

YOUR LEADERSHIP

# EDGE

LEAD ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

ED O'MALLEY  
AMANDA CEBULA

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CHAPTER 20  
INTERVENE SKILLFULLY

## *Raise the Heat*

Making progress on tough issues often requires “raising the heat” to get ourselves and others to do difficult work. Until there is enough pressure (heat) people just won’t act.

*Raising the heat means doing something big or small to compel people to act — to make it more uncomfortable not to address the issue than to live with the issue.*

This is true of life in general. Too many of us don’t save for retirement until the pressure is on. We put off confronting a friend or relative about a tough situation.

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**WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT RAISING THE HEAT?**

Read “Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading” by Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky.



## SO HOW DO YOU RAISE THE HEAT?

### ▶ SAY WHAT OTHERS WON'T.

- State the consequences of inaction.
- Name the elephant in the room.
- Take the temperature. Name it. (See Chapter 4.)
- Speak from the heart. (See Chapter 21.)
- Offer different interpretations. (See Chapter 3.)
- Make a statement about your own frustration: “I am not sure where to go here, but I am frustrated with our lack of progress” or “I am concerned about how quickly we are jumping to solutions.”

### ▶ CREATE STRUCTURES AND ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITY.

- Write down responsibilities and timelines, and include those in future agendas.
- Define the roles of individuals and organizations involved in the challenge, thus urging responsibility where it's needed most.
- Grab the bull by the horns and declare a way forward. Action often raises the heat and forces people to engage more fully.

### ▶ DISRUPT NORMS.

- Use silence. Don't jump in and answer questions or smooth over tough issues. Let others do the work.
- Allow more time. Tough issues will surface if you let a group stew.
- Ask powerful, open-ended questions.
- Ask someone directly for input.
- Interrupt someone who has taken up a lot of air time. Ask them to hold their comments to create some space for those we have not yet heard from.
- Give the work back. (See Chapter 22.)
- Bring somebody new to the discussion. (See Chapter 13.)

► ARTICULATE THE OBVIOUS.

- Point out potential losses or ask what they might be.
- Compare and contrast what is going on.
- Name the values at the heart of the conflict.

► KNOW WHEN TO RAISE THE HEAT. LOOK FOR THESE CLUES.

- You are the only one doing the work.
- Urgent action is required.
- There is an elephant in the room. You know because people keep mentioning it to you in private.
- You aren't satisfied with the rate of progress.
- You find yourself disengaged from something you care about.
- Important questions aren't being addressed.
- Your gut tells you the group is going in the wrong direction.
- Just a couple of people are doing the work, with most folks staying silent.

*“When you can’t make them see the light, make them feel the heat.”*

— RONALD REAGAN



*... we have learned to pile on the logs,  
then we can come to see how  
it is fuel, and absence of the fuel  
together, that makes fire possible.  
We only need lay a log  
lightly from time to time.  
A fire  
grows  
simply because the space is there,  
with openings  
in which the flame  
that knows just how it wants to burn  
can find its way.*

— JUDY BROWN, “FIRE”

### **So you've raised the heat. What do you do now?**

**MODERATE THE TEMPERATURE.** If it is getting too hot, you may need to help people get back down to a manageable level. Sharpening your facilitation skills will help.

**PREPARE FOR THE HEAT TO BE RAISED ON YOU.** Now that you have raised the heat, consider the ideas in the Manage Self section to help you anticipate your own triggers or lean in to uncertainty and conflict.

**EVALUATE THE RESULTS OF RAISING THE HEAT.** Debrief the group about what happened. What worked? What would you do differently? Was it worth it? Have you made progress toward your purpose?

## *Lessons from History*

### **RAISING THE HEAT**

Is there a better example of raising the heat than Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat for a white passenger on that Montgomery bus in December 1955? Her refusal and subsequent arrest led to the Montgomery bus boycott, which eventually led to the integration of the city's bus system and served as a focal point for the civil rights movement.



Every month for three years I've attended committee meetings for an organization I care deeply about. Lately, it feels like we're stuck. There's little engagement, and it seems like we're just going through the motions. Frankly, if this is all we're going to do, I have other ways to spend my time. I'm not ready to give up quite yet. So I'm wondering, what can I do to help us break out of this rut?

- REAGAN IN A RUT

Dear Reagan,

You do have better ways to spend your time. Your committee is accomplishing nothing, except for the illusion of being a functioning group. We are sure there are all sorts of adaptive challenges present, but the heat is so low nothing is happening.

Try one or more of these heat-raising ideas:

1. Keep track of how many people are active in the meeting and then say something along these lines: "I've noticed there are 17 people here, but only three have spoken. Is that what a high-functioning group looks like?"
2. Raise the bar. Suggest that the committee adopt a lofty goal and then evaluate itself against that goal.
3. Simply ask, "How would we know if we are being effective?"
4. And then there is the nuclear option: Let folks know you believe you have better ways to spend your time and you'll quit the committee if the group doesn't get more engaged.

Onward!

P.S. Don't go "nuclear" unless you are ready to follow through!