

A Brief Checklist of Engaging with Others

- **Is the divide before you a technical challenge (requiring use of available technical tools, expertise or authority to resolve) or is it an adaptive challenge (requiring careful navigation and negotiation of fundamental values, morals, beliefs, institutions, or systems)? Is it both? Can you apply both technical and adaptive solutions to the divide before you?**
- **What does it mean to exercise love and the public trust/public interest through your leadership?**
- **What does the public good call upon you to do or not do in a polarized or divisive environment?**
- **What does the “golden mean” (the common middle ground) look like in the situation before you?**
- **What is the “work at the centre” in this situation? How can we redefine, and “re-spect” others when it comes to this challenge, in order to collaborate on the opportunity before us?**
- **Who/what are some resources or counsellors you can turn to, to help you navigate through the situation?**
- **Know what can and will trigger you, emotionally, ethically, morally (or according to how your own beliefs).**
- **Know your “why”: self-awareness, knowing what you stand for, consulting your inner compass, is prime. (balanced with asking “What does the public good call upon you to do or not do in a polarized or divisive environment?”)**
- **Is it possible in the situation to respond to the needs of “every” student or member of the community, or do you need to seek what is best for “all” students and members of your community?**
- **Are there any “rights”, “freedoms” or higher considerations at play in the situation? If so, what options do you have, or not have, to reconcile and respect these rights and freedoms, especially if they appear to diverge or compete against one another?**
- **In a public school board environment in particular, how can you maintain and promote the legal requirement to ensure that the actions and contributions to public dialogue at your meetings remain respectful of all interested parties, especially your students, even if they may not be present during such dialogue? Would a student, if present**

during the meeting, believe that they are safe and included? Are you extending due regard to those who are most vulnerable in your community and require your protection?

- What history or historical foundation is at play in the situation, if at all? Understanding “why” someone or something may be the way they are/it is can be important for engaging with the adaptation that is necessary (to “bring the best forward towards achieving something even better”).
- Be prepared to disappoint people... but at a rate they can tolerate! Knowing when may/will disappoint others and how can you soften this disappointment, can be key.
- Remember that people don’t fear change, they fear loss. People neither fear or “hate” others, they only require greater understanding and awareness of the other. Be very careful when engaging in adaptive leadership of what others may feel they will “lose”. Be very careful in what you may want to label as a “phobia”, as “hateful”, as “bigotry” or “intolerance” on the other side, knowing that in most cases, the other side has just as much “right” to be who they are, as you do.
- Are you both willing and ready to engage with others? And they, with you?
- Are you prepared to keep the dialogue flowing by asking them to “tell you more”?
- Do you have it within you to balance empathy and assertiveness (both listening and seeking to understand, as well as making yourself understood)?
- How can you save the dialogue, and achieve agreement, while still saying “no”?
- What might be some subtle “nudges” that you might consider, to move the other side into greater alignment with what you hope or need to achieve?
- When do you need to get up “on the balcony” and when do you “need to dance”?
- What are you willing to concede and what are you willing to defend?
- What will cause the other side to “talk away” rather than “walk away”?
- What does their victory speech look like? What does yours look like? Can you write a single victory speech that works for both of you?
- How do you “see” those on the other side? As brothers and sisters in a shared humanity, or as opponents and enemies to be conquered and vanquished? Are you ready and willing to exercise “dignity” – the good of yourself and others?