



Swimming in the Deep End: Four Foundational Skills for Leading Successful School Initiatives

By Jennifer Abrams (Solution Tree Press, 2019)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book:

- ⇒ We are living in challenging times and school leaders need to lead schools through complex changes.
- ⇒ This book is for leaders who want to develop the *personal* side of leadership to help them manage the *resistance* that arises with these changes.

Why I chose this book:

Many books about leading for change deal with topics such as timelines, implementation strategies, and evaluation plans. I like that Jennifer Abrams thinks much more about the human side of change. Each of the four leadership skills she proposes acknowledges the existence of **resistance to change** and helps you better manage it. She also brings up another dimension of the human side of change – that is, the *leader's* own experience of change. How do you manage *yourself* through change? Many leaders have not thought through these aspects of change so thoroughly.

As I write this, schools in the US are considering drastically different models for how schools might re-open in the coming school year. There is no doubt that leaders and teachers will continue to experience even more change down the pike. Leaders need a varied toolkit of strategies to manage this change and this book introduces a few more to add to yours.

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

- ✓ The four foundational skills school leaders need to lead change in their schools:
 1. **Thinking before you speak** – Planning ahead to address initial resistance before you roll out an initiative
 2. **Preempting resistance** – Knowing yourself and knowing your staff to better work with others
 3. **Responding to resistance** – Ensuring you *respond* thoughtfully rather than *react* impulsively in the face of resistance
 4. **Managing yourself through change and resistance** – Managing your own self-care in dealing with resistance
- ✓ The Main Idea's professional learning suggestions to help leaders work on the skills introduced in the book

Introduction

What does Jennifer Abrams mean by “swimming in the deep end”? She’s referring to that moment in swim lessons when it’s time to take on the challenge of swimming in the deep end of the pool. Similarly, it’s time for leaders to face some of the more complex challenges in education head on by venturing into the deep end. Whether the issue is teaching digital citizenship, emphasizing STEM, creating social-emotional learning programs, or addressing the achievement gap, it’s time for educators to take the plunge.

This book helps leaders develop four foundational skills to deal with the resistance that comes from addressing some of these complex problems. In order to successfully take on new initiatives, leaders need cognitive, social, and psychological resources. Abrams has outlined four foundational skills to help school leaders develop these types of personal leadership skills that they will need:

1. Thinking before you speak (planning ahead to address initial resistance before you roll out an initiative)
2. Preempting resistance (knowing yourself and knowing your staff to better work with others)
3. Responding to resistance (for when we speak)
4. Managing yourself through change and resistance (managing your own self-care in dealing with resistance)

These are not the *only* skills needed to lead change efforts, but these are some interpersonal strategies to address the resistance that inevitably surfaces in every initiative.

Chapter One – 1st Skill: Thinking Before You Speak

Four Skills to Address Resistance to Change

Thinking before you speak (planning for resistance)	Preempting resistance (know yourself, know others)	Responding to resistance (for when we speak)	Managing yourself through change and resistance (after we speak)
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In the same way that instruction often doesn’t go well because teachers don’t put enough time into the *planning*, new initiatives often fail because the leader doesn’t put in sufficient time to plan. Leaders need to “think before they speak.” Below are some aspects of any initiative you should think through before you begin.

What is the challenge we’re addressing?

Before you start, take some time to articulate the exact challenge that the initiative will address. Will your response fix the problem? Lessen it? To answer this, it helps to know if the issue is a *polarity* or a *problem*. A *problem* can be solved. For example, it’s a problem if you need to find a time when everyone can attend a meeting. A *polarity* is something to be managed like balancing teacher well-being with student well-being. A compromise is most likely needed with a *polarity* and this is something that must be discussed and facilitated well in order to hear all sides. If, as the leader, you frame a *problem* as a *polarity*, or a *polarity* as a *problem* to be solved, you run the risk of dooming your initiative to failure before it even starts. Below are some common polarities to be aware of:

- autonomy and collaboration
- team relationships and team tasks
- needs of students and needs of staff
- continuity and change
- clarity and flexibility
- work priorities and home priorities

How does the initiative align with my values and the school’s values?

