Bad Times: Managing Crisis and Conflict as an Equity Practitioner

NYSAIS Diversity Practitioners Conference
May 2019

AGENDA
• Steps to avoid the consequences of crisis
• Steps to manage crisis
• Managing difficult people
• CLAIM our mistakes

Acknowledgments
• Getting Here
• DEI-related crisis
• I am not a lawyer

CRISIS MANAGEMENT
Conflict is guaranteed. Crisis is not.

Common Challenges
• Briefly introduce yourselves by name and pronouns around the table
• Name any DEI-related crises you have experienced or heard about in an independent school
• 5 mins for whole table: crisp and core
Three Containers

- Before, During, After
  - Advice for Yourself
    - Personally & Legally
  - Advice for Your Students & Community Members
  - Advice for your Institutional Response

Says Who?

Crisis management experts and Diversity Directors

10 Second Reflection

Nikki Giovanni

“I am so afraid of disappointing the people I love, I often forget that I am someone I love, too. And I need kindness just as much as I believe the people I love do.”

Before Crisis

Protect Yourself

- Review and restrict your social media NOW
- Consider what you post/have posted
- Consider whom you “friend”
- Restrict others’ access to posting / tagging you
- Keep your online presence timely and clean
- Be thoughtful about adding your name to documents, whether or not you name your school
- Build your professional network of people who can support you in crisis, outside of your own school

"Practice asking for help in little ways, so when you need the people who love you in big ways, the words won’t get stuck in your chest."

Ashley C. Ford

- Everything you send is discoverable; Be thoughtful about your notes, emails, and text messages.
  - Yes, your text messages are discoverable.
  - Get up and go talk to someone

- Make sure your school has legal representation with DEI experience so you can get good counsel

Supporting the Institution

- Have a crisis team and a communications plan in place with your colleagues; avoid too many cooks in the kitchen in real time
- Run case studies with your team
- Determine in advance who will support your HoS during a crisis
● Pay attention to cyclical challenges: college admissions, school admissions, alumni reunion, Parent Night, etc.
● “The calls are coming from inside the house!”
  ○ Have a protocol for any issues perpetrated by adults in the community

● Be clear about social media policies, and look at them through several angles
  ○ 24/7 Rule must be applied equally
  ○ Consider crafting policy with input from students, parents, and alums

● Make sure your community understands what affinity groups are and why they exist in your school

“Self-care is choosing not to argue with people who are committed to misunderstanding you.”

During Crisis

Protect Yourself
Human resources serves the institution, not the individual
• Remember: Every email can be forwarded, every text message can be screenshot
• Find ways to share information so rumors don’t thrive
• Keep insider info from coming back to you

• Be involved with all messages going to constituent groups
• Expect that you will learn info from the press before you learn it from the school

• Determine how to inform students without manipulating them to do what you wish you could do

• Recognize that DEI practitioners are often the first thrown under the bus
• Expect distance from the Board
• Prioritize student outreach and outreach to marginalized faculty/staff

Zora Neale Hurston

“Grab the broom of anger and drive off the beast of fear.”

• Don’t take it personally: “You are the face, but it’s not about you.”
• Keep perspective: you will come through this, regardless of behavior around you now
• Be ready to rise to the occasion, because people around you won’t be calm
• Avoid falling into savior complex
• Consider what you need to have an outlet
• Talk to a friend outside of school life
• Remember you are only one person

• If you are named in a lawsuit, consider getting your own individual counsel-- your school can be asked to provide that

• Share info quickly; Transparency is your friend
  • CYA
  • Provides time to respond and react
• Transparency is a risk
  • Own your part, face consequences

• Forward all press inquiries to HoS office/ Communications
  • Never, ever, ever respond yourself
  • “Silence may be misinterpreted, but never misquoted.”

• Keep record of everything, with an understanding that someone else might read it
  • Every meeting. Every phone call

• Follow up discussions with an email
  • “Thank you for your time today with X to discuss Y. For next steps, I will… and you will ….”
• Provide deadlines for when you need/will do things
  • Important if school is being unresponsive or unhelpful with your individual concerns

• Show up and depart work on time unless otherwise directed (on record)
  • Absence can be spun as abandonment

• If your safety is threatened, security is needed
  • Business Office and Head of School
  • School security
  • Local police force (...maybe)
  • Most issues will not reach this point

Supporting the Institution
• Make sure the diversity practitioner is involved in the conversation and every message, whether on Admin or not
  • Part of risk management and being a witness
• Keep involved students out of school, not as a suspension but as working time for your Institutional response

Supporting the Institution
• Provide open forums for different constituent groups
  • Provide affinity space alongside those forums
• Gather together the entire decision-making team, regardless of structure, to determine the best plan possible-- rather than being territorial

• Utilize the wisdom of the collective between key stakeholders
  • Admin, trustees, teacher leaders, parent leaders
  • Be transparent when info is quiet vs silent (confidentiality)
● Provide spaces for community processing
  ○ Sit with people in their grief and anger, to avoid those emotions festering and moving underground, destroying trust

● Say “We don’t know” when you don’t know
  ○ “Vulnerability in times of uncertainty can go farther than feigned certainty and political answers.”

