



Schools Conflict Resolution and Mediation

TUCKSHOP TROUBLES

2008 Practice scenario

TUCKSHOP TROUBLES

BACKGROUND

Middle school students at Federation High School came back from their first Leadership Seminar all excited and enthusiastic. They had been discussing accepting responsibility for their own actions, setting goals and taking more control of their lives, at home and at school. Four of these students were members of the School Council - Chris, Vic, Shannon and Alex and they also comprise the Formal Committee. Chris was voted Middle School Captain. Vic is the Deputy.

Every year the middle school students hold a Formal or dance and there is a school camp planned for the end of the year. This year money needs to be raised to allow all students to be able to attend this camp, as it is more expensive than some families can afford. It works out that about \$3000 needs to be raised. In this light the Formal Committee approached the School Principal, Ms Brigden, to ask her permission to allow them to take all the responsibility for organising and running the Formal to raise money for the camp.

They also asked to be allowed to open and supervise the Tuckshop on the night. Ms Brigden was very reluctant to allow this but agreed to encourage and support the students. This was despite the warning of the Tuckshop Convenor, Ms Clarke. She said she was quite prepared to come in and supervise the students and they could serve. Ms Brigden refused her offer on the condition that the Tuckshop be attended at all times by at least two students and that as soon as the takings got over \$100 they would give the money to the supervising teacher. Ms Clarke said she would do a stocktake on Friday afternoon and again on Monday morning, after the Formal. One other important issue was that there must be no alcohol at the Formal, under any circumstances.

To understand how significant this decision was for the students you really need to understand the history of the Tuckshop. It is staffed by the students' parents on a roster basis and is open from 8am to 2pm Monday to Friday. It is a self-serve Tuckshop where the students choose what they want and pay for it at the checkout near the exit. Ms Clarke has run the Tuckshop for ages and is suspicious of all students, even ones that would never consider stealing anything. The students often make jokes about Ms Clarke and her bossy ways.

During school assemblies Ms Brigden frequently lectures the students about the Tuckshop, which is a non-profit service. Ms Clarke does a good job. Because of the volunteer parents, prices can be kept low and students should be grateful they give up their precious time. It is increasingly difficult for Ms Clarke to get enough parents to volunteer.

One of the problems is that every few days, Ms Clarke catches someone stealing. Students do not steal in large quantities, just small things at a time but it adds up. There is one student Jay who always steals from the Tuckshop but because he is always so polite, he is never suspected. The normal procedure is that, if caught stealing, the guilty party would be called to the principal's office, given a standard lecture and placed on detention, or even suspended for a day. Ms Brigden even hinted that if the stealing didn't stop, the Tuckshop could close.

So, it can be seen that that is a big responsibility for the team to run the Formal and operate the Tuckshop. Planning for the Formal began in earnest. Different jobs had to be undertaken by the students. Chris sort of took charge and told Shannon and Alex they were in charge of the Tuckshop and Vic was in charge of "security" outside the hall.

THE INCIDENT

After a lot of planing the night of the Formal arrived and it started at 7.30pm. Everything went well. Shannon and Alex did their jobs but with some grumbling. They initially thought their job important but soon realised Chris and Vic had the best jobs and they were stuck in the Tuckshop away from the action, selling sausage rolls, other goodies and drinks.

Vic has been taking the job very seriously, organising some students to constantly check that there is no trouble. The only problem was Jay, who arrived at 9.00pm shouting and being really loud. He seemed drunk and when Vic would not let him come inside, he became abusive and said, "they would be sorry." Chris had the job of maintaining control in the hall and saw Jay causing trouble at the door. Jay's behaviour was noticed by some students.

But all went well, so everyone thought. Finally the night was over. All the students had been collected by their parents and just over \$2500 had been made through selling the tickets and selling goodies through the Tuckshop. Shannon and Alex waited for Chris and Vic to lock up the Hall and then lock up the Tuckshop. They couldn't believe it though when Chris brought out a checklist and marked off all the jobs - benches back in place, lights off, bins empty before they could go. They were being treated like little kids, especially as they had not been able to enjoy the Formal. But no use stirring up trouble.

Monday morning came and Ms Clarke arrived at school early. True to her promise she planned to do another stocktake and opened the Tuckshop door. She walked in and slipped in a pool of water next to the freezer. Her screams of pain brought immediate attention and a number of staff came to investigate. She had broken her leg and was in real pain. An ambulance was called but she would not leave until the Principal promised that a stocktake would be done.

During Monday morning's assembly Ms Brigden could barely control her rage. She informed the students that an accident had occurred in the Tuckshop and that the volunteer parents rostered on were cleaning out the Tuckshop and it would not be open that day. The Formal Committee was asked to come to her office immediately.

THE AFTERMATH

When Chris, Vic, Shannon and Alex were standing in front of her, Ms Brigden let loose. Someone had either accidentally or deliberately knocked the electric plug out of the large freezer causing it to defrost and leave water all over the floor. Ms Clarke's leg was broken in two places and a large amount of frozen food was spoiled. A stocktake had been completed and there were some items unaccounted for - obviously stolen!

Ms Brigden was furious. She had been let down by the Middle School students and she was holding them all responsible. The damage looked to be worth about \$3000 and the money they had made to go towards the school camp might be taken to make good the damage. She was thinking of cancelling the school camp altogether and removing the students from the School Council.

Ms Clarke would be away sick for at least a month. Who will run the Tuckshop? And, she is threatening to resign; you can't blame her though. She has run the Tuckshop for 10 years and is not paid that much, she does it to support the school. As her wage was minimal, the School Council parents could keep the prices down and use the monies raised to support school projects. If she leaves they will have to employ someone else, at a much higher wage. This will mean less profits and the school will suffer.

And to make matters worse, one of the parents had made a complaint that alcohol was available at the Formal, after they were told about Jay's behaviour by their son.

Ms Brigden said she had had enough and wanted a detailed report, setting out what happened and what they intended to do about it. The Formal Committee wanted responsibility - they had it! She said she was not going to take any action until the end of the week and she might not go ahead with the punishment if the students could give her a reasonable alternative.

When Ms Brigden finished, the four students turned on each other and started accusing each other for their lack of responsibility, each blaming the others for the terrible consequences they faced.

They knew they would not get it all sorted out the way they were fighting and they needed help. They all agreed to go to mediation