Before jumping into implementation, it helps for you to consider the ways the initiative aligns with your own values. You will be able to more authentically support the change if it aligns with your deepest beliefs. Further, what values do your school and district hold dear? Does your school value students who are resilient, responsible, and respectful? If so, how do these ideals align with the change effort? If you can tie the initiative to existing school and district values, you will have a greater chance of staff buy-in. Purpose is clearly an important element as Susan Scott reminds us: “If you want to see someone in real pain watch someone who knows who he is and defaults on it on a regular basis.”

Who needs to be involved in the planning of the initiative?

One of the ways people resist new initiatives is by saying, “Why wasn’t I involved in the planning of this?” This is why it is crucial to get people involved in the planning. Whatever this involvement looks like, think through *who* should be involved early on. Who will those stakeholders be that you want to involve – Teachers? Parents? Students? All of them or just some of them?

How do I get input from others?

Another thing to think about before you start is *how* you will get input from others – Will you use surveys, focus groups, whole-staff meetings, small-team meetings, or one-on-ones? When leaders don’t fully think through the *how*, initiatives fail to get buy-in. Imagine choosing to share the initiative with a few PowerPoint slides and then half the staff doesn’t even show up for that staff meeting. Further, to help with buy-in, be sure to explain exactly how you plan to use staff input. This is known as a *sandbox discussion* – letting staff know what “sandbox” they are playing in helps to clarify their role in the project.

To be able to truly hear from people, you need good facilitation skills. For some tips, check out Elena Aguilar’s [The Art of Coaching Teams](#) (The Main Idea has a summary – click the title) Before you jump into one of these meetings, think about whether you’re aiming for a dialogue, discussion, brainstorm, or decision-making session. Keep in mind that *the process* – discussion, dialogue, decision making – can be just as important as the final decision itself. If you want to prevent people from resisting the change with, “Why wasn’t I involved?” take time to consider *how* you are going about getting input from others. Another key part of the process is *transparency*. Be clear and open about the process, who is involved, and how you will be making decisions.

Why is this initiative needed?

If you simply share *what* the plan is without addressing the *why*, your initiative will fall short. People need to understand why this initiative is needed. One way deep-end leaders make their change initiatives come alive is by sharing stories, “People remember information when it is weaved into narratives up to 22 times more than facts alone.” Stories provide something for your audience to connect with, so consider who your audience is and what they care about. In addition to stories, evidence and data can provide a compelling reason for *why* this project is needed.

What is my complete action plan?

Now that you’ve thought through the *what*, *who*, *how*, and *why*, (and the values), it’s time to put it all together in one action plan. One way to be clear about your plan is to put it in writing with an FAQ (frequently asked questions) sheet. Address the who, what, why, and how and other details of the initiative. Below are some additional questions you might want to consider addressing in your complete action plan as well:

- What changes will occur as a result of this initiative?
- What behaviors will we expect when the change takes place?
- What criteria was used to make the decision to start this project?
- In what timeframe do we need to make the changes?
- Who should we talk to if we have any concerns?
- What supports will be in place to help?

How do I communicate it?

It is not enough to create this FAQ sheet. You need to communicate this plan in a variety of media – in writing, in person – again and again. Repetition is extremely important especially given that people often don’t pay attention until it directly impacts them. The goal is to be extremely clear in your communication plan. You will be less successful in holding people accountable later and dealing with their resistance if you haven’t been crystal clear about the details of your initiative to begin with.

Overall it is more than worth the time and effort to *think* before you take action. The next chapter provides tips for managing resistance when the initiative has been announced.

Chapter Two – 2nd Skill: Preempting Resistance

Four Skills to Address Resistance to Change

Thinking before you speak (planning for resistance)	Preempting resistance (know yourself, know others)	Responding to resistance (for when we speak)	Managing yourself through change and resistance (after we speak)
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Even if you take the time to think and plan as the last chapter suggested, there will still be resistance to change. This chapter highlights two other important skills that will help you address that resistance: *know yourself* and *know others*. If you take the time to know more about yourself – how you work, communicate, learn, and lead – you are less likely to get triggered by and more likely to be able to handle resistance. Further, if you can look at the change from the point of view of others – that is, an *allocentric* point of view – this goes a long way in helping you to preempt resistance and find ways to collaborate more successfully with others.

