.

<sup>3</sup> McDonald et al. "[Core practices and pedagogies of teacher education: A call for a common language and collective activity](#)"