

Fundamental Elements for Exceptional and Candid Collaboration

A No Excuses University Exceptional System



**Presented
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Three-Tiered Collaboration

A Los Pen Example



Daily Collaboration: Collaboration that involves the work that teachers do directly with students. Creative grouping from one class to another, student rotations, and subject responsibility are examples of daily collaboration.

Weekly Collaboration: Time held sacred for team planning. Instructional planning, curriculum mapping, and data analysis are examples of work that is done during this time. Weekly collaboration is best done on a school-wide level. This is not time for individuals to work alone.

Monthly Collaboration: Time set aside for growing professionally as a school. This time is also used for articulation from one grade level to another. Monthly collaboration is best done when it is simplified and focused.

(All collaboration should involve clear and tangible outcomes. Talk is cheap!)



*"We are committed to creating a school that knows no limits to the academic success of each student."
No Excuses University Pledge*

Los Pen Collaboration Commitment

As staff members of Los Pen, we are committed to collaborating with one another in a variety of ways. We understand that the greatest academic and social gains for our students come as a result of *quality instruction* from the classroom teacher and highly effective measures of *collaboration* among team members. Los Pen staff members work interdependently with their teams in many ways. The following are examples of individual commitments that we are all willing to make as we collaborate as a staff:

Clarity of Purpose: Team members remain driven by our one goal to ensure that each student is proficient or advanced in reading, language, and math. They meet with a purpose and devise agendas and timelines to ensure success at every collaborative meeting. They take the time to decide upon meeting topics in advance. After meeting, they follow through with collective agreements as a team.

Respectful of Time: Los Pen staff members are action-oriented professionals who value one another's time. They are prompt to staff and team meetings. They make the most of their time by collaborating during the school day with colleagues as they creatively group students in an effort to meet every learner's needs.

Wednesday Time-Banking: Every Wednesday afternoon from 2:15–3:40, we set aside time for teams to work closely as they design instruction that translates into academic achievement for all. This time is held sacred by all members of the team and should not be used for personal appointments or individual work time.

Professional Growth: Los Pen staff members are open to learning new methods, ideas, and strategies that will lead to greater academic success for all. They participate in on-site Wednesday Collaboration workshops. They seek ways to learn from one another, and are committed to growing professionally together.

Building Strong Professional Relationships: Los Pen staff members are committed to developing strong professional relationships with each other. They praise one another during times of individual, team, and school-wide success. They are honest with one another as they respectfully confront concerns through "Candid Collaboration". They support one another during times that are challenging both professionally and personally. They celebrate with one another as friends and colleagues outside of the school community.



GROUP or TEAM?

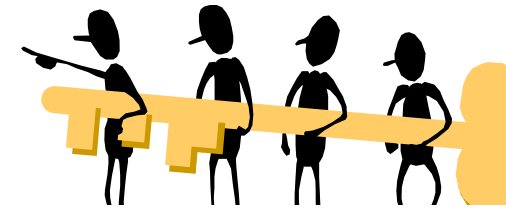


TRIANGLE #1	TRIANGLE #2

REFLECTION...

Groups	Teams
Members think they are grouped together for administrative reasons only.	Members recognize their interdependence and understand both personal and team goals are best accomplished with mutual support. Time is not wasted struggling over "turf" or seeking personal gain at the expense of others.
Members tend to focus on themselves because they are not sufficiently involved in planning the team's objectives and work. They approach their job simply as hired hands.	Members feel a sense of ownership for their jobs and units because they are committed to goals they helped to establish.
Members are told what to do rather than asked what the best approach would be. Suggestions are not encouraged.	Members contribute to the organization's success by applying unique talents and knowledge to team objectives.
Members distrust the motives of colleagues because they do not understand the role of other members. Expressions of opinion or disagreement are considered divisive and non-supportive.	Members work in climate of trust and are encouraged to express ideas, opinions, disagreements, and feelings. Questions are welcomed.
Members are cautious about what they say so real understanding is not possible. Members may play games and set communication traps.	Members practice open and honest communication. They make an effort to understand each other's point of view.
Members may receive good training but are limited in applying it to their job by their supervisor, other group members, or conditions at the workplace.	Members are encouraged to develop skills and apply what they learn for the benefit of the team. They receive support from their team as they are learning.
Members find themselves in conflict situations that they do not know how to resolve. Their supervisors may put off or other members may resist intervention until severe damage is done.	Members recognize that conflict is a normal aspect of human interaction and view such situations as opportunities for new ideas and creativity. They work to resolve conflict quickly and constructively.
Members may or may not participate in decisions affecting the team. Conformity often appears more important than positive results.	Members participate in decisions affecting the team, but understand that their leader must make final ruling in emergency situations and when the team cannot decide. Positive results are the goal.

