

Week 9: BAM! Radio Discussions: Managing Your Boss & Leaning Into Conflict

I. Highlights

- A. It's usually political suicide to go over your boss's head. It will blow back on you somehow.
- B. Always need to realistically assess how much of the problem is my own behavior and how much is the boss's. It usually takes two sides to make a problem.
- C. Need to understand the boss's life context. What outside pressures are on them? What is their communication/work style compared to yours? What can you change to fix that? What are their strengths/weaknesses? What are your own strengths/weaknesses? What strengths can you offer to fill in your boss's weaknesses?
- D. Teachers need the boss to realize what they actually do on a daily basis.
- E. Easier to change your own behavior, which forces others to change how they respond, than to tell other people to change.
- F. When you have a conflict with someone, go after the principle/values involved, rather than going after the person or personality.
- G. Many situations get worse because we're afraid of confronting someone about an issue, so then it doesn't get handled and just gets bigger. "Harmony" isn't always the goal if it means avoiding important issues.
- H. Leader needs an open-door policy so people feel comfortable bringing you even the most difficult problems.
- I. Reframe problems so everyone can take a different perspective, step out of the emotion of it for a moment, remember that we're all here for the same reason.

- J. Sometimes have to ask if you want to preserve this relationship or not.
- K. Have to figure out if it's a "can't do" or a "won't do" situation and why. Then can figure out how to help solve it.
- L. A lot of conflict comes from unmet expectation. Good to start a conversation by letting everyone share what they expect from the interaction.

II. Homework

- A. Assignment due April 10.
- B. More to come after spring break, but that's it for now. :)

III. BAM! Radio Network Talks & Discussions

- A. Available on iTunes. Great resource for teachers. bamradionetwork.com Look at Heart-to-Heart conversations on leadership.
- B. Talk Title: [Leading the Leader: 3 Rules for Managing Your Boss](#)
 1. Does going over your boss's head to share your concerns ever work? Or will you get fired?
 2. Boss is difficult, non-communicative, harsh, lets others undermine you and your decisions. What do you do?
 3. Have to realistically assess how much of the problem is my own behavior and how much is my boss's. A problem with another person is seldom one-sided. Start from the premise that you are both contributing to the problem.
 4. Need to understand the boss's background, communication/learning/listening style, etc. Who is this person?
 5. Most important steps to take in ameliorating a difficult relationship:
 - a) Understanding the boss's life context: pressures on them, shareholder influence,

- (1) Starting working for a new boss is a great time to ask, "What are your priorities and expectations? What do you expect from me? What's your personal style? What are your strengths and weaknesses?" Find out if boss is a reader (learn/receive information through writing better, so start with an email note then follow up in person) or a listener (then better to start with a conversation and follow up in writing)
- (2) Use the boss's strengths to your advantage. Help them build up their weaker areas if that's your strength.
- b) Assess your own strengths and weaknesses. Do a self-assessment and ask trusted peers/coworkers for their input on you.
 - (1) Are you so to-the-point that people see you as cryptic or blunt/rude?
 - (2) Do you talk on and on before getting to the point? Will drive a get-to-the-point style boss crazy.
 - (3) When/where/why/how do you get yourself overwhelmed? This will make you late for deadlines.
 - (4) Preferences for confronting or avoiding conflict
6. Best school principals/directors have realized the way to be most helpful is to let teachers do their jobs and the boss should get out of the way.
 - a) Realize sometimes serve different audiences with different goals. Principal may think she has to keep board and parents happy, not just supporting teachers.
 - b) Principal's job is to keep teachers happy and supplied with resources so things go well in the school. That tends to help keep parents/board members happy.
7. Teachers need to help the boss realize what they do on a daily basis. If principal is far removed from the classroom, may not have enough recent

- experience to understand / remember what it's like to teach 20 preschoolers in today's world.
8. Usually going over the boss's head is political suicide, depending on who the boss and the next level up is. Most people don't appreciate you doing that. Will pay for it one way or another.
 9. Remember the boss is a human being, is not infallible, is dependent on you even if she doesn't seem to care about what you're doing. You depend on boss for resources and support and paychecks, but boss depends on you to get the work done. Most bosses have been where you are at some point in their career, so often have to help them get back in touch with that experience.
 10. Best bosses acknowledge they have a flawed and incomplete understanding of what it's like to work for them.