Know Yourself

How *you* show up matters. That’s why the first part of this chapter is about *you*. The Ancient Greek aphorism *know thyself* is key. To help you manage resistance you must start with yourself so that you can better handle the adults you’ll be working with on your initiative. The action plan you created for the initiative might be perfect for *your* style of working and thinking but it might clash horribly with how others function. Take some time to answer the following questions, excerpted from a longer list on pages 40-41, to get to know yourself better.

- Are you a “get it done right away” or “think about it a few days” kind of worker?
- Which tasks do you enjoy doing with others and which do you prefer to do on your own?
- What are your strengths as a worker? Areas where you need to grow?
- Which work challenges do you find to be fun? More challenging?
- How do you handle abrupt changes in plans? How might someone work with you in those situations?
- Do you consider yourself more of an introvert or extrovert? Have you taken any type of personality-type tests?
- What are the best ways to communicate with you (text, email, phone, etc.)?
- How do you like to handle mistakes? Yours or others?
- How would you like to receive feedback?
- What are your pet peeves when it comes to working with others?

Below is a list of other resources to help “know thyself”

- Myers-Briggs (www.myersbriggs.org)
- Strengths Finder (www.strengthsfinder.com/home.aspx)
- True Colors (<https://truecolorsintl.com>)
- VIA Survey of Character (www.viacharacter.org)
- The New Science of Team Chemistry (hbr.org/2017/03/the-new-science-of-team-chemistry)

Know Others

Now that you’ve explored the questions above and thought about what might trigger you in working with others on a new initiative, it’s time to consider what might trigger *them*. Perhaps you like to work collaboratively, but others prefer to work alone. Although you might like to act immediately, they might shudder at the thought because they need time to think first. To become aware of these differences, your self-awareness and social intelligence are key. Consider some of the following questions to build this awareness:

- Do I listen well?
- Am I attentive to the emotional cues of others?
- Do I know my colleagues’ strengths?
- Am I respectful of different perspectives, backgrounds and worldviews?
- Do I understand diverse worldviews and appreciate differences?

It may seem like a lot to spend so much time focused on the needs of the *adults* when educators feel they should be addressing the needs of the students. The truth is that we need to meet the needs of both. You can’t move a school forward without considering what works for the adults, too. What follows are some ways to help you understand a few larger types of differences you may experience in working with others. The better you can understand the perspective of staff members and move forward in a more *allocentric* way, the better you will be at preempting resistance. Below are some larger categories to think about as you work to understand others better.

*Do I know the **personal backgrounds** of the people I am working and collaborating with?*

As educators we know that the personal backgrounds of students influences their work in the classroom. The same is true of adults. When they come to work, the adults show up with their whole selves. Because their various backgrounds will influence how they view and participate in your initiative, it helps to be aware that there are differences in the following factors (not an exhaustive list) that impact their identities:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Seniority | • Family or marital status | • Geographic location |
| • Place of origin | • Caregiving responsibilities | • Race and ethnicity |
| • Citizenship/immigration status | • Socioeconomic status | • Age and generation |

To preempt resistance, consider the impact of your initiative on staff members based on the factors above. How will it impact someone with caregiving responsibilities versus someone about to retire? Are you trying to do something collaborative when there are staff members from cultures who value status and might struggle more with this approach?

*How does **adult learning theory** impact the initiative I am implementing?*

There has been a lot of research on how adults learn best. Below are three aspects of adult learning that will help you better prepare for your initiative:

- **Competence** – Adults want to feel competent and in control. They don’t want to feel ashamed to find out that the way they’ve been doing things is wrong. Think about ways to highlight what they currently do well, and then give them some choices and control to build on that.
- **Opportunity and Risk** – Adults like challenge, but it helps for the leader to emphasize that growth takes time and it’s OK to not get it right the first time. Help to build a growth mindset by repeatedly letting people know that it will take several iterations to succeed.
- **Identity Formation** – Growing is a process of continual identify formation. It’s important to be generous in allowing the adults you work with to grow into who they are becoming. We tend to think of adults as already formed.

