

Virtual Interview Debrief

Dusty Harrington Case, October 2025



Overview

This debrief is designed to highlight what worked well in a complex, high-stakes interview and to identify a handful of concrete adjustments that can make future faculty interviews smoother, safer, and more effective. It is also meant to help you build shared norms for how your team approaches defended, grievance-driven subjects so that you are working from a common playbook when cases like this arise.

Strengths

One of your clear strengths as a team is the use of strong, open-ended anchoring questions. You began with broad, non-accusatory prompts that allowed Dusty to step into his teacher identity rather than feel as though he were seated on a witness stand. That tone set the stage for a more collaborative conversation. There was also consistent emotional attunement, particularly from Wendi, who picked up on his emotional intensity and reflected feelings as well as facts. The “Yes, that’s right” and “Thank you” responses you received from him were clear indicators that he felt understood in those moments.

You also demonstrated conceptually strong, risk-relevant questioning, especially from Michael and Kacie. You stayed focused on the right domains: the impact of his behavior on students, how things were playing out in the classroom, his perceptions of fairness, and future scenarios such as what might happen if nothing changed. Kacie’s use of summary reflections was another important strength. At several points, you paused to pull together Dusty’s long, metaphor-heavy monologues into clearer summaries, which is exactly what is needed with a subject who tends to lecture and speak in dense, symbolic language. Throughout, you reinforced a due-process frame and emphasized transparency. You made it clear that the goal was to understand what was happening, rather than to rubber-stamp accusations, which is vital when working with someone who believes the process is “stacked against” him.

Areas for Improvement

There are a few key adjustments that would sharpen your work in future interviews. The first is to build more rapport before moving into the “meat” questions. With a mandated, defensive subject, it is worth spending the first five to ten minutes almost entirely on emotion and experience, asking what this has been like for him, before requesting specific examples or details. This slows the pace, lowers the sense of being on trial, and buys you more goodwill for the harder questions later.

It will also help to avoid loaded emotional labels once you see a reaction pattern emerge. Dusty repeatedly rejected words like “uncomfortable,” “lonely,” and “hurt feelings.” Once you notice that he bristles at such labels, it is better to pivot to softer, more descriptive language that he can tolerate, such as “not feeling especially connected” or “this has clearly been intense for you.” Similarly, it is important to answer fairness and process questions directly and strategically. When he asks whether you have read “the emails they’ve stacked up against” him, that is a moment to respond clearly, explaining that you have read them and that this is precisely why you want to hear from him in his own words, so you are not relying solely on those accounts. Skipping or dodging these kinds of questions only feeds his grievance narrative and increases his suspicion.

Another adjustment involves slowing down after meaningful disclosures. When he shares about loss, isolation, or feeling like an “albatross,” resist the urge to immediately move on to the next item on your mental checklist. Instead, reflect on what you heard, check your understanding, allow a brief pause, and only then proceed. This helps him feel genuinely heard and can open the door to deeper, more clinically relevant information.

Finally, you can be more intentional about leveraging the dynamics of a three-interviewer Zoom format. It helps to assign clear roles before you begin: one person as the rapport lead and primary emotional connector, one as the risk-question lead focusing on violence, suicide, means, and future scenarios, and one as a process observer and note-taker who watches patterns and uses the chat to communicate with the team. The back-channel chat can be used to flag emerging themes, such as “he rejects negative labels” or “he’s calmer now; this is a good time for future-risk questions,” so that everyone can adjust in real time without disrupting the flow of the interview.

These adjustments point toward a set of shared norms for future faculty threat interviews. You might think of them as a consistent arc rather than a checklist. Begin by opening with a few emotionally focused questions that invite the subject to describe what this experience has been like and what feels most unfair or distressing. As the conversation unfolds, use short, single-part questions and allow a deliberate pause after you speak, especially given Zoom lag and the subject’s impulsivity. When you notice a strong reaction pattern, name it internally and adjust your language or approach rather than repeating what has already triggered defensiveness. When the subject offers a rich metaphor such as “void,” “albatross,” “genocide”, pause and explore it, since that is often where the most meaningful data lives.

Before closing, once rapport is at its strongest, make sure you have asked at least one clean, direct question about thoughts of harming himself or others. Then end with a validating, future-focused summary, acknowledging what you have heard about the subject’s care for students or commitment to their role, and make it clear that the goal is to translate that care into a classroom environment where students feel safe, and assure that the faculty member feels supported rather than attacked.

