

Building Bridges Between Home And School

The Educator's/Teacher's Guide To Dealing
With Emotional And Upset Parents



Robert Bacal

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And Upset Parents

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Preface — 2013

It's been seventeen years since "Defusing Hostile & Volatile Situations For Educators" was published, or really, made available in a crude photocopied format. In that time we've seen huge changes, and events that have reshaped our views on life, security, education, almost everything. In 1996, social media didn't exist. In 1996 we were years ahead of the tragic events of 9/11. Since then, we've seen natural disasters, floods, earthquakes, and hurricanes in New Orleans, New York, Alberta, Canada, and many other places. We've even seen the U.S.A unable to keep its government "open for business".

If anything the world changes have increased the burdens, however happily carried, on teachers, school administrators, school board officials and non-teaching staff. School shootings have meant teachers now need to be alert to security issues. Budget cuts at all levels have made it tougher and tougher to juggle the responsibilities of schools in our society, at the same time as more responsibilities are added to the educator's collective burden. Decisions are made on school priorities. At every step, both micro and macro, someone is angry.

Yet, one thing remains constant. **It takes a village to raise and educate children.** Educators already know that the more parents are constructively involved in the education of their children, the better the outcomes. Administrators need to interact with and embrace the community, their constituents.

These constituents are often angry. Or, often frightened. Parents, whether informed or not, fight for what they want for their children. Schools, and school staff have the additional responsibility of looking after the welfare of ALL children, not just one, pitting parents and teachers against each other as they both try to maximize the pursuit of their understandable concerns.

It's with this in mind that I decided to revive the original book project, and re-write the earlier book with the aim of helping teachers, school administrators and school staff deal more effectively with the demands made upon them by angry, frustrated, and yes, frightened parents and tax payers. In effect, to build bridges, not just with the "easy to work with parents", but with the most difficult.

The Original Preface

Our society is, indeed, a strange one. While people talk about wanting respect, many people expect it to be forthcoming from others, without conducting themselves in ways that show respect. While people don't like to be demeaned and insulted, they often do things that actually create situations where demeaning comments and insults are likely to occur.

One only has to look at television (situation comedies are great for this) to see that verbal abuse and sparring are considered humorous ... where the person who wins is the one who is quickest or best at insulting the other. It is unfortunate that people know how to conduct themselves aggressively, but very few people know how to communicate in ways that reduce verbal aggression.

In the past years, I have trained thousands of public servants/government workers to deal more effectively with verbal abuse directed at them. In the course of these seminars I have learned a great deal from participants. In addition, I have published a book, "Defusing Hostile Customers Workbook", written for those in government organizations.

It occurred to me that the school/educational context is both similar to the public sector, and different. It also occurred to me that teachers, administrators, trustees and other school staff often have to deal with irate parents or members of the public, and like almost all of us, have never had help in developing the language skills needed to defuse these situations.

Who Is This Book For?

We think that the skills discussed in this book are applicable to anyone working in schools or school boards, including teachers, principals and other administrators, school trustees, and support employees. As you read the book, keep in mind that most techniques discussed will be useful to all school personnel, even if this is not stated specifically. When we refer to teachers, or administrators, we include any other personnel that deal with difficult or volatile situations.

Will The Techniques Work With Everyone?

The techniques and skills we describe are almost always appropriate to use, but you should be aware of a few things. First, every hostile/volatile situation is unique, so a cookbook approach is simply not possible. The techniques we discuss should be considered as tools in your toolbox. You need to use your judgment to choose the best tool for the job. Some tools you won't like, or feel comfortable with. That's fine. It isn't necessary to use them all.

Something else is important. We feel very confident that the skills and tactics discussed in this book will work with most adults. They won't work all the time ... nothing works all the time when it comes to human interactions. While we talk a good deal about dealing with irate parents, you may also find that the techniques we present to you can help you at home, and to deal with colleagues, staff and "bosses".

We SUSPECT that many of the tactics will also be effective with students, but we don't claim that they will work as effectively as with adults. We welcome your comments about this issue.

Using This Book

We suggest that you take this book in small doses. If you are like me you like to swallow a book whole, particularly if you find it interesting or instructive. We suggest that you go through the book a chapter or two at a time, and give yourself some time to think about each chapter before moving on to the next.

Obviously when we talk about skill building in any area, we need to consider opportunities to practice. Unlike physical skills like typing, or even other skills like arithmetic, the really neat thing about learning new verbal responses is that you can practice covertly (in your head). You can rehearse the phrasings, and specific responses suggested in the book. In fact we highly recommend that you try to apply each tactic to a situation you have encountered, and "hear" yourself using the specific technique. You will find that even five minutes a day doing so will help you have the "right thing to say" available when you really need it.

If You Have Comments Or War Stories?

We are always glad to hear from readers. If you have any comments or questions, please feel free to send them along to the address above, or via internet email. We generally respond to all email, so that is the preferred vehicle. Got a story? Send it along.

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