

- The fourth day—practice, practice, practice. This is an entire day of participants presenting, facilitating and participating in protocols.
- The fifth day features planning. How are you going to introduce, create and sustain CFGs at your school?

During those five days, we all go through a great learning journey together. Bonds are formed, skills are learned and the excitement of possibilities takes over the group. Without any one of these days, I believe that journey would falter through lack of preparation, acquisition of skills and vital insights about our profession, our students, ourselves.

What do you think? I invite all coaches and facilitators to respond to this question and email it to us at nsrf@nsrfharmony.org. We'll feature some of your answers in the next "Connections". Michele Mattoon, NSRF Director, Michele@nsrfharmony.org

“EFFICIENT AND COLLEGIAL MODES OF COMMUNICATION”

BY NED IDE, ENGLISH TEACHER AND COORDINATOR OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT TEAMS, THE HILL SCHOOL, POTTSTOWN PA

About two hours into what would be five days and thirty hours of Critical Friends training, I felt a lingering fear – if we didn't get off on the right foot, this was going to be a long walk. Indeed, the stakes were high. We had literally just finished the academic year. We all teach at the same private, secondary, residential school where we all also live. We were excused from two days of faculty meetings to participate in on-site Critical Friends training; we were *not* excused from family time, end-of-year advisee letters and academic comments. I felt the tension. We liked the idea a lot in February. June sounded like 2018.

By the third hour, we stood together in a quickly constructed “danger zone” on my classroom floor. Michele, our coach, had created a series of concentric circles out of masking tape. We dipped our professional and personal toes in and out of various scenarios that had the potential to cause anxiety or fear within each of us. In one 20 minute session, I learned more about friends and colleagues with whom I had worked than I had in a decade. Fears allayed. The tension melted away; we rolled up our sleeves for a week of enriching, meaningful professional development.

In this training, simple protocols like “danger zones” (it

likely has a less threatening title, but I cannot remember) translate into efficient, collegial modes of communication. The early protocols - essentially day one - reconnect teachers as human beings. By sharing fears and celebrating good professional work, teachers are reminded that we are in the ultimate human endeavor. Through modeling, Critical Friends coaching trains teachers to listen. Constructive listening, in my opinion, is the hallmark of efficient, collegial modes of communication. Ground rules called *agreements* reminded us that if we were each responsible for the collective good of the order.

The irony at a school like ours – traditional, communal, and prescriptive – is that we *assume* peer-to-peer professional development. Yet, we are likely more isolated *from* one another precisely because we live, work, and play *with* one another. Our professional modes of communication can be circumvented by the time and lifestyle constraints inherent in boarding school cultures. Inviting NSRF and Critical Friends to the school represented an acknowledgement of a cultural paradox in all boarding schools that alienates its faculty members from professional intimacy. Boarding school faculty can easily fall into this trap. At The Hill School, we had acknowledged this dilemma four years ago, but we floundered with an approach to breaking down barriers and building up professional alliances. Critical Friends training has likely given us the template we were only able to previously intuit. By day three of the training, seven

us knew that the responsibility of creating a culture of peer-assisted professional development would be ours. Michele would be leaving in two days. We braced ourselves for some culminating protocols on day four – we knew we'd have to make a plan for our future on day five.

Moving and looking forward are two very different realities. With the help of Critical Friends training, our team looked at the start of the school year in September as the jumping off point for a pilot program of volunteers. Critical Friends teams at The Hill School will be comprised of volunteers. Next, we looked closely at how to spend the “coin of the realm” – time. Again, it's probable that time issues are similar in nature at all boarding schools. This is where moving forward takes on new meaning. We are planning to ask for “imbedded,” scheduled academic and co-curricular time to meet in teams of 8-12 for a

total of twenty-five hours over the course of the year. We plan to host a luncheon during the first week of faculty meetings that will help us gauge interest. From there, we'll follow an action plan we created on day five, replete with a list of concerns and agreements. We expect, now, that with an actionable plan, time and willing “friends”, that professional development is no longer an assumption.

Armed with a menu of protocols and the empiricism of their efficacy, our small team is prepared to spread the collegiality and communication NSRF and Critical Friends coaches so deftly instill during training. There will be danger zones. We're getting better at navigating them.

Questions/Comments?
Email NIde@thehill.org

**ARTICLE EXCERPT:
“CRITICAL
FRIENDSHIP
CIRCLES: THE
CULTURAL
CHALLENGE OF**

**COOL FEEDBACK.” BY
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