Chad Adams

“If you don’t feed the teachers, they’ll eat the kids.”

Supporting Students & Colleagues

● Provide not just what your faculty and staff can’t say, but what they should say
  ○ Send prompts and scripted responses via email to teachers and advisors so they feel prepared for discussions with students

Jason Reynolds

Three rules for operating with young people:
1) Humility. If they say something, believe it.
2) Intimacy. Give up elements of yourself as you expect them to.
3) Gratitude. Thank kids for being themselves, for showing up.

● Meet with student affinity groups to share what you can and to plan for solidarity
● Continually check in on student groups and provide follow up to them
After Crisis

Protect Yourself
- Take a break at the end of the crisis and truly stay away so you can get yourself together

Bayard Rustin

“Let us be enraged about injustice, but let us not be destroyed by it.”

Support the Institution
- Run a post-mortem with your team

Common Saying

“Don’t take criticism from people you wouldn’t take advice from.”

PRO TIPS

There is no single pathway to navigating a crisis, but here is some advice/best practices from diversity directors who have Been There.
PRO TIPS

“Focus on the connections. What needs to be done to repair, massage, strengthen the relationship that was damaged or frayed due to the crisis?”

PRO TIPS

“What is the ‘real’ matter? Tune out the noise and tune in to the pain and frustration.”

PRO TIPS

“Reimagine a different structure or way of doing something that heals this crisis and better positions folk to handle a future one. The difference does not necessarily need to be a monumental change, though that may be needed. It could include establishing and making explicit boundaries or processes that are often taken for granted or simply thought of as understood.”

PRO TIPS

“Bias-related incidents wound the entire community. Apologize to the right people, in the right way. A general email to the school community will never take the place of an in-person apology, which in some cases is very necessary.”

PRO TIPS

“Offer no explanation that may be perceived as an excuse.”

PRO TIPS

“Transparency is not what our schools are good at, but it is necessary.”
PRO TIPS

“You will be sleep-deprived. You will be called upon for everything.”

PRO TIPS

“Our schools are arrogant, and we think it won’t happen to us.”

PRO TIPS

“Folks need to be able to ask questions, hear what can be shared, hear that certain things can’t be shared, and learn about the process or about the steps we have decided to take to handle any given crisis.”

PRO TIPS

“Practice makes permanent.”

Maya Angelou

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who are are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.”

CONFLICT RESOLUTION
Think about one person at work who gets on your last nerve.

adrienne maree brown

“Don’t forget that we learn to move by falling down a million times.
Don’t forget you were taught most of the things you now believe and teach others.
Don’t dispose of each other – turn and face the conversations we still need to have.
Change and be changed.
PS: Be as gracious and rigorous as your mentors were/are. Be an invitation. Offer others the same compassion you need when you’re wrong.”

CALLING IN, NOT CALLING OUT

• On receiving end of a microaggression:
  • Take a deep breath if nervous. Pause if angry or unsure
  • Start with, “What do you mean?”
    • Be sure you understand what the speaker said
    • Provide a moment of grace
  • Determine your goal
    • Sustainable relationship?
    • Prefer to disengage?
  • Follow with, “How do you know?”
    • Provides opportunity to counter with facts or other experiences

THAT’S NOT HOW THIS WORKS

No Shaming. No Saving.
Goal of responding should usually be to provide greater understanding of an issue or a reaction.
“Yes, love yourself. But also analyze and be critical of how you think, act, and behave. Self-love without self awareness is useless. Be accountable.”

@oyerooh

REFLECTION / TURN & TALK
What makes an apology genuine?
Share a moment when you received a genuine apology, or a moment when you deserved an apology.
• 30 seconds to consider
• 2 mins for Partner 1 while Partner 2 listens
• 2 mins for Partner 2 while Partner 1 listens
• Optional share out

C.L.A.I.M.
• C: Center yourself
• L: Listen to what is being shared, without defending
• A: Acknowledge/Apologize
• I: Inquire, if time is right and person is willing
• M: Move on

Closing Thought
“You can quit your job.”
Erica Corbin, Diversity Practitioner

Common Saying
“Don’t set yourself on fire to keep others warm.”

Cipolla’s Law of Stupidity

Benefit Others
Benefit Self
Cipolla’s Law of Stupidity

Benefit Others

Benefit Self

Bandit

Cipolla’s Law of Stupidity

Unfortunate/Martyr

Benefit Others

Benefit Self

Bandit

Cipolla’s Law of Stupidity

Unfortunate/Martyr

Stupid

Benefit Others

Benefit Self

Bandit

Cipolla’s Law of Stupidity

Unfortunate/Martyr

Intelligent

Benefit Others

Benefit Self

Bandit

Closing Reflection
“Hope is a discipline.”

Unattributed