C. Discussion on that talk:

1. In last week's case study, we decided we should go over one boss's head to get the issue addressed. Recommendation based on this radio talk: first try to figure out where the boss's inactivity is coming from. Is parent confrontation a weakness for her? Can you offer to help with that if she just gives you permission to address it for her?
2. Is political suicide to go over the boss's head. Is a last resort, maybe only if children's health / safety is at risk. Not recommended at all. It will come back to haunt you.
3. In our field, often have the most problems with directors who get hired into director role fresh out of college, have never been classroom teachers.
4. Helps a lot to get to know your boss's style and your own style. Is that the source of the conflict? Often is more our responsibility to match the style of our boss to get communication flowing again.

5. When giving or receiving important information that you need to act on, what's your style? We spent the first few weeks of the semester working on this. Important to know this about yourself.
 6. Good to ask clarifying questions to make sure both sides understand, especially if you have different natural communication styles.
 7. If your boss seems forgetful or scattered, it's possible that she's not a verbal communication style, so she's not receiving the full information just by being told. Try following up in writing.
- D. What do you do if your boss tells you to leave her with too many children (out of ratio)?
1. Don't accept that as an answer. It is NEVER okay to be out of ratio, even for a moment, even if you're leaving the door open.
 2. Phrase it as, "I know you're plenty capable of handling 16 kids, it's not you. I just don't want to put either of us in that position in case licensing shows up. I'm really uncomfortable with that legal risk."
 3. Remind her that it's not just the risk
 4. Need full visual and auditory supervision of every child every moment. No standing in the doorway, no open door, etc. Licensing wins this argument every time. Don't press your luck.
 5. It's illegal. You're unwilling to follow directions that are illegal.
 6. Can call licensing together to ask the question.
 7. By leaving the room, even at the boss's direction, you're agreeing to be part of this illegal decision.
- E. When you have conflict with someone, rather than go after the person or the personality, go after the principle. Talk about the principles/values involved. If you usually have a 2:16 ratio, that shows you're trying to be a quality program. If you stick to that principle of quality, it means you don't leave one teacher out of

ratio, or shuffle kids for teachers' convenience, etc. How can we set up our systems so this doesn't happen?

F. 2nd talk: [Leaning Into Conflict, Discord and Strife](#)

1. So many of our situations get worse because we're afraid of confronting someone about an issue, so then it doesn't get handled and just gets bigger.
2. When children's health and safety are compromised, or when you're not meeting licensing requirements, we have an ethical responsibility to do something about it. We know low-quality programs harm children in ways that stick with them into their futures.
3. Should leaders seek harmony or "the good fight" or can you seek both?
4. As role models for children, we want to role model the most healthy and productive ways to get along with others. That does NOT always mean perfectly peaceful harmony all the time.
5. Try to find a way that we can all find common ground eventually. Can be difficult and time-consuming, but it's important that we all buy into a solution we can all believe in.
6. People's best selves come out when we think about why we're doing what we're doing. Even if we disagree, we need to keep our purpose in mind.
7. Often when you're trying to make change and accomplish things, you will encounter struggle. That's not a bad thing. It's valuable to make significant change and move forward.
8. Clarity: put problems on the table so everyone can understand and work on them. This part can be uncomfortable, before the harmony happens, but it matters.
9. ECE tries to present a safe, orderly environment. Even there, complacency is the enemy. Have to move the school organization forward. Have to learn to embrace the "getting dirty" process of addressing problems head-on when

