



Crucial Confrontations

Tools for resolving broken promises, violated expectations, and bad behavior

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About the authors: This same team of authors previously produced the New York Times bestseller *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. In 1990, they co- founded VitalSmarts, a consulting firm that delivers training products and services to clients worldwide. Sought after as speakers and consultants, the authors have worked with organizations and associations worldwide.

Authors' big thought: Behind the problems that routinely plague families, teams, and organizations are individuals who either can't or won't deal with failed promises. Others have broken rules, missed deadlines, or just plain behaved badly. If anybody steps up to the issue, he or she often does a lousy job and creates a whole new set of problems. New research demonstrates that these disappointments aren't just irritating - they're costly, sapping organizational performance by 20 to 50 percent and accounting for up to 90 percent of divorces. Drawn from over 10,000 hours of real-life observations, *Crucial Confrontations* teaches skills to increase confidence in facing tough issues. You will learn to permanently resolve failed promises and missed deadlines, transform broken rules and bad behaviors into productive accountability and strengthen relationships while solving problems.

Introduction: What's a Crucial Confrontation? (And who cares?)

- We all face crucial confrontations. We set clear expectations, but the other person doesn't live up to them - we feel disappointed. Lawyers call these incidents breaches of contract. At work we're likely to dub them missed commitments; with a friend, broken promises; and with a teenage son, violations of common courtesy.

- This book is about better ways of dealing with failed promises, disappointments, and other performance gaps. The authors explore how to step up to and master crucial confrontations.
- A *crucial confrontation* consists of a face-to-face accountability discussion - someone has disappointed you and you talk to him or her directly. When handled well, the problem is resolved and the relationship benefits.
- As it became clear to the authors that leaders aren't the only ones who wield influence, they expanded the research population to include all opinion leaders. Some were leaders and others were not, but all had been identified by their colleagues as the most powerful and effective people in their companies. They were studied because they were the most influential people and they wanted to learn what made them that way.
- What set opinion leaders apart from the pack wasn't their technical skills, their title, or even something as intangible as charisma. Opinion leaders wielded influence because they were the best at stepping up to colleagues, coworkers, or even their bosses, and holding them accountable.
- Crucial confrontation skills offer the best chance to succeed regardless of the topic, person, or circumstances.
- At this point you might conclude that this book is about communication. But it's not about communication; it's about results.
- Behind every national disaster, organizational failure, and family breakdown you find the same root cause. People are staring into the face of a crucial confrontation, and they're not sure what to say. This part they do know: First they need to talk face to face about an extremely important issue. Second, if they fail to resolve the issue, simple problems will grow into chronic problems.
- When they stare into the face of a possible disaster, some people are caught in agonizing silence. Rather than speak directly and frankly about the problem at hand, they drop hints, change the subject, or withdraw from the interaction all together. Fear drives them to various forms of silence, and their points of view are never heard, except maybe in the form of gossip or rumor.
- Others break away from their tortured inaction only to slip into violence. Frightened at the thought of not being heard, they try to force their ideas on others. They cut people off, overstate arguments, attack ideas, employ harsh debating tactics, and eventually resort to insults and threats. Fear drives them to do violence to the discussion, and their ideas are often resisted.
- When you learn to master crucial confrontations, you'll never have to give in to your fears and walk away from a problem again.
- When problems arise, in the worst companies people will withdraw into silence. In your average company, people will say something, but only to the authorities. In the best companies, people will hold a crucial confrontation, face to face and in-the-moment. And they'll hold it well. This, of course, takes skill.

- It will be a skill set, not a policy that will enable people to solve their pressing problems. The skills for mastering crucial confrontations can be learned. With the right kind of help, people can and do learn crucial confrontation skills all the time.
- *The authors' research has shown that most organizations are losing between 20 and 80 percent of their potential performance because of leaders' and employees' inability to step up to and master crucial confrontations.* By teaching people how to improve their ability to have crucial confrontations they've routinely achieved 20 to 40 percent improvements.
- Learn new set of skills - that is how to master crucial confrontations - and you can look forward to significant and lasting change in every problem you choose to confront in every domain of your life.

Part One: Work on Me First

What to Do before a Crucial Confrontation

- Crucial confrontations live and die on the words people choose and the way people deliver them. Those words, and particularly the way they are delivered, live and die on what people *think* before they open their mouths. No amount of preparation can save a confrontation if the person who brings up the failed promise isn't in the right frame of mind.
- Those who master crucial confrontations make sure their thoughts are in order before they put their mouths in gear:
 - They make sure they are confronting the right problems.
 - They make sure that the thoughts running through their heads- their facts, stories and emotions - help them see the other person as a *person* rather than a villain. They learn to control their strong emotions by revisiting the stories that caused the problem.