*How does the **psychological threat-or-reward** instinct impact people's reactions to the initiative?*

Another way to preempt resistance is to understand how our initiative or our approach triggers people. Neuropsychologist David Rock studied the types of comments that lead to a fight-or-flight response in other people. Using a model that Rock came up with (SCARF), you can become more mindful of times when listeners feel threatened. Rock found that the following five factors (that form the acronym SCARF) either increase or decrease safety in a conversation:

Status: This is how a person feels about her importance compared to others. This may be affected by her roles, expertise, and how long she has been on staff.

Certainty: This has to do with a person's comfort in knowing what will happen in the near future. For your initiative, consider how much individuals will need to change their practice so they know what to expect.

Autonomy: This is about how much control a staff member has over her environment or actions. Think about which parts of the initiative people can do their own way and which need to be done uniformly.

Relatedness: This relates to how connected people feel to the group. Their sense of belonging. Consider how staff will be working together as a team in implementing the initiative.

Fairness: This has to do with having the same rules and processes for everyone. Consider who the initiative is for and if it is meant only for certain departments or teams, why this is the case.

Plan for how might you make use of these five areas to make people feel less threatened. While you can't meet the needs of all 120 people on staff, you can address the five common needs above. A place to start is by becoming aware of these five and tailoring your wording to address these needs. For example, are you valuing veterans and first-year teachers alike (status)? Have you found and articulated aspects of the initiative that allow for individual choice (autonomy)? Have you emphasized the need for teamwork as the way to move forward with this initiative (relatedness)?

*How aware am I of people's different **developmental stages**?*

Adults are at different developmental stages, and depending on these stages, they will have different *ways of knowing*. These are not hierarchical stages, but if you are aware of the way a person knows things, then you can *communicate* appropriately so that she will hear you. Based on the work of Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, take a look at the four ways of knowing and what you might emphasize about your initiative to make sure that you are heard:

Ways of Knowing	Sample Teacher Concerns	What to Emphasize in Your Initiative
<i>Instrumental</i> Way of Knowing (rule-based)	These teachers need <i>concrete</i> next steps or they feel anxious.	<i>Concrete</i> suggestions, models and examples
<i>Socialized</i> Way of Knowing (other-focused)	These teachers like to <i>be appreciated</i> and do not want to be criticized for how they are implementing the rollout. They need to be engaged in the initiative and treated kindly.	<i>Appreciation</i> for effort as well as progress
<i>Self-Authoring</i> Way of Knowing (reflective)	These teachers need <i>autonomy</i> and options. They want to self-assess how they will need to get to the goal. They also appreciate working with others who will help them explore options.	Opportunities for <i>autonomy</i> and opportunities to collaboratively <i>reflect</i>
<i>Self-Transforming</i> Way of Knowing (interconnecting)	These teachers feel it is important to <i>embrace the complexity</i> of the challenge and move beyond a simple solution.	Opportunities to explore alternatives, contradictions, and paradoxes

This chapter provides a variety of ways you can strengthen your allocentric mindset and consider where your staff is when it comes to implementing your new initiative. It is just a start, but adopting an allocentric approach will take you a long way in preempting resistance to change.

Chapter Three – 3rd Skill: Responding to Resistance

Four Skills to Address Resistance to Change			
Thinking before you speak (planning for resistance)	Preempting resistance (know yourself, know others)	Responding to resistance (for when we speak)	Managing yourself through change and resistance (after we speak)

Even when you've done a thoughtful job of planning for resistance and adopting allocentric thinking, you will *still* experience resistant behaviors. The key is not to get triggered and react impulsively, but to respond thoughtfully. Deep-end leaders learn to *respond*, not *react*. How do you do this? What follows are some strategies you can use to respond more calmly to resistance.