Team Feedback

Overall, this was a high-complexity interview with a highly defended, metaphor-heavy, grievance-driven subject. You all showed solid technical skills and moments of genuinely excellent interviewing. The main opportunities for improvement are less about *what* you asked and more about timing, pacing, and matching. You can do this by matching your questions to his emotional state in the moment. Notice and adapt to real-time patterns (what consistently triggers defensiveness vs. opens him up). Finally, exploit the advantages of a three-person Zoom interview (chat, role clarity, camera presence) rather than letting those same factors create noise and disconnection.

You need more “gas in the tank” before driving into hard questions.

Across the first quarter of the interview, you all asked technically solid, content-focused questions (e.g., about the Middle East, students’ reactions, evaluations, and examples), but you hadn’t yet fully built rapport. Dusty enters feeling mandated, judged, and defensive. When you move into “examples” and evaluative language too quickly, he predictably responds with pushback, irritation, or lecturing. The advice here would be to spend the first 15 minutes almost entirely on emotional connection and shared understanding. Stay with his feelings, reflect them back, and check if you’re getting it right before moving into “meat” questions.

Attend to his metaphors; they’re gold.

Dusty gives you a rich set of metaphors: licking boots, hiding under desks in an earthquake, genocide, the void, being a disregarded signpost, the albatross around the neck, etc. These aren’t throwaway lines; they’re “hooks” into how he sees himself (isolated truth-teller, persecuted, cursed, ignored). When he drops a metaphor, pause and explore it with questions like, “Say more about the ‘licking boots’ image, who’s doing that in your eyes?”, “Help me understand ‘the void’ in your words” and “When you say albatross, what does that feel like for you day to day?”

Metaphor work here is both rapport-building and threat-assessment-relevant (grievance, injustice, isolation, entitlement).

Negative characterizations are landmines; log that pattern and adjust.

Any time one of you used a potentially negative descriptor (“uncomfortable,” “feelings hurt,” “lonely,” “frustrated,” etc.), Dusty *immediately* denied it and pushed back. You get several clear “flags on the field” that this is a pattern, but as a group, you keep stepping on the same landmine. Avoid labeling his internal state in negative terms once you’ve seen his reaction pattern. Soften language (“I might be off here...” “I’m using this loosely...”) or flip to strengths/values (“Your ethics and standards really matter to you...”) before gently pairing any concerns. Use process notes or Zoom chat so someone can type: “He rejects negative labels every time, stop using them,” and the rest of you can adjust in real time.

Use reflections and check-ins much more deliberately.

Some of your best moments were when you summarized what he’d just said and almost checked for accuracy, but then pivoted too quickly into another question. Dusty is highly sensitive to being

misunderstood and “judged.” After a summary, stop and ask: “Did I get that right?” or “Is there anything I’m missing or oversimplifying?” That small extra beat both builds rapport and gives you a more accurate picture of his thinking.

Be strategic about which questions you answer (and how).

When Dusty asks, “Have you read the emails they’ve stacked up against me?” or “What have I done to scare people?” he’s not just seeking information; he’s testing fairness and bias. At times, you skipped answering or rushed to another question, which fed his narrative that the process is stacked against him and that you’re just there to judge him. Process questions about fairness (“stacked up against me”) should be answered with a due-process frame (“We’ve read them, but that’s exactly why we want to hear directly from you...”). Highly loaded rhetorical questions (“What have I done to scare people?”) are better met with emotional reflection rather than a list of specific behaviors.

Zoom logistics and team coordination matter.

Wendi’s camera framing made her face very small (about 15% of the screen, cut off at the chin, see image below). That decreases visual presence and emotional impact. With three interviewers on Zoom, you had occasional “talk over” and compound questions that are tougher for a defended, impulsive subject to track. Adjust camera angles so faces are larger and centered. Keep questions short and single-part; build in a 2–3 second “Zoom delay” before jumping in. Use a back-channel chat to:

- Track emerging patterns (e.g., “He’s counting how many times we say ‘passion’, maybe drop that word now”). Coordinate who’s up next and who’s doing what (rapport lead, risk-question lead, observer/note-taker).