Chapter 1: Choose What and If

How to know What Crucial Confrontation to Hold and If You Should Hold It

Every crucial confrontation starts with two questions- WHAT and IF

- **WHAT:** The first time a problem comes up, talk about the original problem or the *Content*. (what just happened)
- If you find yourself having the same problem-solving discussion over and over again, it's likely there's another, more important problem to address.
- Learning how to get at the gist of an infraction requires time and practice. Feeling pressured by time constraints and hyped up by emotions, most people miss the real deal.
- The ability to reduce an infraction to its bare essence takes patience, a sense of proportion, a decision. First, you have to take the time to unbundle the problem. Second, while sorting through the issues you have to decide what is bothering you the most. Third, you have to be concise. You have to distil the issue to a single sentence. If you can't reduce a violation to a clear sentence before you talk, the

issue almost never becomes more understandable and focused as a conversation unfolds.

- If the problem continues, talk about the *Pattern*. Pattern issues acknowledge that problems have histories and that histories make a difference. Frequent and continued violations affect the other person's predictability and eventually harm respect and trust.
- As the impact spills over to how you relate to one another, talk about your *Relationship*, what's happening to "us". Relationship concerns are far bigger than either the content or the pattern. The issue is not that other people have disappointed you repeatedly; it's the string of disappointments that cause you to lose trust in them: You doubt their competency, you don't trust or respect their promises, and this is affecting the way you treat one another.
- If you are not addressing your real concern you're likely to find yourself feeling dissatisfied with the outcome.

- To understand the various kinds of content, pattern and relationship issues that routinely pop up during crucial confrontations, consider the following three dimensions: consequences, intents and wants. Each provides a distinct method for first unbundling and then prioritizing complex problems.
- Problems are almost never contained in the behavior of the offender. They're much more likely to be contained in what happens afterward. The problem lies in the *consequences*. When you want to clarify the issue you need to confront, stop and ask yourself: What are the consequences of this problem to me? To our relationship? To the task? To other stakeholders? Analyzing the consequences helps you to determine *what is* most important to discuss.
- After you have examined the problem and weighed the particulars, you have to talk about the *intentions*.
- As the list of potential problems expands, cut to the heart of the matter by asking what you really do want and don't want - for yourself, the other person and the relationship. If you don't think about all three of these essential aspects, one may take a back seat and you won't solve your most important problem.
- In summary, to decide *what* to confront:
 - Think CPR - Content, Pattern, and Relationship.
 - Expand the list of possible issues by considering consequences and intent.
 - Choose from the list by asking what you do and don't want: for yourself, others, and the relationship.

- IF: The mere fact that you've identified the problem you'd like to discuss doesn't mean you should actually discuss it. Sometimes it's better to consider the consequences before deciding whether to bring the issue up.

- There are no simple rules that dictate which problems are imaginary, which are real, and which you should deal with. Usually when someone breaks a promise you should talk about it.
- In organizations there are reports, goals, performance indicators, quality scorecards, budget variances, and a boatload of other metrics that clearly show a difference between what was expected and what was delivered. These failed promises represent clear opportunities to have crucial confrontations.
- If the problems are ambiguous or discussing them could get you in trouble, divide this up into two camps: First, how do you know if you're not speaking up when you *should*? Second, how do you if you are speaking up when you *shouldn't*?
- To determine if you're wrongly going to silence, ask four questions:
 1. Am I acting out? When you've gone silent, but your body language keeps sending out hostile signals or you're dropping hints or relying on sarcasm, you probably ought to speak up.
 2. Is my conscience nagging me? When you've gone to silence and your conscience is nagging you - you probably ought to speak up.
 3. Am I choosing the certainty of silence over the risk of speaking up? Our two favorite methods for tricking ourselves into remaining silent are 1) downplaying the cost of not speaking and 2) exaggerating the cost of expressing ourselves.
 4. Am I telling myself I'm helpless? At the heart of most decisions to stay quiet even though we're currently suffering lies the fear that we won't be able to make a difference. The truth is that many confrontations fail not because others are bad and wrong but because we handle them poorly. Be careful not to let fear taint your judgment. If you're afraid that you're not skilled enough to have a crucial confrontation, enhance your skills.
- In summary, the clues that you should be speaking and not clamming up include the following four signs:
 1. You're acting out your feelings. Your nonverbal behavior is already speaking for you. Consider taking charge of the conversation yourself.
 2. Your conscience is nagging you. Take the internal prodding as a sign that your silence isn't warranted.
 3. You're downplaying the cost of not taking action.
 4. You figure that nothing you do will help.
- To determine if you're wrongly speaking up, ask if the social system will support your effort. There are times when it is better not to bring up a problem, or at least not until you have done some preparatory work.
- Often when you have weighed the consequences, it is better to remain silent about an issue.
- The biggest stumbling block is that problem solving is never done in a vacuum. Every company and family has an unwritten history that indicates which infractions are

appropriate to deal with and which ones a person should let slide. All expectations, contracts and promises aren't equally binding.

