



## **Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High**

**Authors:** Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Swtizler

**Publisher:** McGraw Hill New York

**Copyright year:** 2002

**ISBN:** 0-07-140194-6

**Author bio and credits:** The authors are top international corporate consultants and cofounders of Vitality Alliance, Inc., and VitalSmarts. Together they have developed dozens of corporate training programs for Fortune 500 companies.

**Author's Big Thought:** the conversations the authors refer to are the interactions that happen to everyone - the day to day conversations that affect your life. What makes a conversation crucial is first that opinions vary, second that the stakes are high, and third that emotions run high. What makes each of these conversations crucial is that the results could have a huge impact on the quality of your life. The mission of this book is to enable people to handle (even master) crucial conversations in order to step up to and effectively hold tough conversations about virtually any topic. This book gives the tools to handle life's most difficult conversations, say what's on your mind, and achieve positive outcomes.

**Noteworthy info regarding contents and chapter titles:**

### **START WITH HEART**

Here's how people who are skilled at dialogue stay focused on their goals- particularly when the going gets tough.

### **Work on Me First**

- Remember that the only person you can directly Control is yourself.

## **Focus on What You Want**

- When you find yourself moving toward silence or violence, stop and pay attention to your motives.
- Ask yourself: "What does my behavior tell me about what my motives are?"
- Then, clarify what you *really* want. Ask yourself: "What do I want for myself? For others? For the relationship?"
- And finally, ask: "How would I behave if this were what I really wanted?"
- Refuse the Sucker's Choice
- As you consider what you want, notice when you start talking yourself into a Sucker's Choice
- Watch to see if you're telling yourself that you must choose *between* peace and honesty, between winning and losing, and so on.
- Break free of these Sucker's Choices by searching for the *and*.
- Clarify what you don't want, add it to what you do want, and ask your brain to start searching for healthy options to bring you to dialogue.

## **LEARN TO LOOK**

When caught up in a crucial conversation, it's difficult to see exactly what's going on and why. When a discussion starts to become stressful, we often end up doing the exact opposite of what works. We turn to the less healthy components of our Style Under Stress.

### **Learn to Look**

To break from this insidious cycle, Learn to Look.

- Learn to look at content *and* conditions.
- Look for when things become crucial.
- Learn to watch for safety problems.
- Look to see if others are moving toward silence or violence.
- Look for outbreaks of your Style Under Stress.

## **MAKE IT SAFE**

### **Step Out**

When others move to silence or violence, step out of the conversation and Make It Safe. When safety is restored, go back to the issue at hand and continue the dialogue.

### Decide Which Condition of Safety Is at Risk

- *Mutual Purpose*. Do others believe you care about their goals?
- *Mutual Respect*. Do others believe you respect them?

### Apologize When Appropriate

- When you've clearly violated respect, apologize.

### Contrast to Fix Misunderstanding

- When others misunderstand either your purpose or your intent, use *Contrasting*. Start with what you *don't* intend or mean. Then explain what you *do* intend or mean.

### CRIB to Get to Mutual Purpose

- When you are at cross-purposes, use four skills to get back to Mutual Purpose:
  - **C**ommit to seek Mutual Purpose.
  - **R**ecognize the purpose behind the strategy.
  - **I**vent a Mutual Purpose.
  - **B**rainstorm new strategies.

### MASTER MY STORIES

If strong emotions are keeping you stuck in silence or violence try this.

#### Retrace Your Path

*Notice your behavior.* If you find yourself moving away dialogue, ask yourself what you're really doing.

- Am I in some form of silence or violence?

*Get in touch with your feelings.* Learn to accurately identify the emotions behind your story.

- What emotions are encouraging me to act this way?

*Analyze your stories.* Question your conclusions and look for other possible explanations behind your story.

- What story is creating these emotions?

*Get back to the facts.* Abandon your absolute certainty by distinguishing between hard facts and your invented story.

- What evidence do I have to support this story?

*Watch for clever stories.* Victim, Villain, and Helpless Stories sit at the top of the list.

### **Tell the Rest of the Story**

Ask:

- Am I pretending not to notice my role in the problem?
- Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person do this?
- What do I really want?
- What would I do right now if I really wanted these results?

### **STATE MY PATH**

When you have a tough message to share, or when you are so convinced of your own rightness that you may push too hard, remember to STATE your path:

*Share your facts.* Start with the least controversial, most persuasive elements from your Path to Action.

*Tell your story.* Explain what you're beginning to conclude.

*Ask for others' paths.* Encourage others to share both their facts and their stories.

*Talk tentatively.* State your story as a story, don't disguise it as a fact.

*Encourage testing.* Make it safe for others to express differing or even opposing views.

### **EXPLORE OTHERS' PATHS**

To encourage the free flow of meaning and help others leave silence or violence behind, explore their Paths to Action. Start with an attitude of curiosity and patience. This helps restore safety.

Then, use four powerful listening skills to retrace the other person's Path to Action to its origins.

- *Ask.* Start by simply expressing Interest in the other person's views.
- *Mirror.* Increase safety by respectfully acknowledging the emotions people appear to be feeling.
- *Paraphrase.* As others begin to share part of their story, restate what you've heard to show not just that you understand, but also that it's safe for them to share what they're thinking.
- *Prime.* If others continue to hold back, prime. Take your best guess at what they may be thinking and feeling.

As you begin to share your views, remember:

- *Agree.* Agree when you do.
- *Build.* If others leave something out, agree where you do, then build.
- *Compare.* When you do differ significantly, don't suggest others are wrong. Compare your two Views.

## MOVE TO ACTION

Turn your successful crucial conversations into great decisions and united action by avoiding the two traps of violated expectations and inaction.

### Decide How to Decide

- *Command.* Decisions are made without involving others.
- *Consult.* Input is gathered from the group and then a subset decides.
- *Vote.* An agreed-upon percentage swings the decision.
- *Consensus.* Everyone comes to an agreement and then supports the final decision.

### Finish Clearly

Determine *who does what by when.* Make the deliverables crystal clear. Set a *follow-up* time. Record the commitments and then follow up. Finally, hold people accountable to their promises.

**Reviewer's recommendation:** This book has a really simple model to follow. While I didn't particularly enjoy the writing style, the content was worth reading.



Wise leaders recognize that they and their organizations need periodic refocusing to be the best they can be. Frumi helps such leaders rediscover the strengths and values that energize them so they in turn can renew their colleagues, employees, and business operations.

Contact Frumi at 949-729-1577  
[ceocoach@frumi.com](mailto:ceocoach@frumi.com)