

**Ambitious Leadership**

**@ St Bede's**

# Ambitious Leadership @ St Bede's

## 1. Rationale

Leadership is a vital element of the college's success. Leaders must have a strong understanding of the college Missions Statement and vision for the future. The ability of leaders to influence and guide students and colleagues towards the college vision has a direct impact on our ability to reach this goal. Leaders must be ambitious and courageous, communicating the expected vision and charting a strategic course to guide the journey. Leaders focus on effective change management, whether this be large change or marginal gains – more of the same will just bring more of the same.

This document is designed to clarify and codify the key expectations and behaviours that leaders have agreed will provide high quality leadership. By ensuring an understanding by all, with mentoring and coaching where necessary, the consistency of leadership will improve and outcomes in all areas with it.

### Why is management at all levels so important?

1. Leadership at the point of delivery has the biggest impact on a colleague's discretionary effort (Inc. Magazine, 2016). The direct line manager is more significant than the head teacher in this respect.
2. 75% of people who leave their job because they are unhappy in their role report that they do so because of their immediate manager (Gallup, 2021)

## 2. Values

Leaders at St Bede's agree that the eight Gospel values of the St Bede's Way must underpin all that they do:

Work Hard.	Be Kind.	Do The Right Thing.
Service Courage	Compassionate Peacemaker Gentle	Integrity Justice Forgiveness

Leaders also agree to uphold the Nolan Principles, adapted for St Bede's.

### The Seven Principles of Public Life – The Nolan Principles – adapted for St Bede's

#### 2.1 Selflessness

Leaders at St Bede's should act solely in terms of the interest of the students and staff in their care. This includes looking after their own health and well-being to allow them to be as effective leaders as possible.

#### 2.2 Integrity

Leaders at St Bede's must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should be honest and have strong moral principles that underpin their work.

#### 2.3 Objectivity

Leaders at St Bede's must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

## 2.4 Accountability

Leaders at St Bede's are accountable to the Diocese of Clifton, governors, families and the wider college community for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to well-designed scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

## 2.5 Openness

Leaders at St Bede's should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from others in their team unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

## 2.6 Honesty

Leaders at St Bede's should be truthful.

## 2.7 Leadership

Leaders at St Bede's should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor conduct wherever it occurs.

**Leaders actively practice their values:** values represent a leader's guiding principles. They serve as an internal dashboard. Regardless of what is happening around the leader, they can always choose to act in alignment with their values and feel satisfied they have met their moral duty.

## 3. Culture

*"You can mandate adequacy; you can't mandate greatness. It has to be unleashed."*

*Joel Klein*

The college culture is the responsibility of the Principal and the senior leadership team. The way this is lived out within teams on a day-to-day basis is the responsibility of all the leaders within the college.

The quality of relationships cannot be left to chance. St Bede's has systems in place to drive improvement and consistency – regular meetings, appraisal process, development plans, action points etc., but the "how" of this leadership is key.

Leaders at St Bede's are: Conscious, Intentional and Deliberate.

Conscious of the context and carefully attuned to the needs of their colleagues.

Intentional about the role the leader needs to play in each interaction.

Deliberate about the behaviours, tools and scripts that will lead to the best outcomes/build the relationship/empower the individual/provide appropriate challenge or support.

Leaders consciously step into one of four roles:

- Supervisor - checking that what has been agreed to be done is being done, that it meets expectations and that we are all aware of deadlines, policy, goals etc.
- Mentor - sharing their experiences/wisdom of when they sat in a similar role so that others may shortcut their growth.

- Consultant – The leader does it for their colleague. The difficult conversation or meeting or if the colleague is buckling under the weight of their role. The colleague is invited to sit alongside the leader so next time the colleague can lead it with more confidence.
- Coach – non-directive, so posing the right questions, providing the space, trust and confidence for the individual being coached to consider how they can achieve more, reach their objectives and find capabilities within themselves.

### What makes a great culture at St Bede's?

- **Alignment** comes when the college's Catholic mission and its employees' motivations are all pulling in the same direction. Exceptional organisations work to build continuous alignment to their vision, purpose, and goals.
- **Appreciation** can take many forms but the dignity of the person is key throughout. A culture of appreciation is one in which all team members frequently provide recognition and thanks for the contributions of others.
- **Trust** is vital to a team. With a culture of trust, team members can express themselves and rely on others to have their back when they try something new.
- **Performance** is key, as great schools create a culture that focuses on great outcomes for students. In these schools, talented employees motivate each other to excel, and, as shown above, greater outcomes are the result.
- **Resilience** is a key quality in highly dynamic environments where change is continuous. A resilient culture will teach leaders to watch for and respond to change with ease.
- **Teamwork** encompasses collaboration, communication, and respect between team members and with students' families. When everyone on the team supports each other, employees will get more done and feel happier while doing it.
- **Integrity**, like trust, is vital to all teams when they rely on each other to make decisions, interpret results, and form partnerships. Honesty and transparency are critical components of this aspect of culture.
- **Collaborative Innovation** leads schools to get the most out of available team members, technologies, and other resources. A culture of innovation means that you apply creative thinking to all aspects of your business, even your own cultural initiatives.
- **Psychological safety** provides the support employees need to take risks and provide honest feedback. Leaders remember that psychological safety starts at the team level, not the individual level, so managers need to take the lead in creating a safe environment where everyone feels comfortable contributing.