- If you are committed to say nothing, differentiate yourself. If you're going to speak up when others remain silent, if you're going to hold people to a standard that differs from that of the masses, get the word out. Send out a warning. Differentiate yourself from others. This is particularly wise advice for those moving into new positions of leadership, parents taking over blended families, etc.
- If you're going to differentiate yourself from your spouse or coworkers by holding people to a more rigid standard, don't be smug about it. Set expectations in a way that shows respect for people with different views.

Chapter 2: Master My Stories

How to get Your Head Right before Opening Your Mouth

- *Master my stories.* The second step in the model also takes place before you actually speak. Anyone who has ever dealt with crucial confrontations realizes that a person's behavior during the first few seconds of the interaction sets the tone for everything that follows. You have no more than a sentence or two to establish the climate. If you set the wrong tone or mood, it's hard to turn things around. To avoid this costly mistake, work on your own thoughts, feelings and stories.
- Another person does something, and as a result, we're propelled to action. We see what that person did and then tell ourselves a story about why he or she did it, which leads to a feeling, which leads to our own actions. Under these circumstances we come to some of the most ignorant conclusions imaginable.
- People aren't all that good at attributing causality accurately. We quickly jump to unflattering conclusions. The chief error we make is a simple one: We assume that people do what they do because of personality factors (mostly motivational) *alone*.
- Most of the time human beings employ what is known as a *dispositional* rather than a *situational* view of others. We argue that people act the way they do because of uncontrollable personality factors (their disposition) as opposed to doing what they do because of forces in their environment (the situation).
- We make this attribution error because when we look at others, we see their actions far more readily than we see the forces behind them. In contrast, when considering our own actions, we're acutely aware of the forces behind our choices. Consequently we believe others do bad things because of their personality flaws whereas we do bad things because the devil made us do them.
- Under adverse conditions people more readily make the fundamental attribution error. During crucial confrontations, the fundamental attribution error is as predictable as gravity. The more tainted the history is and the more severe the consequences are, the more likely we are to assume the worst, become angry, and shoot from the hip.
- When you see a violation but move to silence rather than deal with it, three bad things happen:

- First, you give tacit approval to the action.
- Second, others may think that you're playing favorites.
- Third, each time the other person repeats the same offense you see the new offense as evidence that your story about his or her motives was correct. You continue to tell yourself ugly stories, you fester and it's only a matter of time until you blow.
- Eventually there comes a time when silence leaps to violence. When you move from silence to violence, you no longer keep crucial confrontations professional, under control, and on track to achieve a satisfactory ending. In fact the consequences can be nothing short of horrendous.
- People don't *deserve* to be abused, physically or emotionally. It's not good for them. The greatest leaders, coaches, and parents studied never became abusive.
- *Tell the rest of the story.* Ask why a reasonable, rational, decent person would do what you've just seen as well as if you yourself are playing a role in the problem. By asking this "humanizing question," individuals who master crucial confrontations adopt a situational as well as a dispositional view of people.
- *Look at all six sources of influence.* To help expand their view of human behavior, the authors organized the potential root causes of all behavior (including failed promises), into a model that contains six cells, a diagnostic and influence tool. At the top of the model are two components of behavior selection - motivate and enable. In order to take the required action, the person must be willing and able. Each of these components is influenced by three sources of influence: self, others and things. Examine the force of self, others, and things - all either motivate or enable others to keep their commitment.
- *Expand motive to include the force of others.* Do others praise and support the desired behavior or do they provide pressure against it? Is the reward system aligned? If people do what's required, will they receive a carrot or a stick?
- *Finally, add ability.* Can others do what's required? Does the task play to their strength or weakness? Are people around them a help or a hindrance? Do the things around them provide a bridge or a barrier?

Part Two: Confront with Safety

What to do during a crucial confrontation

When there is enough safety, you can talk to almost anyone about almost anything. As the best problem solvers move from thinking to talking, here's how they create safety:

- They begin well. They know how to describe a performance gap in a way that makes it safe for others to talk with them.

- They know how to help others prioritize compelling demands, and they know how to discipline when necessary.
- They also know how to *help* others deal with ability barriers by jointly exploring solutions. They help others comply by making compliance easier. They understand the underlying principles of empowerment.
- Finally, effective problem solvers know how to deal with unexpected problems or emotions that may come up during a crucial confrontation.

Chapter 3: Describe the Gap

How to Start a Crucial Confrontation

- We're stepping up to a broken promise. A gap: a difference between what you expected and what actually happened.
- These gaps include missed commitments, disappointed expectations, and bad behavior.
- The authors call these *crucial* confrontations because the stakes are high. Handle them poorly and you could lose a job, a friend, or a limb.
- The exploration of ways to initiate a crucial confrontation begins by sharing lessons learned from observing people who had the guts to step up to a problem but then quickly failed. Following is what not to do:
 - Don't play games. The first technique is the result of a good intentions and bad logic. It's called sandwiching. To soften the violent blow, you first say something complimentary, next you bring up the problem, and then you close with something complimentary again.
 - A close cousin to this circuitous technique takes the form of a surprise attack. A leader starts a conversation in a chatty tone, makes pleasant small talk, and then moves in for the kill.
 - Don't play charades. Rather than come right out and talk about a problem, many people rely on nonverbal hints and subtle innuendo
 - Don't pass the buck. Nothing undermines your authority more than blaming someone else for requesting what you would be asking for if you had any guts. If you repeat this mistake, it won't be long before you're seen as irrelevant.
 - Don't play read my mind. This tactic is as irritating as it is ineffective. Despite good intentions, asking others to read your mind typically comes off as extremely patronizing or manipulative.
- To ensure that you set the right tone during the first few seconds of a crucial confrontation, carefully describe the gap:
 - Start with safety
 - Share your path
 - End with a question