Courtesy of Janet Malone



KEYS TO EFFECTIVE TEAMS

DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker

- ⇨ Collaboration is embedded in routine practices of the school.
- ⇨ Time for collaboration is built into the school day and school calendar.
- ⇨ Teams focus on key questions.
- ⇨ Products of collaboration are made explicit.
- ⇨ Team norms guide collaboration.
- ⇨ Teams pursue specific and measurable performance goals.
- ⇨ Teams have access to relevant information.

Rate Yourself as a Team Player

Adapted with permission of the South Carolina State Department of Education.



Effective school improvement teams are made up of individuals who respect each other and work well together. Your behavior has an enormous impact on the team's ability to do its work efficiently and effectively. The following is a series of questions about your behavior in your work group. Answer each question honestly.

There are no right or wrong answers. Describe your behavior as accurately as possible.

1. I offer facts, opinions, ideas, suggestions, and relevant information during my team's discussions.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
2. I express my willingness to cooperate with other group members and my expectation that they will also be cooperative.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
3. I am open and candid in my dealings with the entire group.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
4. I support team members who are on the spot and struggling to express themselves intellectually or emotionally.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
5. I take risks in expressing new ideas and current feelings during a team discussion.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
6. I communicate to other team members that I am aware of and appreciate their abilities, talents, capabilities, skills, and resources.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
7. I offer help and assistance to anyone on the team in order to improve the team's performance.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
8. I accept and support the openness of other team members, supporting them for taking risks and encouraging individuality.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
9. I share materials, books, sources of information, and other resources with team members in order to promote the success of all members and the team as a whole.
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always
10. Three things I might do to increase the effectiveness of our team include:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

Team Norms

1. Created by teams
2. Endorsed by the critical mass
3. Reviewed until they become a part of the culture
4. Utilized not as a mandate, but as a means to create better results and make the most of your time



Examples of Norms for Team Meetings

1. Be honest, respectful, and listen to your colleagues
2. Everyone is responsible for participating
3. Maintain a laser-like focus
4. Be innovative, think outside the box: If there is a problem, we look for a solution
5. Ensure equal time for all participants



Wednesday Team Meeting Agenda

Date: _____ Location: _____ Facilitator: _____

Meeting Topics:

Collective Agreements:

Items for Follow-Up at Next Team Meeting:



Rate Your Team Meetings

Tools For Schools from National Staff Development Council

We start our meeting on time.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

We review and develop the meeting's agenda/goal before the meeting begins.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

We set time limits for the meeting.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

We identify a recorder to compile notes of the meeting.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

We encourage participation by all members.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

We summarize what we have accomplished in each meeting before concluding the meeting.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

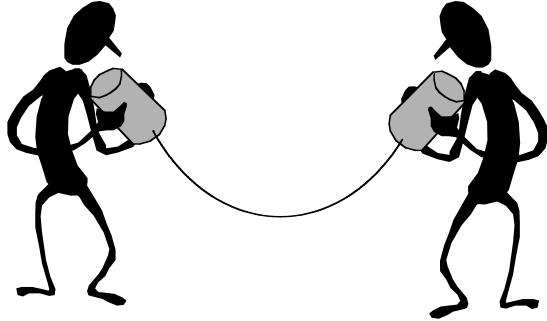
We briefly evaluate each meeting in terms of efficient, productive use of time and each members concerns.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

We end our meeting on time.

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

Candid Collaboration



What is Candid Collaboration?

- Honest communication with a purpose.
- An endeavor to empower staff to actively participate in collaboration that is solution focused.
- Addresses two aspects of collaboration: **instructional** and **relational**.
- Four levels of conversation: **Supporting**, **Accountability**, **Intervention**, and **Resourcing**.

What is the common vocabulary?

