Dealing with Irrational Behaviors...
Without Losing Your Mind

Mark Patterson, University Ombuds
Preliminary Considerations

- Be sensitive to trauma
  - Mental health support may be appropriate
- Irrational *behaviors*, not irrational people
  - Respect is bedrock
How do you typically react to irrationality?

x = "empathy" left / "logic" right
y = "engage" top / "retreat" bottom
Scenario

Prof Alex Finley, an associate professor in your Department, recently posted on a CSUCI-focused Instagram page that they are under threat for speaking out about election issues. The posting says “the University” is trying to force Alex to leave and asks for student support to fight back. You are surprised to see this posting, as you had just spoken to the Dean last week and she had said nothing about Prof Finley.
What's your first reaction in this situation?
Respect autonomy

"With this info, what happened makes sense"

Close the loop when possible

Establish a future “handle” to reengage

Warm Up your “Curiosity Muscles”
- Suspend diagnoses
- What data would convince you (even if unlikely or impossible)?

Assess Data Objectively
- Observed actions
- Specific words
- Observed impact (self and others)

Reframe from their “Deep Why”
- Restart the film
- Step through the actions
- Invite a “re-take”... and the next scene

Narrow the Scene Scope
- Temporarily suspend the narrative
- Zoom in on specific action(s) or interactions frame by frame
- Walk with them through the frames

Ask “5 Whys”
- Pick a “frame”
- Assess their perspective with their help
- Contextualize broadly

Focus: Unearth the “Deep Why”
Scenario

Prof Alex Finley, an associate professor in your Department, recently posted on a CSUCI-focused Instagram page that they are under threat for speaking out about election issues. The posting says “the University” is trying to force Alex to leave and asks for student support to fight back. You are surprised to see this posting, as you had just spoken to the Dean last week and she had said nothing about Prof Finley.
You can't argue people out of paranoia. … The only solution is to reduce the distrust and anxiety that is the seedbed of this thinking.

David Brooks
Oct. 2020