- Recognize and protect “open window” moments. With Wendi in particular, Dusty’s defensiveness drops, and he shares loneliness, isolation from colleagues, divorce/loss, lack of support, and the centrality of his teaching role. Those are high-value disclosures for risk assessment. However, pressing too hard right after he opens up risks slamming the window shut. When he lets you in, stay there for a bit; don’t immediately follow with more probing, checklist-style questions. Treat disclosure like a tentative dog taking a first treat; let him nibble several times safely before moving closer.
- Risk-specific work still needs explicit coverage. Given what emerges, social isolation, marital loss, job threat, grievance, identity tied to work, you rightly start circling questions that are essentially about future harm (“What happens if things don’t go your way?”). Those were nicely phrased, indirect violence-risk probes. Still, suicidality doesn’t get clearly and directly explored in this slice of the interview, even though his situation screams for at least one clean, direct question. Plan for the back half of the interview, *once rapport is strongest*, you will explicitly ask about thoughts of harming self and others, using language that fits his frame.

Feedback for Wendi

You bring a consistently steady, empathic presence to this interview, and Dusty clearly responds to it. Early on, you join the conversation with a strengths-based reflection: "It sounds like you're extremely passionate about the work that you do, and I can hear that in what you're saying," which earns an immediate "Yes, thank you" from him, one of the few clean affirmations he offers the team. You also skillfully normalize and soften language when you revisit student discomfort: "You said that some of the students, I guess, were uncomfortable, I'm going to use that word loosely," which shows you're aware of how loaded certain terms can feel to him. Later, when you shift to his coping and supports ("how do you kind of decompress from this?... because I always care about, like, the person"), you open the door to rich material about isolation, lack of friends, and his "albatross" metaphor for feeling like a cursed burden to the college. You validate losses gracefully ("I'm really sorry to hear that") and reflect affect directly ("I could hear it in your voice when you're saying that"), which are all high-value rapport moves in a highly defended subject.

Where your questions sometimes get bumpier is when they slide from threat-assessment-relevant exploration into something that feels more like therapy to him, without a clear bridge. The moment you ask, "And what was that divorce like for you?" he snaps, "I'm sorry, is this a therapy session? I'm not here to really process my divorce or my feelings about my ex-wife. She's a bitch," and the whole interaction gets more brittle from there. Similarly, later in the interview, you pose a good process question, "would you have wanted [colleagues] to [come to you] and what do you want to know from it?", and then quickly pair it with "how do you think they would respond... if you had said to them... calling them cowards," which he meets with "I wouldn't know... they're avoiding me in the hallway." In both cases, your underlying instincts are solid (you're trying to get at coping, supports, and perspective-taking). Still, with someone this grievance-driven, it helps to tie each personal or relational question explicitly back to purpose. For example, "I'm asking about the divorce because big losses can change how supported people feel day to day," or "I'm wondering how you think they'd respond because that might tell us what feels possible going forward."

Your closing work is particularly strong, and you might lean into that style earlier. When you say, "I think it's a little bit of both... part of us meeting again to really kind of touch base, see how things are going... we'll try to at least make sure that somebody maybe gets in touch with you about that," you are transparent about limits, clear about process, and still oriented toward support and follow-through. Dusty reacts positively: "Thank you, Wendi. I really appreciate that. That's a wonderful piece of information... The sooner, the better, please." That's a good model for your questioning overall: pairing curiosity with a clear frame about why you're asking, and staying in that mix of warmth and structure you show at the end. If you keep your empathic tone, continue to soften loaded language, and add just a bit more explicit framing before deeply personal questions, you'll get even more leverage out of the strong connection you already built with him.

Strengths:

- You are the strongest emotional connector in this interview. You mirror his feelings, acknowledge their intensity, and get verbal “thank yous” and “absolutely” interruptions from him, clear indicators that he feels understood.
- Your use of modifiers (“I’ll use the word ‘uncomfortable’ loosely...”) helps Dusty tolerate language he’d otherwise reject.
- You offer humanizing self-disclosure (“Here’s how I handle this myself...”) in an appropriate, strategic way to soften harder questions.
- Later in the interview, you’re the one who successfully revisits the divorce and loss history and gets more vulnerable content from him.