Start with Safety

- When another person has let you down, start the confrontation by simply describing the gap between what was expected and what was observed. This is clear and simple, and it helps get you off on the right foot.
- If you maintain a safe climate, others will hear and consider what you're saying. Make it safe for people and they won't need to go to silence or violence.
- When others know that you value them as a person and care about their interests, they will give you an amazing amount of leeway. If *what* you say and *how* you say it causes others to conclude that you don't respect them or that you have selfish and perverse motives, nothing you say will work. As you talk about a problem, a warning flag goes up in their minds. People assess their risk on the basis of two factors. Are bad things *currently* happening to them? Are bad things *about* to happen to them?
- As you first describe the gap, if your tone of voice, facial expressions, or words show disrespect, bad things are *currently* happening to the other person. You're not respecting that person. You're speaking in an uncivil tone. Your manner is discourteous. Your delivery is contemptuous. You have found that person guilty in your head, or so it feels to them.
- This lack of respect is typically communicated subtly with perhaps only a raised eyebrow. In any case, the other person believes you think he or she is incompetent, lazy, or worse. It's only natural that others feel disrespected; they are afraid and resort to either silence or violence.
- If it becomes clear to others that your purpose is at odds with theirs, they're likely to conclude that something bad is *about* to happen to them. Even if you start the confrontation respectfully, it is only natural that if others feel that you are at cross-purposes, they'll resort to silence or violence.
- We have to watch for signs that people are worried, stop saying what we're saying, diagnose why people are afraid, step out of the original conversation, and restore Mutual Respect, Mutual Purpose, or both.
- To ensure that the other person doesn't feel disrespected even though you are about to talk about a problem, we first avoid making others feel disrespected by not disrespecting them. Show others respect by giving them the benefit of the doubt. Tell the rest of the story. Think of other people as rational, reasonable and decent. This attitude eventually affects our demeanor, choice of words, and delivery and helps make the confrontation safe for others. They can tell that even though we've spotted a potential problem, we're speaking out of a position of respect.
- Use Contrasting to restore Mutual Respect. Many discussions of failed promises and bad behavior start with a preventative Contrasting statement "I don't want you to think I'm unhappy with how we work together. Overall I'm very satisfied. I just want to talk about how we make decisions together."

- You can also use contrasting in the middle of a conversation when you suddenly become aware that the other person is feeling disrespected.
- When a conversation turns ugly, it's usually because others misunderstand not your content but your intent. They believe that the only reason you're bringing up the infraction is that you're out to humiliate them, make them do something they don't want to do, overthrow their authority, or otherwise cause them pain and sorrow. They believe that bad things are *about* to happen to them.
- If you think others are likely to harbor bad thoughts before you've even said a word, take another kind of preventive measure: Establish Mutual Purpose.
- If the topic you're about to address is traditionally off limits, ask for permission to discuss it. Asking permission is a powerful sign of respect. It also helps allay people's suspicion that your intentions toward them are malicious.
- Always discuss problems in private. Never conduct public performance reviews. Never discipline your children in front of their friends. Never confront your spouse in the middle of a dinner party.
- Don't use inappropriate humor as a punitive remark.
- Don't deal with individual problems in meetings or public gatherings by chastising the whole group.

Share Your Path

- Start with the facts. As a general rule, when you are sharing your path, it's best to start with the facts; what you saw and heard. Don't start with your stories. If you do, people are likely to become defensive. Instead, describe what the person did, outside your head.
- Explain what, not why. Facts tell us what is going on. Conclusions tell us why we think it's going on.
- Gather facts. Gathering the facts is the homework required for holding a crucial confrontation.
- Every time you share a vague and possibly inflammatory story instead of a fact, you're betting that the other person won't become defensive and can translate what you're thinking into what he or she did. That's a bad bet. Share the facts. Describe the observable details of what's happening. Cut out the guesswork.
- Start with the facts because they are the least emotional and controversial element of the conversation and then tentatively share your story or conclusion. Make sure your language is free of absolutes. By taking the attitude that you could be wrong and using tentative language, you're being fair.
- Once you start to tell your story, no matter how tentative you are, there's a chance the other person will become defensive. If so, take away their fear. Step out of the content and restore safety.