- **Crucial Conversation** – A discussion between two or more people where stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong.
(see book Crucial Conversations by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler)
- **Dialogue** – The free flow of meaning between two or more people.
- **Shared Pool of Meaning** – The act of making a conversation safe enough for everyone to add meaning in order to create a pool of information.

Candid Collaboration Levels

Level 1: Supporting	Level 2: Accountability	Level 3: Intervention
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Opens the door	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Identifies problem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reviews	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct / timelines
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Seeks to understand	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Outcome driven	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Purposeful plan
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Proactive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Candid
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not attacking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specific	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Two or more
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> One on one	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not attacking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Facilitated by one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Happens when calm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> One on one	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Calm	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Timely	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Respectful of time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results driven	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Genuine		

Level 4: Resourcing
In the event that the first three levels are not successful, consult with administration.

Instructional Scenarios



1. Assessment scores are due to Cathy in 3 days. Like everyone you have been working tremendously hard to get all assessments done on time. As you share your stress with a colleague, you overhear another colleague talk about their decision to “blow off” certain portions of the assessment plan. This raises obvious concerns to you.
2. For several weeks now you have noticed a new staff member looking confused during collaboration. You have thought to yourself of how it reminds you of your first year and the overwhelming responsibility that you felt. You also reflected on some of your lost opportunities in that first year. You have two choices. First, do nothing and let the teacher find their way the same that you did. Or second, participate in candid collaboration. Knowing that as a staff we’re working on being candid collaborators, what would you do?
3. In the staff room, you overhear a colleague from a grade level above yours talking about a specific student in a negative way. Parents are making copies and OASIS tutors are being given a tour of the staff lounge. You realize that the child being discussed is one of your former students. In addition, you are privy to some pertinent background information that the current teacher may not be aware of at this time.

Relational Scenarios



1. It’s Wednesday collaboration and a member of your team is not in attendance. After talking to the team, no one is aware of the reason for their absence. In short conversations with your colleague they have shared that they are going through some “personal” issues. How might you carry on a supportive conversation?
2. When in dialogue with a colleague, you perceive their communication to be condescending and judgmental. On one occasion, after giving input during a team meeting, this colleague laughs and says, “You’re kidding right?”. Other times, after making suggestions, they correct you and tell you *their* way to accomplish the objective you are discussing. This is happening on a regular basis and is impeding your ability to speak honestly about academic priorities and planning.
3. After being in school for several weeks you notice that a parent exhibits frustration while working in your class. This is evident by remarks that she/he makes to students and other parents about curriculum, instruction, assessment etc. While you have overheard these remarks, they have never directly spoken to you about them. How will you carry on a candid conversation with this parent?

Collaboration



Where are we now, where are we going?

<i>How are you currently collaborating in these three areas?</i>		
<i>Daily</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Monthly</i>
<i>What ideas do you have to collaborate in these three areas?</i>		
<i>Daily</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Monthly</i>

It's Time for the Optimists to Come Out of Hiding

The Closet Optimist (Part One of Six)

Author: **Damen Lopez** published: **November 10, 2008**

Why is it that in an institution that preaches the importance of teamwork to children (public education) so many of our educators make the decision to act with blatant independence? I would contend that it's not because we have a school system filled with loners, but more so because we have a school system filled with people who feel alone. This, coupled with the sometimes strong negative voices of a very small percentage of a staff, creates a silent group of educators that I call the "Closet Optimists".

So, what makes up a Closet Optimist and how do you know if you are one who falls into this overpopulated group of educators?

The Symptoms of a Closet Optimist (Part Two of Six)

Author: **Damen Lopez** published: **November 12, 2008**

In my work with schools across the country I have engaged in conversations with hundreds of Closet Optimists. In speaking with them, almost without fail, each individual shares their deep desire to break free from the chains of negativity and move forward with a spirit of maverick leadership that we at TurnAround Schools actively promote. In an effort to support a cure for this all too common malady, I have identified four symptoms to be aware of as you pursue change for yourself and/or those around you.