Growth edges:

- When you get that strong “click” (he thanks you, agrees emphatically), you tend to pivot quickly into another question. Stay with the connection longer—reflect, check in, let it “land” before moving on.
- Notice that your “I’m wondering...” phrase often signals you’re leaving the emotional space too soon. Use that as an internal reminder: *“Am I ready to move on yet, or should I sit in the feeling a little longer?”*
- After he discloses loneliness and rejection, resist the urge to pull for more detail immediately. Give him space and affirm how significant what he just shared is, without pushing deeper right away.

Feedback for Michael

Your opening sets a strong, professional tone. You clearly establish the meeting's purpose, introduce your colleagues, and invite Dusty to use first names, which shows respect and builds credibility. By keeping your questions focused on the classroom and university environment, you effectively steer the conversation, preventing it from veering into broader political discussions. This approach makes it clear that while there's room to explore various aspects, the focus is on Dusty's role, conduct, and support systems.

When Dusty challenges the meeting's premise, you handle it well by maintaining composure and curiosity. Your shift to specifics about content, technique, and feedback received shows good investigative pacing. By avoiding arguments and seeking examples, you adopt a solid interviewer posture. At times, you skillfully use reflective language to acknowledge passion without endorsing conclusions, which is commendable.

However, there are moments where your phrasing could invite unproductive escalation. For instance, labeling isolation as "lonely" might open unnecessary side paths. Instead, focus on observable behaviors. You could say, "You've reached out to colleagues without receiving responses. How is this affecting your day-to-day functioning with students and grading?" or "What changes have you made in class based on that lack of response?" These questions keep the focus on actions and next steps.

Your mid-interview pivot to technique is well-timed, but the question format might imply judgment. Instead of asking, "Do you think you are being more provocative?" consider, "Compared to last year, what has changed about your delivery, volume, or pacing in class?" followed by, "What student behaviors indicate whether this approach is working or not?" This keeps the discussion operational and concrete.

To manage interruptions, consider establishing a simple ground rule early on. For example, "I will ask a question, then pause to allow you to respond. I will not interrupt you. When you finish, I will summarize and check for understanding before asking the next question." If interruptions continue, calmly reset with, "I hear you. I am going to finish this sentence, then I will stop." This approach is respectful and protects the interview process.

Strengths:

- Your questions are conceptually strong. You're aiming exactly where a threat assessor should: impact on students, classroom behavior, and emotional experience.
- You do some smart reframing later, especially when you use "they claim" to create distance between student complaints and Dusty ("What are some of the things they *claim* you've done?"). That framing lets him answer without feeling you've already sided against him.
- You're trying to integrate earlier language (e.g., "uncomfortable") to maintain continuity in the interview, which shows good tracking of what's been said.

Areas for Improvement:

- Early on, you move into content and examples before rapport is built, which repeatedly elicits defensive responses. For someone like Dusty, you need more emotional buy-in before you'll get cooperative answers.
- Once it's clear that any negatively charged descriptor ("feelings hurt," "uncomfortable," etc.) produces immediate denial and irritation, you need to retire those words quickly. This is a place where your teammates, via chat, could help by flagging the pattern.
- When Dusty corrects you ("My feelings aren't hurt"), you miss a golden repair opportunity: to say "You're right, I got that wrong, thank you for correcting me. I'm still getting to know you, and I appreciate you clarifying." Owning the misstep would both defuse tension and model humility, strengthening rapport instead of letting the moment pass.
- When he asks, "Have you read the emails they've stacked up against me?" that is *one* question you absolutely should answer, and answer in a way that emphasizes fairness and due process rather than dodging or pivoting straight into another probe.

Feedback for Kacie

Your presence is steady and human, with a measured tone that focuses on values, collaboration, and practical support. Dusty responds well to you, even when heated, and you effectively hold space without engaging in arguments. This skill is invaluable in interviewing. Your strongest moments occur when you ask about helpful assistance and invite Dusty to envision a working relationship with colleagues. These prompts reveal how Dusty defines "support," which is crucial for any behavior plan or return-to-classroom agreement. You also reset effectively after disruptions with a neutral "Okay," which is a great technique with an intense speaker.

To sharpen your approach, consider narrowing broad prompts, as they can create agitation. Instead of asking, "How are you being supported?" try, "Name two actions from colleagues that would count as support for you this month." Similarly, instead of asking, "How do students show they support you?" ask, "In class, what student behaviors indicate learning is occurring? Give two concrete examples." Specifics reduce argument and provide verifiable material.