#### **4. Characteristics of a great leader**

Leaders at St Bede's aspire to develop into mature and ambitious leaders. Characteristics of such leaders are:

1. Trust is key to the successful leading of a team. Trust tends to be dependent on two things – is the leader competent and do they have integrity?
2. Leaders should have clarity of vision. If they don't know where the team is going, how can the team?
3. Leaders listen so that they really understand members' goals and obstacles. They assume the colleague knows something or has some insight the leader does not.
4. Focus on the strengths of team members – things that are recognised by leaders will be repeated. Leaders identify strengths and potential within the team. This empowers colleagues to make decisions and develop their investment in the wider mission.
5. Through the use of mentoring, counselling and coaching – leaders aim to develop their team members' independence.

6. Humility and self-reflection are important to the growth of a leader. If they know their gaps they plan to fill them through their own professional development or the development of partnerships.
7. Be urgent with feedback and guidance for team members. Feedback is help and leaders want their team members to succeed.
8. Effective leaders develop culture of high challenge, low threat. Make it easy to take risks and talk about mistakes. Hiding mistakes can be costly, avoiding take risks even more so. Resilience allows leaders to not only bounce back, but bounce forward in the face of loss or adversity.
9. Conflict of some sort is likely to be ongoing and can be healthy to ensure things improve. Leaders must learn to be visible, approachable and manage this conflict well.
10. Great leaders are aware of critical indicators and act quickly on this feedback to identify risks and act early to avoid or mitigate future problems.

**Leaders have HOKIER-V: Humility, Openness, Knowledge, Integrity, Empathy, Resilience and Vision.**

## 5. How do we evaluate good leadership?

Leaders at St Bede's are self-reflective and strive to improve their practice. They use ideas like those below to think deeply about their strengths and areas for development:

- 'State of the nation' – does the leader have a good understanding of the national, local and school level context in which they are working?
- How well does the leader plan? Look at strategic vs operational.
- Is the leader knowledgeable? E.g. curriculum, T&L and assessment.
- Does the leader communicate well, setting the direction of travel?
- Is the leader able to build and sustain a team? Is a positive, developmental culture fostered? Do they find ways to improve all team members?
- Does the leader manage performance well? Do they know what is going on in their area of responsibility? Do they 'Manage by Walking Around' (MBWA)?
- Do leaders manage upwards, supporting their own line managers so all can be as effective as possible? Are they open to being managed upwards?

## 6. Communication

*"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place"*

*George Bernard Shaw*

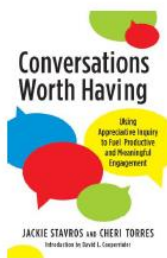
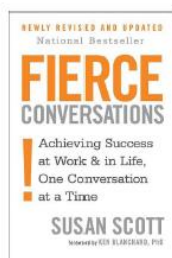
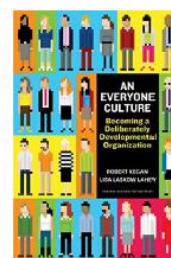
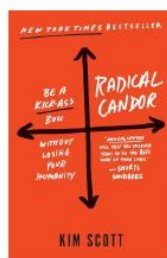
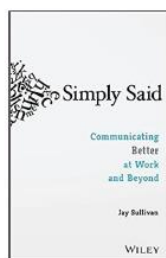
Leaders at St Bede's are aware of the variety of the types of conversations they have:



Leaders understand the weight of their words. Through their position, the stakes tend to be higher. Their communication defines the college culture and climate. Rushed or clunky interactions can lead to unintended consequences.

The means of communication is well considered. Face-to-face communication should be prioritised for information that might be sensitive, difficult to hear, or easy to misunderstand. Electronic messaging is convenient but is much harder for demonstrating empathy, humour or to build strong relationships.