- we can't prevent them in the first place. Can't make progress by avoiding problems or pretending they don't exist.
10. As long as we don't argue in front of kids or parents, and we get to a productive point eventually, it can be valuable.
 11. Studying business entrepreneurs, research shows that even the new businesses that feel are glad they took on the struggle. The process was worthwhile even when nothing came of it. There's satisfaction in working long and hard for something you believe is valuable, and working alongside other people who believe it too.
 12. May feel terrified and miserable going through conflict, but would rather be able to get the issues out on the table than be in an environment where people robotically do what they're told instead of agreeing and working toward what we believe in on purpose.
 13. Handling children can be a very emotional topic when it brings up people's own emotional baggage from their childhood experiences.
 14. As a leader, you need an open-door policy. People need to be comfortable bringing you even the most difficult problems and believe that you will fight for the right answer alongside them. They won't be punished or criticized for bringing up a problem. Honor every opinion. It's okay for anyone to raise any concern, even if it's offensive to you.
 15. Perseverance is key. Change can't happen overnight, and it needs the leader's energy to keep it going.
 16. Skill: Reminding people at the beginning of a difficult discussion about what the institution is meant to accomplish, who it's meant to serve. "We're all in this together" framework.
 17. Skill: Make sure to disagree about ideas and ways of doing things, not about personalities and people. Don't make it personal.

18. Majority of women are conflict-avoidant, which can make this tricky. Realize that we all have emotions. Need to listen without judgement.
19. Perspective-taking skills help. Reframe something emotional by getting people to stop, breathe, take the other perspective, put it out on the table and look more objectively.
20. For the sake of our children and families, this is why we're here and where we're going. Let's take a step back to figure out how to get there together.

G. Discussion on that talk:

1. Director's openness is the key to all of this. Don't avoid conflict, don't judge the people involved in the conflict.
2. Reframing situations can help look at other perspectives, step outside of the emotion/ overwhelm
3. Often the other person is aware of the conflict too, so if it's bothering you, it's probably also bothering them. They may be grateful for you opening the conversation with, "I just wanted to check in about what happened on Tuesday night. How did that go for you? I want to get your side." Cuts down on the defensiveness, opens the way for conversation.
4. Even if the other person doesn't know what the conflict is about, they are probably sensing your tension, and may stress out about what's bothering you. (Is it them? Did they offend you? What's going on?) Not knowing is usually worse than addressing it.
5. What if the boss is just not a nice person? All this assumes the other person has good intentions. Sometimes you just have to move on and find another job that matches your values and beliefs, but that's obviously a last resort.
6. Ask yourself, do you want to preserve this relationship? Is it worth fighting for? Is it worth it for me to continue in this program? If yes, then there are a

lot of strategies to use to get through this. It takes time, but if it's worth it to you, you can hang in there until change happens.

H. When the boss is not doing her job and issues are not being addressed:

1. Start by looking at the boss's perspective and the pressures on her. Is the board of directors, the owner, the budget, the parent committees, etc. pushing her? What's making her so ineffective? Step into her shoes as much as you can.
2. Is this a "can't do" or a "won't do" situation?
3. May find out this is a person who needs things in writing and needs a lot of statistics/details/facts to back it up. If my style is a lot of spoken words, that doesn't help her. I can give her a written report that she can turn around and take it to her boss to make things happen.
4. If the boss's attitude is that he's male and so of course he should be in charge of all these unintelligent women, that's harder. Maybe it's that he's the only man in a totally female organization and his "macho" attitude is really his way of defending himself in the organization and compensating for the teasing he gets from his friends/family for working in a female job. It's possible that his attitude isn't intended toward me, it's in response to outside pressures, so maybe I can have a thicker skin and not take it so personally.
5. Figuring out the other person's perspective and their style makes a huge difference! The second part is understanding your own style. You can't change another person's personality/style/behavior, but you can change your own behavior, which makes others react to you differently.
6. Maybe the first time you talked to her, it was budget week and she couldn't hear anything besides numbers. Maybe the second time you talked to her, she had two parents waiting to talk to her. It's all about timing. By the third time