When Dusty interrupts or reframes questions into debates, stay calm and add a light structure to keep your question intact. For example, "I will finish the question, then I will stop and listen." Ask the question in one sentence, and if he answers a different question, acknowledge, and return with, "Heard on publishing goals. I also need a direct answer to this one point about classroom examples." This keeps you in collaboration without ceding control.

Explore operational safety and pedagogical plans if nonresponse from colleagues continues. Ask, "If you return to class next week, what two adjustments to your delivery will you try to reduce student distress while preserving your academic freedom?" followed by, "How will we know those adjustments worked?" The first invites ownership, the second defines evidence.

Strengths:

- You offer some of the clearest summary reflections, tying together his earlier statements and where you are in the story. This is exactly the skill set the team needs more of.
- You make good use of his language (e.g., "the void") and structure your questions thoughtfully, especially around "what happens next if things don't change," which is a nuanced, indirect way of assessing for future risk.
- You give micro-attending behaviors ("yeah," "mm-hmm") and allow him space to respond; that's particularly valuable over Zoom.

Areas for Improvement:

- Like the others, you sometimes move too quickly from a good reflection into a new question. Pause and explicitly ask, "Did I get that right?" before shifting gears.
- Your questions can occasionally be multi-part with layered options, which is hard for an emotionally activated, impulsive subject over Zoom. Aim for short, single-focus questions.
- Asking for "examples" before rapport is firmly established often feels to him like a cross-examination. For this kind of subject, consider giving *your* hypothesized example and asking if it fits: "It sounds like what you're saying in class is X. Am I close?" That maintains control of the frame while reducing the sense that he's handing you ammunition.

Dusty Harrington Virtual Interview

Chronological Timestamped Feedback for Kacie, Michael, and Wendi

2:25 Opening question and rapport

I really like the open-ended nature of your opening question. You smoothly moved from your typical professional role to a more student-focused frame, giving Dusty room to talk and setting the stage for a more collaborative conversation rather than a cross-examination. It functions like a “hall pass” back into the classroom, inviting him to re-enter his teacher identity and expand on what matters to him.

At this point in the interview, given his history of defensiveness, it will be interesting to see how this kind of open-ended question plays out. You set him up well: you’re not boxing him in, you’re signaling curiosity. Strong start and a very effective opening question. You also get two powerful metaphors from Dusty early on (e.g., licking boots, hiding under desks) that reveal his perceptions of administration and colleagues. These are rich entry points into his sense of grievance and injustice. As you move forward, keep circling back to these metaphors; they are emotional “anchors” you can use to understand his worldview and build rapport.

3:32 Middle East question and emotional acknowledgment

Here, you shift into, “Let’s talk a little bit more about what’s happening in the Middle East,” and what he has been trying to cover in class. The question is reasonable and appropriately open: you’re asking what specifically concerns him. However, you’re moving into content (genocide, war, politics) without first acknowledging the emotional charge he’s just shown.

Dusty uses intense language like “genocide” and references large-scale death. When he does that, it’s a cue to pause and reflect on the emotion, not just the topic. Before going further into “what specifically are you worried about,” consider a brief reflection like: “You’re using really strong language here—this is clearly very emotional and important to you.” That brief acknowledgment would likely help him feel seen and reduce his tendency to lecture or escalate when he feels misunderstood.

4:31 Wendi’s emotional connection

Wendi, you step in here, and this is exactly the right move. You lean into the emotional content and start connecting with the *feeling* behind his statements rather than staying only with the *facts*. This is where your strengths really show up. You could strengthen this moment even more by labeling what you’re noticing more directly. Something like: “This is clearly very emotional for you. I can hear how much this weighs on you.” That kind of statement deepens rapport and shows you’re tuned into more than just the intellectual argument. You’re already heading in this direction; clearer language would amplify its impact.

4:46 Pacing after a good connection

Wendi, right after your question here, you get a good response from Dusty and a clear opening into his emotional world. You do a nice job of connecting and then pivoting toward the next question. The thing to watch is the *speed* of that pivot. One of the recurring themes in this

interview is that, when you get a meaningful emotional disclosure, all three of you often move on a bit too quickly. After Dusty gives you something vulnerable or personal, try to stay with it a beat longer, reflect, check if you've understood, and let it "land" before moving to the next topic. That extra few seconds can significantly deepen trust.