Below are some publications about communication that have shaped the thinking of leaders at St Bede's:



## 7. Making a positive change successfully

When leaders at St Bede's plan to make a change they consider:

1. Does it fit with our college mission and values?
2. What will the final product/outcome look like? Be detailed.
3. Discuss the idea with a line manager – ask them to give advice, act as a sounding board or devil's advocate.
4. Write up a summary of the change for your team members. Ensure clarity and detail.
5. Predict the pitfalls including negative reactions.
6. Be honest and open with team members – explain why the change is necessary, pros and cons for students and staff. What are the workload considerations? What are we removing to allow time for this?
7. Does it need a small-scale pilot?
8. If proceeding, the change will need an energetic launch – all leaders must be invested and show they are invested.
9. Consider the urgency. Where possible, make the change in a timely manner – choose a time in the academic year when team members have the capacity to be receptive to change.
10. Make the change the “main thing”. Nothing else for at least a fortnight.
11. Over-communicate – regular clarifications, praise of successes, highlight gains, offer support etc.
12. Personal conversations where necessary – maintain a consistent positive party line.
13. All leaders must be and be seen to be doing it.
14. Consider how you are going to assess the impact and plan for this.
15. Drift is the enemy of sustainable. Don't change and then abdicate - regularly returning to changes in briefings, training, meetings and everyday conversations give them a better chance of becoming habitualised.

## 8. Avoiding drift

When policies and procedures are well designed and working well, it is important leaders do not lose focus or become complacent in case of drift. Drift is a slide back into old habits or poorer practise and less good outcomes, and so is the enemy of a successful organisation.

To avoid drift, leaders consider:

1. Keeping the issue high on the agenda. Over-communicate via briefings, training, meetings and everyday conversations. Show it is important to leaders.
2. Use the language of drift to maintain high quality practice
3. Codify the expectations. Check that "we do what we say we do".
4. Systematically review reality with policy. Is there a gap?
5. Ensure policy is clear.
6. Leaders actively check that the issue is being actioned.
7. Ensure training is offered so everyone is able to enact the policy.
8. Be aware that new and returning staff may need intensive support to meet the college expectations in certain areas.

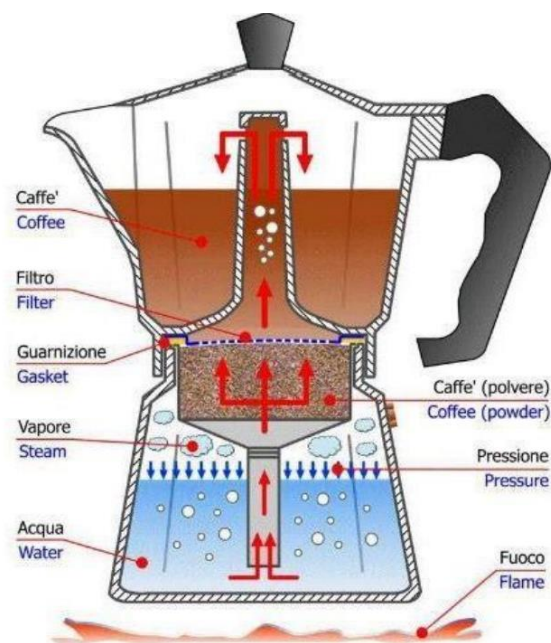
## 9. Unleashing talent

One of the most important roles of a leader is to maximise the quality of the team's work. This means making the most of the potential of all members; outcomes must be excellent now but also in the future. Therefore, developing others and unleashing their talent becomes a high priority.

*"Where there are few flourishing adults, there will be few flourishing children".*

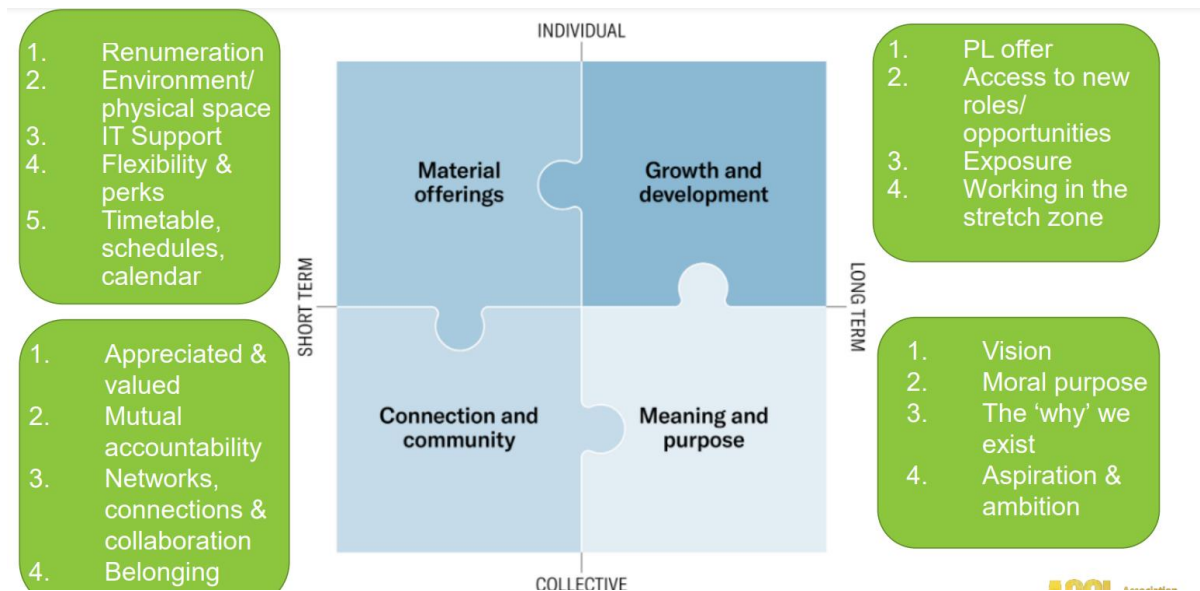
Lynn Swaner and Andy Wolfe (from Flourishing Together)

