

## Crucial Conversations

Tools for Talking when The Stakes are High

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Publisher: McGraw-Hill Education; 2 edition (Sept. 9, 2011)

### The Basics:

- Definition of a crucial conversation:  
A discussion between two or more people where: stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong.
- Definition of dialogue:  
The free flow of meaning between two or more people.
- Purpose of dialogue:
  - a. To fill the pool of shared meaning.
  - b. The greater the shared meaning in the pool, the better the decision.

### Key Takeaways:

- Minimize flow of adrenaline to maintain your rational skills
- Make your goal dialog not winning. In dialog, this allows the free flow of thoughts, feelings, ideas, and probable solutions. Everyone wins!
- Start with Heart. Before speaking look at your motivations.
- Ask Yourself: What do I want for you? For me?
- Make the other person feel "safe." If they do not, they will "fight or flight" and there will be no dialog.
- Aggressiveness or withdrawal is a sign the other person does not feel safe.
- If you make people feel safe and they dialog, you will increase your influence; and, enhance your relationships, leadership and teamwork.

When there is "silence or violence," the person is communicating they feel unsafe. Silence withholds thoughts, feelings and ideas from the pool. Violence adds toxic waste. The goal is to restore safety and move back to dialogue.

Essential: Mutual respect & a mutual purpose.

#### Promote Safety:

Express sincere care

Offer a humble apology

Contrast: Make a "Don't" & "Do" statement. e.g. I don't want to suggest it's your fault.

#### Promote Mutual Purpose:

"CRIB"

Commit - to stick it out

Recognize - feelings

Invent - a higher level mutual goal

Brainstorm - new strategies

We either act on our emotions (think them out), or our emotions will act on us.  
In-between event and emotional response we tell ourselves a story (lightening fast!).

**Change the story, change your emotional response.**

It's the stories we tell ourselves that will ultimately control us.

Question your feelings which enables you to question your story. Then one can explore alternatives and soothe emotions that cause "silence or violence."

*Ask: Would a descent, reasonable, responsible person act this way?*

Do not jump to conclusions regarding people's motives. First consider alternative motives. This will diffuse negative responses and allow for healthy dialog (which usually will reveal true motives).

To share delicate information takes:

Confidence that your input matters.

Humility that you don't know it all (and the final decision could change) and that you don't have to win.

Skill - don't violate respect. Don't kill safety. Both shut down dialog and the essential flow of meaning in the relationship.

5 skills of Crucial Conversations:

"STATE"

- **Share your facts**
- **Tell your story** (gives meaning to the facts)
- **Ask for others' facts, views, feelings** (story)
- **Talk tentatively** - confidence & humility. We typically don't have "full understanding" of every situation, so don't act like it! (Kills safety, makes people defensive, closes dialog & influence.
- **Encourage testing** - invite others' views to test your views (even play devil's advocate against your view to encourage dialog). Communicate "I want to hear you." [Stay curious - this will keep your emotions cool]

Dialogue is the only reliable way for me to determine other people's real motives.

[Goal: Respect, Candor, & Safety]

And remember, people can move from thought to thought quickly. However, once the chemicals that fuel emotions are released into your bloodstream, it takes time for those chemicals to dissipate. So, give people time and space for emotions to calm and catch up to the safety already created.

Help others retrace their steps from their emotions, to the story behind them, to the facts. How?

Safe Listening ("AMP")

**Ask** - what's going on? I'd like to hear your thoughts. Are u worried about hurting my feelings?

**Mirror** - see their actions (tone, posture, etc) and repeat them back kindly.

**Paraphrase** - calmly repeat back in your words what u heard. Not "Parroting."

Also, "**Prime**" - say what you think people are already thinking. But be sure that you're clear of what you think they're thinking. And, "Agree & Build"

If disagree, compare. Say we "differ" not that they're wrong.

Find a decision to agree on, then act on. Action is key!

Dialogue is not decision-making (it adds meaning to the pool). But it does lead to good decision-making. Make it clear to all involved how decisions will be made.

It's the leaders job to determine how decisions will be made and to get all involved to commit to supporting the final decision.

4 Key Ways of Team Decision Making:

1. Command - leader decides and tells people.
2. Consult - leader collects input from team and makes final decision (which the team chooses to support)
3. Vote - efficient. But team needs enough info and willing to support if their option did not win the vote.
4. Consensus - everyone agrees on decision.

Note: The Leader's job is to determine which of these 4 is to be used in each case.

Who to involve in decision-making? Answer the following:

- Who cares? (Do not involve people who don't care)
- Who knows? (Do not involve people who will not add meaning to the pool)
- Whose cooperation do we need?
- What is the minimum number of people to involve?
- Answer this question; who does what, by when? And how will you follow up?
- Hold people accountable. It build a culture of integrity.

On the best teams, each team member is involved in team accountability.

When dealing with trust issues, deal with trust around the issue not around the person.

Don't nag. Stop acting out of your expectations that others won't take initiative.

Instead talk out your expectations very clearly. And come to agreements placing responsibility on the team members.

Keep crucial conversations simple and to the point. Discuss the pattern (trend) and then move to solutions.

Action: Use the phrase, "I think we have moved away from dialogue."

This will bring awareness and openness to the situation. If we are not in dialogue we are in silence or violence. (Or, "Fight or Flight").

Dialogue is the free flow of meaning. And the number one key to insure that happens is safety.