9:37 Returning to teaching and values

As Dusty talks here, you have a great opportunity to connect his identity as a teacher, his values around honesty and rigor, and the current conflict. He's essentially saying, "I care deeply about being a good professor," even while he complains about students or administration. At this point, a summary statement back to him could be very effective: "It sounds like you care a lot about being a high-quality professor, and you feel that's being questioned or misunderstood right now." This sort of reflection validates his identity and sets the stage for a more productive conversation about how his approach is landing with students.

10:17 Kacie's question about direct feedback

Kacie, around this point, you ask whether anyone has spoken to him directly about concerns. This is a well-framed question. It checks whether he's received clear feedback, and it opens the door to his perceptions of fairness and process. You also start doing something I encourage throughout: you're not just asking questions; you're listening to patterns in his responses and adjusting. Keep leaning into that: your curiosity about what communication has or hasn't happened is exactly where we want to be to understand his sense of grievance without endorsing it.

11:00 "It's not like I'm going to publish this"

Around 11 minutes in, Dusty makes a notable comment along the lines of, "It's not like I'm going to publish this." That small, offhand remark tells you something about how he views his own conduct and the interview context. This is a perfect spot for a brief follow-up: "Say more about that, what feels different about what you say privately versus what you'd publish?" That kind of probe could reveal how he distinguishes between classroom conduct, personal opinion, and public accountability. It's a missed chance in the recording, but a good learning moment: listen for these throwaway lines and consider pausing to explore them.

11:38 "Sitting here with you instead of teaching"

He comments that instead of teaching, he's sitting in this meeting with you. That's a significant statement from a threat assessment perspective because it touches both on his identity (teacher) and his grievance (being pulled into a process he doesn't trust). A helpful response might be: "It sounds frustrating to feel pulled away from what you love doing to sit in a process you didn't choose." This both validates his frustration and reinforces the message that you're not there to punish him, but to better understand what's happening.

12:27 Quick responses and interruption patterns

Here you note how quickly Dusty answers, how ready he is to respond, and how frequently he interrupts. This is an important pattern to watch: it reveals his impulse control, conversational style, and sensitivity to perceived criticism. Rather than labeling this behavior negatively, use it

diagnostically. You might say internally, “He tends to jump in quickly; I need to slow my pace, ask shorter questions, and build in space after I speak.” This helps keep him engaged while also reducing the likelihood of escalation.

13:30–14:15 Extended lecturing and summary reflections

Dusty goes off on another extended monologue here, part lecture, part diatribe. This is a prime opportunity for a summary reflection. Instead of waiting for him to run out of steam and then jumping straight to a new question, pause and say something like: “Let me see if I’m tracking you. You’re saying A, B, and C, and that leaves you feeling X. Did I get that right, or am I missing something?” Doing this uses “all parts of the buffalo;” you’re harvesting his long speech for meaning, not just enduring it. It also gently tests your understanding and helps him feel heard.

14:33 “Uncomfortable” as a loaded word

Wendi, you use the word “uncomfortable” and wisely soften it by saying you’re using it “loosely.” This is good instinct, because we can see in several parts of the interview that Dusty reacts strongly when he perceives negative emotional labels being applied to him (e.g., “hurt feelings,” “lonely,” “uncomfortable”). Once you see that pattern, consider either avoiding those words altogether or prefacing them with acknowledgment of your own fallibility (“I might have this wrong, but...”). You handled it reasonably well here; the learning point is to notice how often he pushes back when he feels labeled and adjust accordingly.

15:00 “Suck it up, Buttercup” and generational commentary

Around 15 minutes in, Dusty shifts to language about “suck it up,” toughness, and his view of younger students as overly sensitive. This reveals a lot about his cognitive frame: he sees himself as resilient, principled, and misunderstood, and he sees some students as weak or coddled. This is valuable content to summarize back to him later: “You see yourself as someone who has had to push through hard things, and you sometimes feel students today don’t have that same resilience. Did I get that right?” Such a reflection doesn’t endorse his view, but it shows you understand it, and it makes it easier later to challenge how that frame may be landing in harmful ways.