Leaders recognise that when work is challenging, there can be a tendency to keep hold of power and responsibility and be reluctant to delegate or provide opportunities for others. To use the analogy of coffee, despite the pressure of many leadership roles, we want to focus on lighting a flame, heating the water, and allowing the flavour to filter to the surface, rather than use our leadership position to push down and force out the flavour.



It will not be appropriate in all situations, but leaders' general approach at St Bede's is to take charge of culture and strategy, but then to give away power to others. By empowering them and showing that they trust them, colleagues can grow professionally and personally.

Leaders know that colleagues are motivated by a range of factors. The diagram below codifies these:



Leaders are aware of which of these are within their control and which ones are not. As Epictetus taught, they focus on what they can control.

### Decision making

One key way to unleash talent is to improve the quality of decision making. The wisdom and knowledge needed cannot be short cut, but can be developed more quickly by leaders through quality mentoring and guidance. The London Air Ambulance identify three type of decisions:

1. Rule-based
2. Recognition based
3. Novel

Rule-based decision making requires standard operating procedures (SOPs). These are agreed, well-articulated and detailed steps required when met with a specific decision. An example might be a fire evacuation or expectations when on duty.

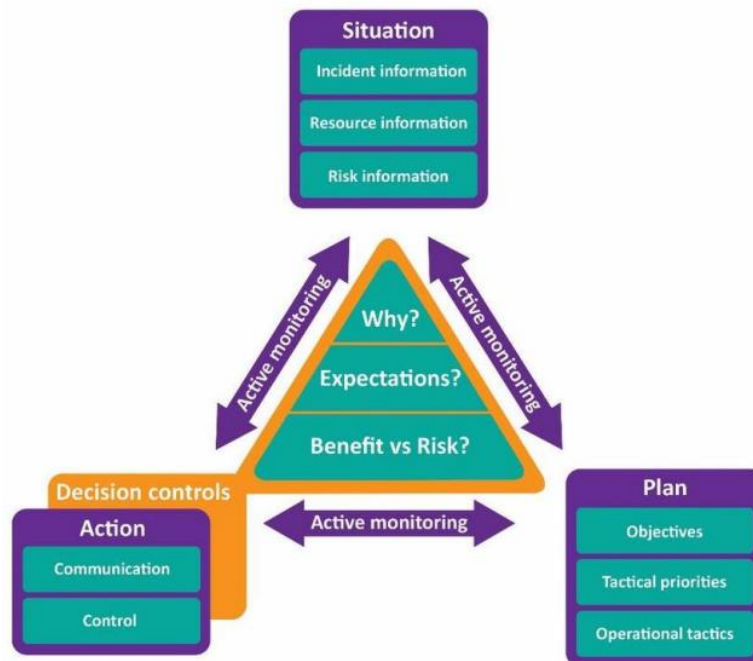
Recognition-based decision making involves referring back to previous similar situations. Leaders can improve this for inexperienced colleagues by discussing potential scenarios and outlining possible next steps and outcomes. The question prompts below can help colleagues with these types of decisions:

- When have I made a decision like this before?
- What did I do and what did I learn?
- Is there value in acting differently this time?
- Who else can stress test my thinking?

Novel decisions are those that are unusual, harder to plan or predict and usually have a large potential impact. With these types of decisions, it is important to slow down, analyse the problem from multiple angles, lay out thinking and then asking others to challenge before finalising your approach.



The diagram below can help formulate an approach:



“Leadership needs management, or leadership doesn't happen. So much of what is needed is effective administration of systems and processes is rarely glamorous. We spend a great deal of time focussed on routine tasks to help St Bede's run better for students and staff - and that's fine!”