

David Roth's Decision

David Roth is a high school principal, and he is annoyed. He had worked hard to build consensus for moving forward with the PLC concept. He provided the entire staff with research and readings on the benefits of PLCs. He sent key teacher leaders to conferences on PLCs and used those staff members as a guiding coalition to promote the concept. He encouraged interested staff to visit schools that were working as PLCs. He met with the entire faculty in small groups to listen to their concerns and answer their questions. Finally, at the end of this process, he was convinced that the faculty was ready to move forward. He divided teachers into subject-area teams and asked each team to work collaboratively to clarify the essential outcomes of their courses and to develop common assessments to monitor student proficiency.

Within a month, the sophomore English team met with Principal Roth to ask if the team could exempt one of its members from team meetings. They explained that Fred made it clear that he was opposed to the entire idea of collaborative teams and common assessments. Fred made no effort to contribute, and his ridicule and sarcasm were undermining the team. Principal Roth assured them that he would look into the situation and attempt to remedy it.

The next day, Principal Roth called Fred to his office to discuss Fred's attitude toward his colleagues and the collaborative team process. After listening to the principal's concerns, Fred expressed his unhappiness with what he felt was a heavy-handed, top-down dictate of working in teams. He rejected the idea that the staff had arrived at consensus. Not only was he opposed to the initiative, he knew many other teachers who were as well. It was fine with him if the team did not want him to participate, because he had no interest in participating. He had always been an effective teacher, and he did not need some artificial process of working with colleagues to become effective. The meeting ended, with no resolution.

After much deliberation, Principal Roth decided to ask the English team to continue working with Fred in the hope that his attitude would improve over time.

From R. DuFour, R. DuFour, R. Eaker, & T. Many. (2010). *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, pp. 225–226.

Elements of Difficult but Crucial Conversions

Elements	Case Study
Assume good intentions	
Ask that person to articulate the assumptions and thought processes behind his or her position.	
Find common ground.	
Build shared knowledge.	
Share your own assumptions and thought processes.	

Important: Before initiating a difficult conversation, clarify what you want and do not want to result from the conversation.