Communication strategies to respond rather than react

Not only will it help if *you* have the communication tools to respond rather than react, but it will be even better if others have strategies as well. What follows are some norms that staff can use to relate to and communicate with each other. The adults in our building have many credentials and skills in working with *students*, but may not have learned how to communicate productively with *adults*. The following skills will help:

- **Pausing:** Pausing before responding allows time for thought and will enhance the discussion.
- **Paraphrasing:** To help members of the group better understand each other, try a paraphrase starter, “You’re thinking...”
- **Posing questions:** Using gentle, open-ended questions helps the group’s thinking, “I’d like to hear more about...”
- **Putting ideas on the table:** To help dialogue, share tentative ideas, “One thought I have is...” “Here is a possible approach...”
- **Providing data:** A group’s shared meaning comes from shared qualitative and quantitative data.
- **Paying attention to self and others:** This connects to the concept of allocentric thinking in the previous chapter. Paying attention to others helps us understand their reactions and respond in a way that speaks to them.
- **Presuming positive intentions:** Using positive intentions in your speech helps to promote dialogue and avoid put-downs.

Responding professionally to resistance

When people respond negatively to your initiative, make sure you don’t react with anger or frustration. Below are some suggestions to help you respond more professionally to a few typical forms of resistance:

Typical form of resistance	Professional ways to respond
Someone intimidates you with shouting, swearing, or threatening	“You have every right to feel that way, but not in that offensive manner. Please rephrase your objection in a professional way.”
Someone responds with words like <i>never</i> , <i>always</i> , <i>every time</i>	“While it may seem that I <i>never</i> respond, this is an overgeneralization which is not true. Let’s try to focus our discussion on this specific situation.”
Someone brings up unrelated events from the past	“That information isn’t the focus of this current implementation. Let’s stick to the <i>current</i> rollout.”
Someone wants to be let off the hook in implementing this initiative	“Everyone is responsible for this rollout. While I understand [the person’s circumstances], I also understand that we all need to do our part. How can I support you because I am committed to making sure this gets done?”
Someone says the district is making us do this	“We are the district. All of us. I am included... By stating the district is making us do this takes away our power. We need to take responsibility for our part of the work.”
Someone says the timeline is unrealistic	“I feel the same way. There is never enough time. I have found I’ve been able to make these modifications [explain] to make more time. Given that this initiative isn’t going away, what do you suggest we do next?”

Use of language and mindset in responding to resistance

In addition to the suggested sentences above, there are other ways you can tweak your language to more effectively deal with resistance. First, be authentic and accurate in your language. If what you are stating is not a *suggestion* or a *recommendation*, don’t sugarcoat your language and use these words. Be accurate and honest about things that are non-negotiables, mandates, or requirements. Next, change some of your self-talk so you have a more positive mindset when speaking with staff. Rather than saying to yourself *I can’t*, use *I don’t* instead. Using *I don’t* sends the message that you have a choice so you will feel more empowered. Further, rather than thinking of something as negative (“They pick at every little problem”) reframe it so you think more positively (“They are conscientious.”) A more positive mindset will lead to more positive language.

Use body language to respond appropriately to resistance

Instead of having your body language reveal frustration and irritation, you can use it to respond more effectively to resistance. Sometimes you will want your body language to make you appear more authoritative and at other times you will want to appear more approachable. Knowing which way to position yourself depends on what you know about others (from your allocentric stance). Take a look at the different ways you can choose to project your body language below. The key is in knowing when to use which stance.

Authoritative Stance	Approachable Stance
Keep your head still, speak in complete sentences, hold eye contact while talking, move smoothly, occupy maximum space, have a rigid spine, maintain strong eye contact that says, ‘This is where we are headed’	Nod when others speak, smile, start sentences with “um,” speak in incomplete sentences, lean in to create a more collaborative atmosphere, be less rigid, have a softer spine, show vulnerability with your body

Resistance *will* happen, but deep-end leaders can control how they speak and hold their bodies even when others lash out. They key is not to react, but to *respond*.