End with a question

- You started the crucial confrontation by doing your best to make it safe. You shared your path in a way that continued to make it safe. Now it's time to bring your opening paragraph to a close, still maintaining safety. End with a simple diagnostic question: What happened? Make this an honest inquiry, not a veiled threat or an accusation such as "what's *wrong with you!*"
- As you finish off your description of the failed expectation your goal should be to hear the other person's point of view.
- Don't underestimate the importance of the sincere question. If you sincerely want to hear the other person's point of view, you let him or her know that this is dialogue, not a monologue. You help the other person understand that your goal is not to be right or to punish but to solve a problem and that all the information must be out in the open for that to occur. So end your opening statement with a sincere invitation for the other person to share even completely contrary opinions with you.
- Finally, as the other person answers the question, listen carefully. Listen for the underlying cause.

Chapter 4: Make It Motivating

How to make others want to take action

- Knowing how to bring to the surface and resolve all underlying causes requires a great deal of skill. If you miss a single ability barrier, the other person won't be able to cooperate. If you misinterpret the underlying motivational block, you'll be pushing the wrong buttons. You'll also have to choke back the desire to pull out the big guns to motivate or pull out your big ideas to enable. Both methods are tempting, and both will be wrong.
- Contrary to popular myth, you don't have to wield power or provoke fear to be an effective motivator. Motivation has little to do with clout, chutzpah, or even charisma. In fact, motivation is about expectations, information and communication.

Consequences motivate

- Motivation isn't something you do to someone. People always want to do things. They're motivated by the consequences they anticipate. And since any action leads to a variety of consequences, people act on the basis of the overall *consequence bundle*. It's the expected sum total of the consequence bundle that drives behavior. If you want people to act in another way, you have to let them know how a different behavior would yield a better consequence bundle.
- Every time we decide to use our power to influence others, we damage the relationship. Every time we compel people to bend to our will it creates a desolate and lonely work environment. When we unleash our power as a way to motivate our relationship with others is forever changed. We move from respected partner to feared enforcer. And then we pay.

- When we quickly move to use force to influence change, people intuitively understand we do that because we believe they have bad motives. We don't respect them. In addition, it communicates that we care only about *our* goals, not theirs. In other words, it destroys safety. And when safety disappears, people immediately become defensive. Eventually they resist our ideas out of principle. When people produce solely out of fear, once the fear is removed, so is the motivation to continue to follow orders.
 - When perks are applied to routine behavior, extrinsic rewards confuse purpose. Special rewards should be reserved for special performance.
 - The problem with power, perks, and charisma is not that they never work or never should be used. The problem is that people turn to them too quickly, and there are almost always better methods.
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- Explore *natural consequences*. Begin by explaining natural consequences. Within a business context, this typically includes what's happening to stakeholders. Stakeholders include other employees, customers, share owners, communities, and regulatory agencies.
 - Consequences make up the reasons behind all behavior, so savvy influencers motivate others with a consequence search. They explain natural consequences until they hit on one or more that the other person cares about. As you start your consequence search, your job is to make the invisible visible while maintaining a dialogue. There are six methods for doing that:
 1. *Link to existing values*. As you consider all the consequences you could discuss with another person, turn your attention to that person's core values. This will be your point of greatest leverage. Then help the other person see how his or her values will be better realized through the course you are proposing. If you have created enough safety, you can talk frankly about any value issues.
 2. *Connect short-term benefits with long-term pain*. Show how the short-term enjoyment the person is currently experiencing is inextricably connected to longer-term problems. Place the focus on long-term benefits.
 3. *Introduce the hidden victims*. This is perhaps the most widely used method of explaining consequences. You describe the unintended and often invisible effects an action is having on others.
 4. *Hold up a mirror*. To help introduce the social implications of a particular action, describe how a person's action is being viewed by others. Help others gain a view from the other side.
 5. *Connect to existing carrots and sticks*. Eventually you may want to talk about rewards. Help others see how living up to an expectation advances their careers, enhances their influence, puts more money in the bank, or reduces their risks.
 6. *Stay in dialogue*. Watch for the line between dialogue and threats. As you're doing your best to make consequences more visible, stay in dialogue. Keep the information flowing honestly and freely in both directions.

- If your motives are wrong, sharing becomes threatening. Your motive must be to solve the problem in a way that benefits both of you. Anything less than that will provoke silence or violence, not gain willing compliance.
- The line becomes finer when your motives are right but the other person mistakes your description of natural consequences for a threat. If you notice that others appear nervous, step out of the conversation and restore safety by explaining your positive intentions. Explain that your goal is to solve an important problem. You simply want to share the consequences of what they're doing and then ask them for their view on the matter. When they start hearing natural consequences as threats, you should recognize it as a safety problem, not an insurmountable barrier to dialogue.
- Listen to others' view of natural consequences. Your view of what should be done may change in the process of jointly discussing consequences.
- Stop when you have reached critical mass. Don't sell past the close.

Match method to circumstances.

