

Steps for Compassionate Action – Scenarios for Discussion

Combined from the works of Monica Worline and Jon Katzenbach, Carolin Oelschlegel, and James Thomas

Instructions: Working in pairs, take one scenario and discuss your answers to the questions on the following page.



Scenario One:

A co-worker has been late to work several times and is in danger of disciplinary action. You are aware that she is struggling with anxiety but fears ridicule based on some staff comments about students who struggle to come to school on time. She comes to you one morning upset by the harsh look she got from the administrator when she was 5 minutes late. She says “Can you believe what a micro-manager she is?!”



Scenario Two:

A staff person is showing signs that they may be addicted to gambling. His work performance is slipping but prior to this he has been an excellent employee. As the school administrator, you are this person’s manager and have growing frustration with his lowered engagement with students, families and colleagues. He comes to you to tell you that yesterday a child fell and seemed OK but then the mother called to say that the child’s arm is broken. He reports that he did everything after that to follow school policies when a child is hurt. He says that he is coming to you just to be sure you knew and to verify that he did everything needed to follow-up. You wonder if the accident was due to negligence on the part of the staff person.



Scenario Three:

The parent of one of your students has shared with you that she is having a rough time and may have to remove her child from all extra-curricular activities because she can no longer afford to pay the program fees. The child is very involved in both the arts and sports and is upset at the possibility of having to give them up.

Steps for Compassionate Action – Scenarios for Discussion (continued)

Questions

- 1. Notice** – Be present in the moment and able to recognize signs of distress.

 - a) What times or situations in your day are you most likely to have things get in the way of you being present?
 - b) Consider the scenario as happening in such a time. What can you do to be more present in these times?
- 2. Self-check** - Be aware of your emotional resonance (What am I connecting to from my past?) and initial cognitive appraisal. Appraisals are natural and dependent on your frame of reference from your experience and “training” and often inaccurate or incomplete.

 - a) What emotions arise for you in relation to this scenario?
 - b) What might your initial judgments be? What might your “old tapes” play back to you?
- 3. Seek to understand** – Suspend appraisals. Listen with curiosity to understand the concerns/distress from the other’s perspective. Move towards generous interpretations of another’s behavior.

 - a) How might you invite the person to share information with you? What strategies do you use to encourage them to open up with you?
 - b) What are three possible “generous” explanations for this behavior?
- 4. Cultivate empathy** – Genuine concern develops based on what you have come to understand. This leads to a growing desire and intention to help. Keep listening for understanding if empathy seems out of reach.

 - a) What situations do you find most difficult for you to tap into your genuine empathy? What can you do in these situations to ensure the person experiences empathy?
- 5. Discern best action** – Work with the person to figure out what would actually be helpful to them rather than what you think would be helpful or was helpful to you in past, similar circumstances.

 - a) Compare your ideas for a helpful action with those of your partner. Note differences and the problems that might arise if your solutions were applied to your partner.
- 6. Take action** – Be aware that intention alone is not compassionate action.

 - a.) What typically gets in your way of taking compassionate action?
 - b) What can you do to minimize those barriers?