16:00 Exploring belonging and isolation

Michael asks a question that begins to explore whether Dusty feels included, lonely, or separate from his peers. That’s an excellent direction to go, especially given his heavy reliance on metaphors of isolation and persecution. As you pursue this line, keep your tone gentle and descriptive rather than diagnostic. Instead of “You seem lonely,” try: “It sounds like you don’t feel especially connected to colleagues right now.” That slight shift in wording is less likely to trigger defensiveness and more likely to invite elaboration.

16:45 Mixed messages about being liked

Here, Dusty offers a fascinating combination. On one hand, he acknowledges that people may be uncomfortable with him; on the other, he presents himself as unconcerned about popularity. That mix, “I don’t care if they like me” plus repeated references to being misjudged, is important.

From a threat standpoint, this shows both grievance and perceived moral high ground. Rather than arguing with him, keep drawing him out: “On one hand, you’re saying it doesn’t matter if people like you, and on the other, it clearly bothers you to be misunderstood. Help me understand how those fit together for you.”

19:17 “Have you read the emails they’ve stacked up against me?”

This is one of the most important moments in the interview. Dusty asks whether you’ve read “the emails they’ve stacked up against” him. That phrasing shows how he experiences the process as adversarial, punitive, and biased. This is a question you should answer directly with a due-process frame: “Yes, we’ve read them, and that’s exactly why we want to hear from you in your own words. We don’t want to rely only on second-hand information.” Answering transparently here would reinforce fairness and reduce his sense that the process is secretly rigged.

19:37 Signs of calming and regulation

You can hear Dusty starting to calm down a bit. His tone becomes slightly less charged, and his pacing slows. These are the moments where you can carefully introduce more pointed questions without overwhelming him. When you notice this kind of shift, consider using it as a bridge: “I appreciate you walking us through all of this. Given what you’ve said, can we talk a bit about what you see happening next if nothing changes?” That lets you capitalize on his more regulated state to explore risk and future behavior.

21:16 Kacie’s “what happens if nothing changes” question

Kacie, your question around this time, essentially “What happens if things don’t change?”, is excellent. It moves gently into future-oriented risk without sounding accusatory. You’re asking him to walk you through his own prediction of what might unfold. This is exactly where we want the interview to go in its middle and later stages. Keep using that kind of forward-looking language rather than blunt questions about “danger” or “threat.”

21:40 Staying with the emotional thread

Kacie follows up in a way that continues to explore his feelings about being in this process and about how others view him. That’s right where you want to be, on his emotional and interpretive experience, not debating facts. As you do this, remember to check in with him explicitly: “Am I understanding you correctly that...?” Those check-ins help prevent misattunement, which is especially important with someone who reacts strongly to perceived misunderstanding.

21:50 Two people walking toward each other

You use a metaphor here about two people walking toward each other and adjusting to avoid colliding. It’s a nice, accessible way to talk about mutual accommodation and shared responsibility for communication. Using metaphors that *aren’t* inherently adversarial (unlike his “genocide” or “albatross” imagery) can help reframe the situation as something to be negotiated rather than something being done *to* him.

23:00 Apology for interrupting

Dusty apologizes for interrupting. That's meaningful. It shows some awareness of his own conversational impact and suggests you have leverage to work with his better self. Consider briefly reinforcing that awareness: "I appreciate that you caught yourself there; it helps us have a more productive conversation." Small acknowledgments like that can strengthen alliances and reinforce adaptive behavior.

24:46 Losses, divorce, and lack of supports

At this point, Dusty starts talking more openly about personal losses, divorce, and isolation from colleagues and friends. This is a critical risk-related area, the intersection of professional stress, relationship loss, and isolation. When he goes here, slow down. Reflect and validate before moving on: "That's a lot of loss to carry, professionally and personally. How are you coping with all of that right now?" This material is essential for assessing both violence and suicide risk and should be explored carefully and respectfully.

25:29 "Albatross around my neck"

Here, he uses the "albatross" metaphor. This is one of several metaphors he uses throughout to describe himself as burdened, cursed, or unfairly marked. By this point in the interview, he has used more metaphors than many subjects do in an entire assessment. Metaphors like this are high-value data. Gently invite him to unpack them: "When you say you feel like an albatross around their neck, what does that look like in your day-to-day life?" This not only deepens rapport but also clarifies how hopeless, trapped, or persecuted he feels.