Chapter Four – 4th Skill: Managing *Yourself* Through Change and Resistance

Four Skills to Address Resistance to Change

Thinking before you speak (planning for resistance)	Preempting resistance (know yourself, know others)	Responding to resistance (for when we speak)	Managing yourself through change and resistance (after we speak)
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The final skill in dealing with change, and in particular resistance, is to manage *yourself*. To manage resistance effectively you will need resolve, resilience, and stamina. This chapter introduces a few ways you can take care of yourself while managing resistance. Some may think that this is a luxury, but Abrams writes, “I do not consider self-care an indulgence, but rather an investment.”

How resilient are you in the face of change and resistance? The definition of *resilience*, according to Merriam-Webster, is “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.” To bounce back, it is essential to be able to answer in the affirmative to the following questions, and if you can’t, take a look at the self-care suggestions in the rest of the chapter:

- *Am I getting better at coping with unexpected chaos and anxiety within my organization?*
- *Can I soothe myself when I am dismissed, diminished, or challenged?*
- *In moments of discomfort, can I calmly let in information and make informed, nonreactive decisions?*
- *Can I hear different opinions in the midst of conflict?*

Suggestions for self-care

• *Care for your physical self.*

When you feel exhausted, the last thing on your mind may be exercise, but research has confirmed the many benefits of moving your body. To care for yourself, in addition to exercise, you might get a massage, try to eat more healthily, and improve your sleep. One concrete step you can take is to put your phone in another room when you sleep, turn off all alerts, and set up a message that says, “If this email arrives after 8pm I will respond to it the next business day.” Another way to care for your physical as well as emotional health is to use breathing, meditation, or some practice to calm your body and mind. You can simply start your day with a moment of silence or you might prefer a guided or walking meditation (see davidji.com or insighttimer.com). Of course, it’s easy to remind educators to take care of their physical selves, and it’s another for them to develop the habits to actually *do* them regularly.

Boost your optimism, growth mindset, and regularly express gratitude.

Research shows that if we focus on the positive, we will not only be happier, but we will also improve our lives. One way to do this is through gratitude. You can find many types of gratitude journals on Amazon or you can just journal each morning to get started. Danny Bauer of *Better Leaders, Better Schools*, simply writes down the following each day: three things he is grateful for, one thing he is looking forward to, and one person he is going to help. Optimism is something that can be learned as psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman has found (see his Authentic Happiness website www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu). In addition to gratitude, another way to increase happiness is to reframe how you view things (glass half full). As you are dealing with change and resistance, you will confront disappointments. If you can see that these disappointments lack the three Ps (*permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization*) it’s easier to get over them. When Abrams taught, she helped students with their disappointments upon receiving their first grades by telling them the following to preempt the three Ps:

1. This is just *one* paper (think short-term, not permanence)
2. It doesn’t mean anything about you as a person, or as a student in the bigger sense (it is not a pervasive reflection of you)
3. You can work on it again (more effort will help and it’s not personal)

Here she was helping students with positive self-talk. Leaders need to do the same. If they believe in their own ability to grow and improve – that is, develop a healthy growth mindset – they will be able to reframe setbacks using strategies like the three Ps above.

Find compassion, laugh, and restore yourself.

There are various ways to take a moment that will help you feel restored. Some people go outside and take a hike while others attend a worship service or go to the theater. Still others make sure to find time to laugh – research shows that laughing can improve your immune system and lessen depression. When Abrams messes up and feels badly about it, she tries a self-compassion practice like a loving-kindness meditation to cultivate compassion for herself and others. This helps her acknowledge that she is human and makes mistakes, and it’s OK. Forgiving yourself and others certainly helps relationships, but it also helps with your own immune system!

Take time to grow yourself.

Unfortunately, administrators and school leaders often get the least amount of professional development in a school. There is so much deep learning to do around leadership and yet leaders often neglect their own growth. While it will take effort to prioritize the time for your own professional learning, there are ways to ensure that you continue to grow. Consider joining a mentoring or professional development group (like a mastermind), take online courses, listen to podcasts, build your network and engage in Twitter chats, and keep up your reading!