- you go, it sounds like you're whining because you're frustrated. She doesn't realize it's your third attempt. We all ignore whiners.
7. Beware of indirect/fluffy talk. If you want to go out to dinner at the new restaurant, but you're saying, "I hear this new restaurant is good. My friend really liked it. It would be nice to go there sometime..." the other person may take you literally instead of realizing that you mean you want to go to dinner there tonight. If you're feeling like the person isn't listening, think about whether you're actually asking directly enough.
- I. A lot of strife/conflict comes from unmet expectations. A good starting question is, "What are your expectations for this situation?"
 1. Teacher may expect that the director will enforce the center's written policy (on biting, etc.) and that didn't happen.
 2. Rather than phrasing the conversation as, "It's all your fault, you're not doing this..." you can talk about yourself. "I'm feeling upset because..." or "I was operating under the expectation that... but that didn't happen, so now I'm not sure where I stand." Frame it in a way that makes the other person less defensive, and not just dumping the problem on the other person's plate. Sets up the discussion as a partnership/conversation instead of a fight. Use I messages = "I was thinking..." or "I did this because..." or "Now I feel..."
 3. There are tons of strategies. You have to go with what works for you and your center. If it's a critical/urgent issue, don't rely on putting it in a suggestion box. Go to the person with authority and work on it together.
 4. Frame it concisely: "This is a big problem for me. I need your support to address it."
 - J. Story: Her boss was saying, "If they want to quit, let them. I don't care. I'm not taking any more complaints." Teacher tried to get her to realize what would happen if she lost her team. Started pushing questions, tours, tasks, etc. up to her

to help her realize what it would mean if the teachers weren't there. It worked! The boss sat down to talk about the problems and is working on changing her behavior.

- K. Have to deal with the immediate situation, but always have to address the structural issues that caused it and can cause it to happen again.
1. Why is the site supervisor never around?
 2. Why is it okay for the boss to not follow policies? Is it not a written policy so we have different understandings of what should happen? Does it need to be re-written if our needs have changed?
 3. This fear of the bigger issues that a small problem can raise is sometimes why directors don't want to address problems at all. They know what it can lead to.
 4. Look at what you're doing to enable this director to get away with this nonsense. How am I perpetuating this problem without meaning to? Are people covering for her so she doesn't have to know all these operational details? Stop covering for her. That forces her to learn the details, or to appreciate the people under her.
- L. Sometimes there are people who just don't work with these normal strategies. Deeper personality issues, insubordination, etc. need a different approach. May be a no-win situation, especially if the organization/boss won't back you up.
- M. "Reframing" the situation where there's a seriously biting child and the boss won't enforce the policy of kicking her out: Center is expanding and doesn't have the resources to support the newly full classrooms yet. Director is very overwhelmed: doesn't know what to do with this family, doesn't want to lose families because the owner is putting pressure on her to stay at full capacity. Doesn't have the time to think it through or the energy to start that emotional

conversation with a parent. Is pretending the problem doesn't exist. (Is not a good excuse, but does help see the bigger picture to think about this.)

- N. You can't change other people, but reframing the situation and getting information on people's styles helps a lot.
- O. Story: A few people complained about the morning opening teacher. Director thought she was framing the confrontation well, but didn't know the teacher's style well enough. Very sensitive teacher was horrified that anyone complained about her, that she had messed up, broke down crying at that point in the meeting and quit. Never got beyond that to figure out what the complaint was. Big backlash that took a long time to sort out. Next time, the director took longer to observe and gather her own data, then approach it more carefully. Teachers were annoyed that she was moving slowly, but reframed it by sharing her perspective.
- P. There is another good talk on working with Millennial employees. (People born since the mid/late 1980s or later.) Major % of our workforce will be Millennials by 2020, so need to adapt our leadership/organization styles accordingly because their styles are different than Baby Boomers or GenX.

IV. Next week is spring break. No class!

V. Next big assignment when we come back will be group project doing a case study together to thoroughly analyze, apply research, some writing, plus present it to the class.

- A. Will have a verbal final through these case studies/presentations. No multiple choice or essay questions.

- B. More details later, but know she will be expecting us to be able to articulate the steps to understand a scenario and then apply strategies for resolving it. (The book is full of these strategies. Lots of technical detail and definitions.)
- C. These are stubborn problems. How do we resolve them? What needs to be in place organizationally so we can even address these problems in the first place? What organizational structures are allowing these problems to persist?