- This is the final element of making a task motivating. It has to do with the circumstances you're facing. The goal of exploring consequences is to bring to the surface the issues that make the task undesirable. If it's not immediately clear, this could take some work. Once you're both aware of the factors that are at play, decide if you still want the person to continue (you may change your mind). If you decide that the task still makes sense, use any combination of the methods described for making things work.
- When people simply want to know, explain both what needs to be done and why. When dealing with someone who is pushing back, resist the temptation to jump to power. Search for consequences that matter to the other person.
- When priorities differ *remind* people without haranguing them.
- When the person really doesn't want to do what you're asking, it takes a genuine consequence search to come up with something that motivates him or her. You have to search because not every consequence matters to everyone.
- Despite your best efforts, sometimes you still have to start down the path of discipline. As you start down this precarious path keep the following in mind:
 - Know the mechanics. Every organization has its own discipline steps and policies. Study them carefully. If you fail to follow procedure, your efforts may be thrown out when they are reviewed, undermining your credibility.
 - Partner with people of authority. Check with specialists to learn what actual steps should be taken.
 - Be appropriately somber. Keep the tone serious and speak about what has to be done not what you now *get to do*.
 - Explain the next step. Explaining the next level of consequences informs and motivates. It also helps eliminate surprises.

- Be consistent. Don't play favorites. When discipline falls under review, the first thing parties examine is equity.
- Don't back off under pressure. Once you've started the process, stick with it.
- When you've decided not to administer discipline as a way of compelling someone to change his or her actions, develop a coping strategy and then candidly share it. That way, as the other person observes and experiences the consequences of the work-around he or she can choose to act differently if he or she wants to avoid the pain, waste, and inefficiency you've talked about.
- Even if you don't have the power to impose your will on an unwilling person, you can avoid being part of the problem by being candid about your coping strategy.

Finish well

- Let's assume you've been able to make it motivating. You jointly discussed consequences, you chose not to back off, and the other person has agreed to comply. The conversation is winding down but it's not through. You have to do one more thing to ensure you haven't wasted your time. Wrap up the conversation by making a plan. Determine who does what and by when. Then set a follow-up time.

Chapter 5: Make it Easy

How to make keeping commitments (almost) painless

- Motivation and ability are linked. In the short run, if a task is undesirable but not impossible, we can crank up the pressure and get the job done. Over the long run, we want to find a way to remove some of the factors that make the job undesirable or we'll constantly be looking for ways to motivate people to do what they hate doing.
- When you're lucky, people come right out and tell you if a problem was due to motivation or ability. Sometimes it can be ambiguous or complicated and requires a detailed diagnosis and multiple solutions. Without going to all the sources, you're only going to be able to deal with a subset of the underlying causes.
- Sometimes people purposely hide or mask the genuine source of a problem. If they fear they will get into trouble for not being able or not wanting to do what's been asked, they may stretch the truth to avoid new problems. Perhaps the most common ability problem people try to hide is their illiteracy.
- The most common form of masking takes place when people cover up their lack of motivation with a bogus ability problem.
- When facing ability barriers, make impossible tasks possible and nasty tasks less nasty. In short, when others face ability barriers, make it easy.
- Knowing *what* to do with an ability barrier is actually fairly simple: Jointly explore root causes, the underlying ability blocks, and remove them.

- Knowing *how* to remove those barriers requires our attention. We need to know if others can't do something because of self (they don't have the skills or knowledge) others, (friends, family, or coworkers are withholding information or material), or things (the world around them is structures poorly).
- Take care to avoid jumping in with your own solutions. Empower others by allowing them to take part in diagnosing the real cause and coming up with workable solutions. Ask others for their ideas. Don'ts: Don't bias the response, don't feel the need to have all the answers and don't pretend to involve other people and then manipulate them to your way of thinking.
- Remember the all-important question: "What do you think it will take?"
- When others can't identify all the causes, jointly explore the underlying forces - include self, others and things. Remember the model. When necessary, stimulate the brain-storming process by including your own view of what some of the barriers may be.
- Ask yourself the following three questions as the brainstorming discussion winds down:
 - Will this person keep facing the same problem?
 - Will others have similar problems?
 - Have we identified all the root causes?
- There are times when people do need help. They can't see the barriers that have them stymied. In this case, it is our job to teach and advise, to point out stumbling blocks. In short, our job is to make the invisible barriers more visible.
- Once you're finished with surfacing and resolving ability barriers, "pop the question." Popping the question" means that you end a discussion of ability by checking for motivation. Once you've dealt with motivation, check ability.
- Check to see if others are willing to do what's required one you've taken steps to enable them. Just because they can *do* something, doesn't mean they're willing

Chapter 6: Stay Focused and Flexible

What to do when others get sidetracked, scream, or sulk

- When new problems emerge, remain flexible enough to deal with them, without getting sidetracked. Each time you step up to a new problem, it should be by choice, not by accident.
- The right confrontation can change before your eyes. If the new emergent problem is more serious, time sensitive or emotional than the original one or if it's important to the other person, you have to change it on the spot. You can't allow the new and more important issue to be at the mercy of the original problem.
- As new and emergent problems surface do the following:
 - Be flexible
 - Note new problems