This book simply provides introductions to ideas you might try to plan for, preempt, and address resistance and change. You certainly do not need to take on all of them, but they are here for you to explore when you are ready to take a moment.

THE MAIN IDEA's PD suggestions for Managing Resistance to Change

The PD suggestions below are for a school leader or leadership team to think through and practice a few skills to help manage resistance to new initiatives or change. There are a number of questions to reflect on so you might want to pull out a journal or have some way to record your thoughts and responses. You do not need to do all of these exercises or do them in order.

Skill 1: Thinking Before You Speak

⇒ Think of an initiative or a change that you'd like to make in your school or district. First make sure you know whether this change is a *problem* (solvable) or a *polarity* (which needs to be managed). Take a look at the following examples of polarities to help you determine if this is what your initiative is:

- autonomy and collaboration
- team relationships and team tasks
- needs of students and needs of staff
- centralization and decentralization
- continuity and change
- clarity and flexibility
- work priorities and home priorities
- teacher as lecturer and teacher as facilitator

⇒ Take some time to map out different aspects of this initiative that were introduced in this chapter to ensure that you “think before you speak.” Use a chart like the one below if it's helpful:

Think before you speak -- Map out the following aspects of your initiative	
<i>What is the challenge we're addressing?</i>	
<i>How does the initiative align with your values and the school's values?</i>	
<i>Who needs to be involved in the planning of the initiative?</i>	
<i>How do I get input from others?</i>	
<i>Why is this initiative needed?</i>	
<i>What is my complete action plan (additional details from what has been outlined above)?</i>	
<i>How do I communicate it?</i>	

⇒ On p.27, Abrams lists websites with resources to help with dialogue, discussion, and decision making. People often resist changes when they feel they were not included in the decision-making process. Choose a decision-making protocol from one of the websites on this list and practice using it at an upcoming leadership team meeting so you will have experience with it as you go through the initiative. This is one my favorites from the School Reform Initiative: http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/consensus_decision.pdf In this protocol, “consensus” is defined as:

- A. I can live with the decision.
- B. I will support my colleagues in implementing this decision.
- C. I will do absolutely nothing to impede the implementation of the decision.

Skill 2 - Know Yourself, Know Others

Know yourself

⇒ To better know yourself, you could choose to do a personality-type test like the ones listed in the summary (Myers-Briggs, Strengths Finder, True Colors, VIA Survey of Character Strengths, or The New Science of Team Chemistry). Or, you might simply take time to write your own answers to the questions below. One additional step I recommend is to share your answers with a critical friend and see if she would answer any of these questions differently given her experience of how you work.

- Are you a “get it done right away” or “think about it a few days” kind of worker?
- Which tasks do you enjoy doing with others and which do you prefer to do on your own?
- What are your strengths as a worker? Areas where you need to grow?
- Which work challenges do you find to be fun? More challenging?
- How do you handle abrupt changes in plans? How might someone work with you in those situations?
- Do you consider yourself more of an introvert or extrovert? Have you taken any type of personality-type tests?
- What are the best ways to communicate with you (text, email, phone, etc.)?
- How do you like to handle mistakes? Yours or others?
- How would you like to receive feedback?
- What are your pet peeves when it comes to working with others?

Know others

⇒ Part of knowing your staff better so you can preempt resistance is knowing them personally *and* knowing larger categories of how people are different. Ask yourself the following questions (consider writing down your responses):

Question	Self-Assess
How well do you know the <i>personal backgrounds</i> of your staff?	Look at a list of your staff members – can you name a few salient details about the background of each person?
How familiar are you with <i>adult learning theory</i> ?	Write down everything you know about adult learning theory. Now describe a few examples of how you have applied this theory to initiatives or interactions with staff.
How aware are you of the way <i>psychological threat-or-reward</i> theories impact your staff members?	Describe SCARF (or other psychological models) and ways you’ve used your knowledge of these theories to better interact with staff.
How aware are you of <i>adult developmental stages</i> ?	Write down everything you know about adult developmental stages. Now describe a few examples of how you have applied this theory to initiatives or interactions with staff.