28:40 Wendi's question about support and connection

Wendi, your question around 28:40 about how he's managing, who he talks to, and how he copes is very well done. You're inviting him to identify both stressors and protective factors without making him feel like a case file. Again, after he responds, resist the urge to pivot too quickly. Let him sit in that space for a moment. You might follow with something like, "Of the supports you mentioned, which feels most solid to you right now?"

28:00 Misogynistic comment and bias

Around this time, he makes a misogynistic remark about a female colleague (e.g., calling her a "bitch"). This is important clinical and conduct information, even if it comes out in a seemingly offhand way. You don't need to confront it aggressively in the moment, but it's worth a simple, neutral follow-up: "That's strong language. Tell me more about what's happening between the two of you that leads you to describe her that way." This keeps the door open to exploring his attitudes toward women, authority, and conflict without derailing the interview.

32:20 Kacie's question about the future and offense

Kacie, your question about what happens if others remain offended or uncomfortable with him is another strong forward-looking probe. It pushes him to reflect on his own behavior and the likely reactions of others, without labeling him as dangerous. This is core threat assessment work of walking him through possible future scenarios and his likely responses.

32:29 Planning and collaboration themes

At this point, you begin to hint at planning and collaboration—what supports might look like, how the institution might respond, and how he might adjust to avoid escalation. It's helpful to capture that explicitly: "It sounds like we may need a plan that includes X, Y, and Z. What parts of that would feel workable to you, and what parts would feel unfair?" That kind of language frames the process as something done *with* him, not *to* him.

32:00–33:00 Returning to earlier themes

In this section, you circle back to some earlier themes (e.g., "suck it up," generational differences, feeling out of step with current campus culture). This is useful repetition that shows these are core narratives for him, not passing comments. When you hear repeated themes, consider explicitly naming the pattern: "I've heard you come back to this idea a few times—that you value toughness and see the culture shifting away from that. It sounds central to how you see this whole situation." Labeling patterns helps both you and him recognize what's really driving his reactions.

39:43 Wendi's question that doesn't quite land (and that's okay)

Wendi, your question around 39:43 reaches for something important but doesn't quite go anywhere in his response. That's okay. Not every question will land, and you're taking appropriate, thoughtful risks in how you're framing things. The learning point here is to notice when a question falls flat, accept it, and pivot gently rather than trying to force it. Your instincts on that are sound.

41:04 Tag-team work and staying in the emotional space

There's a kind of Wendi-Kacie tag-team dynamic as you both work in the emotional space. That can be very effective as long as you're not piling on too many questions at once. Be mindful of Zoom lag and Dusty's tendency to interrupt. Short, single-part questions with a beat of silence afterward will serve you better than compound questions or rapid-fire back-and-forth.

42:54 Denial of physical intimidation and exploration

Here, Dusty pushes back on any suggestion that he has physically intimidated students or colleagues, even when their emails may frame things that way. This isn't the time to argue the details; it *is* the time to explore perception. You might say: "From your perspective, you haven't been physically intimidating. Some students, however, have described feeling that way. Help me understand what you think they're reacting to." This keeps the door open to exploring the impact without requiring him to agree with the exact language of the complaints.

45:00 "Is there anything we haven't talked about?"

Your question here, asking if there's anything important you haven't covered, is an excellent closing move. It gives Dusty a sense of agency and allows for disclosure of anything still on his mind that you might have missed. If he offers something meaningful here, consider doing one

last brief reflection before closing: "I'm glad you brought that up. It sounds like that's been weighing on you as well."

46:00 Extended closing and reframing

There's an extended stretch where you begin to shift toward closure, planning, and reframing. Michael, your attempt to reframe back to his care for students and his identity as a teacher is particularly helpful. This is exactly where you want to land: acknowledging his investment in students, recognizing his frustrations, and making clear that the institution is trying to find a path forward that protects both students and him.

50:24 Final note on closing and validation

At the very end, there's a powerful opportunity, one I'd encourage you to make even more explicit, to say something like: "Dusty, it's clear you care deeply about your students and about being a good professor. That's come through over and over today. Our goal is to make sure that care translates into a classroom environment where students feel safe and able to learn, and that you feel supported rather than attacked." A closing statement like that validates his core identity while clearly anchoring the institutional concern. It's a strong way to end an interview with someone who is both deeply invested and deeply defensive.