- Select the right problem: the original problem, the new one, or both
 - Resolve the new problem and return to the original one
 - Be focused
 - Deal with problems one at a time
 - Consciously choose to deal with new issues, don't allow them to be forced upon you.
- When people feel unsafe, step out of the conversation, create safety, and then return. To restore safety, you point to your shared purpose. You assure the other person that you care about what he or she cares about. You use contrasting to clarify the misunderstanding. You apologize when necessary.
- When people don't deliver on a promise because "something came up", deal with it. Others need to let you know that plans may be changing as soon as they can.
- When a worse problem emerges, step out of the original problem, leave a bookmark so you'll know where to return, and then start over with the new problem. Once you've dealt with the emergent problem, return to the original issue. It's OK to change topics, but always clarify what you're doing.
- Sometimes, having dealt with a much larger problem, you decide to return to the original problem another time. If there is enough safety to continue, go ahead and finish what you stated. Retrieve the bookmark and continue where you left off.
- These steps can be applied to any new problem that emerges in the middle of a crucial confrontation. Pull out of the original problem, announce the change in topic, confront the new problem, bring it to a satisfactory resolution, and then decide whether you need to return to the original problem.
- Sometimes you can experience three different emergent problems in a couple of minutes, and you have to decide which ones to confront.
- When others become upset, or emotional retrace their Path to Action to the original source. Talking about the facts helps to dissipate the emotions and takes you to the place where you can resolve the problem.
- When dealing with anger, first determine how dangerous the situation is. If you think you're in danger, leave.
- If you're not in danger, go straight to the emotion; don't deal with the argument per se.
- Here are three things not to do.
 - Don't get hooked and get angry in response.
 - Don't one -up. They certainly don't want to be told that their problem can't compete with your lengthy and impressive history of disappointments and disasters
 - Don't patronize.

- We have to find a way to understand why others get emotional as well as let them know we understand. The authors have four power listening tools to help us using the acronym AMPP. AMPP reminds us that we can simply *Ask* to get the conversation rolling. *Mirror* to encourage. *Paraphrase* in your own words what you think they stated for understanding and *Prime* to make it safe for the other person to open up.
- Paraphrasing serves two functions. First it shows that you are listening and that you care. This alone often calms the other person down enough to allow a rational conversation. Second, it helps you see what you do and don't understand.
- Finally, take action. Openly talking about the other person's path puts you in a position to deal calmly with the issues that have surfaced. Once we've uncovered the story and the action that led to it, we're in a position to deal with the problem itself. Listening actively is a way to get results.
- If your emotions are in control but you're having trouble coming up with the right words, take a strategic delay. Think about what you'd like to say privately, safely, and slowly and then return later.
- If your emotions are in control but you're about to lose your temper, it is also wise to take a strategic delay.

Part Three: Move to Action

What to do after a crucial confrontation

- Here's what the best problem solvers do after the crucial confrontation to ensure that the problem doesn't keep showing up again.
- The best problem solvers create a complete plan. They build the foundation of accountability by being specific about what comes next. This includes who does what by when and follow-up.
- They piece together all the theories and skills into a complete problem-solving discussion. They carry a model in their heads and apply it to difficult interpersonal challenges.

Chapter 7: Agree on a Plan and Follow Up

How to gain commitment and move to action

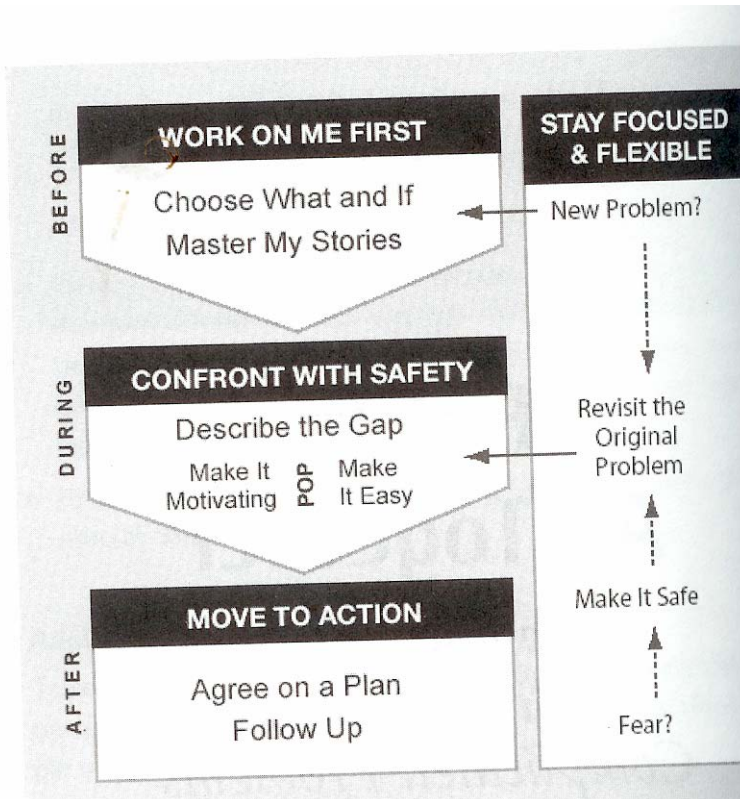
- The way you complete a crucial confrontation is as important as the way you start it. If you do this well, you build commitment and establish a foundation for accountability.
- A complete plan assumes nothing. It leaves no detail to chance. It sets clear and measurable expectations. It builds commitment and increases the likelihood that we'll achieve the desired results. It also enables both parties better to have the next discussion - for accountability, for problem solving, or for praise.
- The key to making a complete and clear plan, free from all assumptions (and thus improving accountability), is to make sure to include four key components.