If you are not satisfied with your knowledge of any of these areas, go back and read the summary, purchase the book, or explore the topic more online (unless you want to learn more about the *personal backgrounds* of staff in which case you should consider setting up some one-on-one meetings with staff and carve out time to ask about their lives and listen).

⇒ I particularly appreciate the power of using the SCARF model to consider staff members’ psychological needs when planning an initiative, a PD session, or a change. Consider using this chart to map out what to do to build psychological safety when presenting your initiative:

Psychological Safety	How will I reinforce this element of SCARF in my initiative?
Status: This is how a person feels about her importance compared to others.	
Certainty: This has to do with a person’s comfort in knowing what will happen in the near future.	
Autonomy: This is about how much control a staff member has over her environment or actions.	
Relatedness: This relates to how connected people feel to the group.	
Fairness: This has to do with having the same rules and processes for everyone.	

Skill 3 - Respond Rather Than React

⇒ Abrams presents a number of communication skills that all start with the letter P. These would serve as powerful norms if everyone on your team or involved in the initiative were to follow them. However, seven norms are too many to remember. With your team, choose three of the norms below (perhaps use the definition of consensus from above). Next, discuss what each of those three norms would look like and sound like in a meeting. Finally, for your first meeting, have someone serve as the “P Checker,” observe how people are using the Ps in the meeting, and then report on that use at the end of the meeting.

- **Pausing:** Pausing before responding allows time for thought and will enhance the discussion.
- **Paraphrasing:** To help members of the group better understand each other, try a paraphrase starter, “You’re thinking...”
- **Posing questions:** Using gentle, open-ended questions helps the group’s thinking, “I’d like to hear more about...”
- **Putting ideas on the table:** To help dialogue, share tentative ideas, “One thought I have is...” “Here is a possible approach...”
- **Providing data:** A group’s shared meaning comes from shared qualitative and quantitative data.
- **Paying attention to self and others:** Paying attention to others helps us understand them and respond appropriately.
- **Presuming positive intentions:** Using positive intentions in your speech helps to promote dialogue and avoid put-downs.

⇒ Educators often neglect to *practice* new skills they hope to acquire. It can be particularly useful for a leader to practice the words and body language to convey a certain message. Imagine a scenario in which a staff member confronts you about your initiative (it might help to imagine specific people) and in front of a mirror, practice the words and the body language you would like to use from the charts below. Note: If you use these skills in an online meeting with a view of yourself, you can grade your response afterwards!

Typical form of resistance	Professional ways to respond
Someone intimidates you with shouting, swearing, or threatening	"You have every right to feel that way, but not in that offensive manner. Please rephrase your objection in a professional way."
Someone responds with words like <i>never</i> , <i>always</i> , <i>every time</i>	"While it may seem that I <i>never</i> respond, this is an overgeneralization which is not true. Let's try to focus our discussion on this specific situation."
Someone brings up unrelated events from the past	"That information isn't the focus of this current implementation. Let's stick to the <i>current</i> rollout."
Someone wants to be let off the hook in implementing this initiative	"Everyone is responsible for this rollout. While I understand [the person's circumstances], I also understand that we all need to do our part. How can I support you because I am committed to making sure this gets done?"
Someone says the district is making us do this	"We are the district. All of us. I am included. . . By stating the district is making us do this takes away our power. We need to take responsibility for our part of the work."
Someone says the timeline is unrealistic	"I feel the same way. There is never enough time. I have found I've been able to make these modifications [explain] to make more time. Given that this initiative isn't going away, what do you suggest we do next?"

Authoritative Stance	Approachable Stance
Keep your head still, speak in complete sentences, hold eye contact while talking, move smoothly, occupy maximum space, have a rigid spine, maintain strong eye contact that says, 'This is where we are headed'	Nod when others speak, smile, start sentences with "um," speak in incomplete sentences, lean in to create a more collaborative atmosphere, be less rigid, have a softer spine, show vulnerability with your body