

# Cliff Edge Challenges

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*How the right questions can transform the challenge and chart the way through*

Two questions people find it difficult to ask when discussing challenging issues:

- ☐ Realistically, are we past the point of rescue with this issue?
- ☐ If something fundamental doesn't change, how long will it be before we do move past the point of rescue?

Research has shown that one of the most common approaches to conflict is **AVOIDANCE** – many of us have become masters at 'ducking and diving' around conflict. Of course, we have to recognise that there are many times when this is the sensible course of action – but it is *not always* the right course of action...and as the well know prayer goes ...'*teach me to know the difference*'!

One of the most important skills in any conflict resolution approach is that of skilful questioning in all phases of addressing challenging issues. Leaders need to be artists with questions...the right question for the right time to the right person in the right way... In training mediators and conflict resolution consultants across a range of professions, this is one of the most demanding and crucial elements in my experience. To be able to ask the appropriate question...to have the self insight, the appreciation of the context, the understanding of the participants...all combining to serve the good judgement required to deploy the right question.

Let me put forward some stimulating and provocative questions to consider in challenging circumstances...

- ▣ What cost are you prepared to pay to deal with the issue?
- ▣ **What conversations do you need to have – and what needs to happen to have these conversations?**
- ▣ If I act what happens?...If I don't act what happens?
- ▣ **What's my comfort zone? What's my stretch zone? What's my panic zone?**
- ▣ What do you need to do today, this week, this month to stretch yourself personally and professionally?
- ▣ **Chaos, Change and Chance – how have they shaped (and continue to shape) my personality and my ability to perform?**
- ▣ Your most recent critical event – how did you handle it?
- ▣ **Your next critical event – how do you plan to handle it?**
- ▣ **Honest conversation is the conductor of powerful foresight**  
– when did you last have such a conversation?
- ▣ **Are you determined to develop yourself?**

In any challenging – cliff edge – experience we have to be able to question what is happening, why is it happening, what do I do, what can I learn... We can spend so much energy avoiding challenges, muting contrary voices, smoothing over differences and placating that we lose the 'taste' of conviction, of passion, of compelling purpose and sacrifice it on the altar of 'calm'. Like death and taxes, challenges and significant challenges will arise. We don't seek them, but nor should we pathologically avoid them. The danger of consistently embracing avoidance (though of course we tell ourselves

that it is constructive and appropriate ...*but just a little bit too often...*) is that we miss the whole picture and therefore misdiagnose the real issues, poorly design a response and deliver the wrong actions...some further questions to consider...

☐ **Do I too often accept the placebo over what prompts real engagement, real change?**

☐ **Do I avoid the triple-jeopardy of failing to recognise a danger, making a mistake and then not wanting to know about the relevant correction?**

The fear of the **WCS** – worst-case scenario – can paralyse. Our conflict coaching service helps leaders to address their WCS so as to free up optimum planning and action. In conflict coaching as with other modes of coaching and personal professional development the aim is to empower the leader to embrace the challenge in all its facets.

We have found in Curam that with the increasing challenges of the current environment that more and more leaders are being forced to the ‘edge’ – our support is to assist precisely at this ‘edge’ and work from there to face directly what should not be avoided any longer. We work with the leader to:

☐ ruthlessly **diagnose** the reality of the situation

☐ creatively and sensitively **design** the strategy to deal with the challenge

☐ effectively **deliver** and implement the strategy action by action.

This approach is turning around school communities by addressing long lasting poisoned relationships, financial and governance challenges.

Contact us for a no-obligation consultation and see if our resources across an expanded team can be of meaningful support to you. Remember avoidance is an option not a lifestyle...

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