- Who
- Does What
- By When
- Follow-up
- There is no *we* in *accountability*. For accountability to work, a person needs to know what he or she is expected to do. If the task requires many hands, each person needs to know what his or her part of the assignment is. When it comes to large jobs, make one person is responsible for the whole task and then link specific people to each part.
- When you end a crucial confrontation and are deciding exactly what to do, don't take the *what* for granted. Ask what might be confusing or unclear.
- When choosing the frequency and type of follow-up you'll use, consider the following three variables:
 - Risk. How risky or critical is the project or needed result?
 - Trust. How well is this person performed in the past; what is his or her track record?
 - Competence. How experienced is this person in this area?
- The two most common methods for checking on progress are *scheduled* and *critical event* follow-up times.
- If you find yourself in a crucial confrontation where you're worried about back-sliding, never walk away without agreeing on the follow-up time.
- When it comes to how and when you follow up with others, your intentions will have a huge impact.
- When making an assignment, describe the type of follow up you think is appropriate. Explain why and be candid about your reasoning. Then sincerely ask if the other person agrees with the methods. When you both agree on the frequency and type of follow-up and you both know it, you won't be left wondering if you are perceived as too hands-off or too hands-on.
- There are two forms of follow up. Do a *checkup* when you're giving the assignment and are nervous or have questions. You take the lead. You are in charge of follow-up. Use a *check-back* when the task is routine and has been assigned to someone who is experienced and productive. Now that person is in charge. That person checks back.
- To achieve the results you want as well as maintain healthy relationships, both checkups and check-backs can be useful forms of follow-up.
- The biggest problem with following up is not that we do it too often despite the fact that many of us have felt micromanaged from time to time. The biggest problem is that we don't follow up at all. We set plans, create follow-up dates, and then sort of let them drop.
- Our first problem is that we tend to forget. To keep your promises in front of you, do the following:
 - Put follow-up dates and times on your calendar
 - Use sticky notes or computer cues to remind yourself

- Put follow-up times on your agendas
- Another reason people frequently fail to follow up on assignment is that they want to be seen as nice. In fact the converse is true. If you don't follow up you are being unkind to everyone. Allowing failure eventually destroys results and relationships.
- The purpose of the follow-up is to see what the current status is, how things went, what worked, and what didn't. The intention is to be helpful and supportive.

Chapter 8: Put It All Together

The Crucial Confrontation Model:



THE BIG IDEA FROM EACH STEP

Choose What and If

What: Ask yourself what you really want. You can talk about the content, the pattern, or the relationship. To stay focused, ask what you really want.

If: Are you talking yourself out of a crucial confrontation? Don't let fear substitute for reason. Think carefully not just about the risks of *having* the confrontation but also about the risks of *not* having it.

Master My Stories

Instead of assuming the worst and then acting in ways that confirm your story, stop and *tell the rest of the story*. Ask: Why would a reasonable person not do what he or she promised? What role might I have played? When you see the other person as a human being rather than a villain, you're ready to begin.

Describe the Gap

Make it safe by starting with the facts and describing the gap between what was expected and what was observed. Tentatively share your story only after you've shared your facts. End with a question to help diagnose.

Make It Motivating and Easy

After you've paused to diagnose, listen for motivation and ability. Remember, you don't need power. In fact, power puts you at risk. Instead, make it motivating and make it easy. To do that, *explore the six sources of influence*. Remember to consider others and things as possible influences.

Agree on a Plan and Follow Up

Remember who does what by when and then follow up. This idea is simple and serves as its own reminder. Then ask to make sure you're not leaving out any details or missing any possible barriers.

Stay Focused and Flexible

As other issues come up, don't meander; consciously choose whether to change the discussion to the new issue. Weigh the new problem. If it's more serious or time-sensitive, deal with it. If it is not, don't get sidetracked.

Recommendation: This is an amazing tool for any business or for any family. Read it, try it and keep working on improving your ability to step up to crucial confrontations.



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My associates and I specialize in and have a passion for working with successful accounting firms. Our concentration is on what are commonly called the "soft skills." Through our experience we have demonstrated that what is true for Fortune 500 companies is also true in creating a competitive advantage for accounting firms.

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