

ADR Skill of the Month

Time to Brake, Break, and Breathe

In conflict resolution, this is a time of year when we can race ahead of ourselves. The school term has low mileage on it, our tanks are still pretty full, and our engines are fairly fresh from our summer tune-ups. We know there's a lot of ground to cover and, seeing all that scary open road ahead, we press down on that accelerator. Yep, it's "October Overdrive" and we'd better pay attention to our speedometers before things turn into Mr. Toad's Wild Ride.

Now that you're a month or so into the school year, I want you to ease off the gas pedal for a moment, glance into the mirror and answer honestly: How is it going? Do you still have that positive new 'tude'? If so, congratulations and keep on driving in your safe lane. If not – or if you're unsure – maybe the "Three B's" will help you stay on course.

Brake. This refers to the psychological technique of telling ourselves to stop putting negative energy into what's driving us. (I'm not suggesting making external changes.) When we're busy and most likely wearing multiple hats, it's natural to rev up to "overdrive" mode. But when we do that, we miss the scenery whirring past us – and perhaps some important road signs. We lose sight of the Why, What and Who of our jobs. And we lose awareness of how we feel, and how others perceive us. We don't even know if we're communicating in ways that are being understood, and we're definitely impaired in our ability to understand other perspectives. Braking allows us to stop building up anger, resentment, frustration or whatever else we might be feeling that may be taking us off track. Putting on the brakes allows us to take those necessary *breaks*.

Break. This can be a five-minute "I need some air" break or a "Let's sleep on it" break. What matters is taking time to comprehend and process things such as what has just been said in a meeting, as well as to gather our thoughts so that we can communicate in a positive, productive way. Bear in mind that a break usually involves other people, so it is important to get agreement on how long it will last (i.e. 10 minutes, one day, a week.) The added benefit to a break is that it allows us a healthy step away; to let us *breathe*.

Breathe. If we had to put on the brakes, chances are we weren't breathing. Working in special education and having children/students with disabilities can be challenging and emotional; and for parents it's also personal. No matter who we are, we should remember to breathe. As I write this, it seems so simple: "Don't forget to breathe!" Duh, right? True enough, but I chose this topic because I too can forget to "Brake, Break, and Breathe," especially during this time of the year. But I know that when I force myself to do it, I am always calmer, more grounded, and open to continuing that tough conversation. Try it; it works.

Feeling anxious before a tough meeting? Set a timer for 5 minutes and then simply breathe. It will relax you, ground you, and open you to being your most effective.

Speaking of openness, this seems the right occasion to remind you that I'm always eager to hear about what does or doesn't work for you from these articles and techniques, as well as what questions and suggestions you have. For instance, for those who did answer "yes" to maintaining a positive new attitude, let me know – so I can share – what has made the difference this time around. Are there other tips and insights that could help your colleagues or fellow parents? E-mail me at mpurchin@purchinconsulting.com. After all, we are truly in this together, breathing the same air and sharing the same road.

Marc Purchin, Director of ADR Services

Southwest SELPA

Alternative Dispute
Resolution Services
(ADR)

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For more information or
to utilize ADR services,
contact:

Marc Purchin
SW_adr@lcoe.edu

310.546.1834 x 229
310-202-1155 Home Office

www.swselpa.org