Symptom #1: *Closet Optimists tend to share positive opinions with individuals, but act incredibly meek while in groups.*

Symptom #2: *Closet Optimists never forget the moment when a "naysayer" stripped them of their will to fight and therefore are reluctant to take risks in sharing their personal perspectives on a variety of topics.*

Symptom #3: *Closet Optimists often dream of what it would be like to be a part of a staff that exemplifies a positive spirit. Because of this, they tend to be educators who are always in pursuit of greener pastures.*

Symptom #4: *Sadly, Closet Optimists are likely to turn into "naysayers" over time due to a lack of exercising their once positive attitudes.*

Do these symptoms sound familiar? Do you know a Closet Optimist? Are you a Closet Optimist? Visit our blog in the coming days as I offer four prescriptions for this educational illness.

The Cure for the Closet Optimist: Prescription #1 (Part Three of Six)

Author: Damen Lopez published: November 14, 2008

Reading the four warning signs of a Closet Optimist often acts as a worrisome wake-up call for many. Please rest assured however as I have four separate prescriptions that will act as a cure. Please practice them often as an individual, but more importantly as a staff, and email me in the morning.

Prescription #1: Teach, model, and practice candor as a staff. One of the hardest things for educators to do is to be candid with one another. Because of this, we must explicitly teach individuals how to be candid with their views. When it comes to the academic success of students, it is our **obligation** to offer opinions publicly that challenges the status quo and ensures greater achievement for all.

can.dor (*noun*) the quality of being open and honest in expression; frankness

The Cure for the Closet Optimist: Prescription #2 (Part Four of Six)

Author: Damen Lopez published: November 18, 2008

Prescription #2: Actively seek perspective. Far too often we as educators live in a “woe is me” cycle where we think our school, our class, and our job must be harder than anyone else’s. Because of this, it is important that we gain perspective by sharing the success stories of those who have generated far greater accomplishments in spite of far greater challenges. Seeking a great story to offer perspective to your colleagues? Start by watching the documentary [Darius Goes West](#). This 90-minute film will offer perspective and motivate you to accept and confront your challenges head on.

The Cure for the Closet Optimist: Prescription #3 (Part Five of Six)

Author: Damen Lopez published: November 22, 2008

Prescription #3: Protect your “non-negotiable north”. “If you do what’s right, you can’t go wrong”. Many years ago, these words helped drive the way that I would make decisions as a principal and in turn became my “non-negotiable north”. Truth be told, there were times where my **right** seemed to be everyone else’s **wrong**. However, during times where I was timid to take risks, my leadership compass always pointed me in the right direction and helped me resist the urge to stay quiet and avoid confrontation. A Closet Optimist’s lack of willingness to stand for what they believe in will almost always lead to the death of their “north”. Because of this, we must find opportunities to take risks, do what’s right for students, and never, ever, allow the majority (or perceived majority) stop us from taking a stand.

The Cure for the Closet Optimist: Prescription #4 (Part Six of Six)

Author: Damen Lopez published: December 1, 2008

Prescription #4: Know the difference between REASONS and EXCUSES. It’s important that we recognize the challenges that exist in education. The key however is to understand that there is a difference between reasons and excuses. Reasons such as the fact that students live in poverty or speak a second language, share why a challenge exists in the first place. Excuses on the other hand are made when defeat is accepted and hope is lost. The best schools in our country take plenty of time identifying reasons for poor success, but spend even more time finding solutions so that those same reasons do not turn into excuses.

As we go forward on a mission to be openly optimistic, know this: If you are waiting for 100% of your colleagues to “get onboard” you will be waiting forever. Why? Because schools, companies, and organizations rarely have every single person operating on the same page. However the reason that a select few choose to be negative surprisingly has little to do with the organization itself and everything to do with them as individuals. The fact is that negative colleagues are not onboard in life, much less on board with the mission of any one school. While this is frustrating and unjust, what is worse is when Closet Optimists allow for the minority opinions of negative educators to drown out the proactive energy of those who want to do right by kids. When schools are guided by the negative force of a few individuals it is never an indictment of their ability to drive the agenda. More so, it is an indictment on the reluctance from Closet Optimists to come out of hiding and collectively assemble. When Closet Optimists allow their outward attitude to reflect their inward spirit, amazing results tend to follow.

Fran is available to provide on-site training at your school. For more information, please contact us at Consulting@NoExcusesU.com

Handouts can be downloaded here:

<http://tinyurl.com/NEUInstitutes>