

Crucial Conversations

Tools for talking when stakes are high

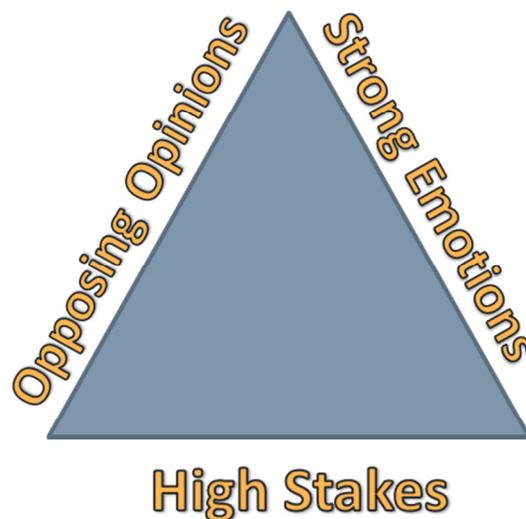
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What's a Crucial Conversation?

- Opinions vary
- Stakes are high
- Emotions run strong

These conversations happen often. How we handle them impacts business, relationships, health and wellbeing.



When it matters most:

- Genetics get in the way – adrenalin kicks in
- Fight or flight
 - We go silent and retreat.. or we say something under pressure that doesn't further our cause.
- Self-defeating behavior

Silence fails:

- Most common complaint – silos
- 80% of projects that require cross-functional cooperation → cost more and produce less
- Leaders respond with new processes, systems and structure → but it's about behavior

The Fool's Choice:

- Option 1: Speak up and turn a powerful person into an enemy
- Option 2: Suffer in silence and make a bad decision that hurts the company

There's a third choice... dialogue

The gifted and influential team members you have may already be gifted in this area. Not at going along, but at speaking up in a way that is respectful and heard. But good news, dialogue skills are learnable.

The Pool of Shared Meaning

- Enter conversations with our own feelings and experiences
- Enter *crucial* conversations in a different pool
- Dialogue makes it safe to add to the *shared* pool – get all ideas into the open

As the Pool of Shared Meaning grows, decisions get better. Everyone shares their feelings, opinions and insights, the pool of shared meaning grows, and things become clearer – birthplace of synergy. Not just better decisions, but better follow up because everyone was in on it.

Step 1: Start with the Heart

- Focus on what you really want
 - What do I want for myself?
 - For others?
 - How would I behave if this is what I really want?
- Refuse the Fool's Choice
 - Search for the and
 - Clarify what you don't want, add it to what you do want, and start looking for good options

Step 2: Learn to Look

- Be aware of when things become crucial
- Look to see if others are moving toward silence or violence
- Monitor your own style under stress

Step 3: Make it Safe

- When it becomes crucial, step out of the conversation and make it safe
- Do you have mutual purpose?
- Do you have mutual respect?
- Clarify with contrast – what you don't intend, then what you do mean
- Find mutual purpose and respect then continue to dialogue on strategies

Step 4: Master Your Stories

- We see & hear something, then tell ourselves a story... feel and act
- To master your stories
 - Retrace your path – question your conclusions
 - Get back to the facts
 - Ask yourself what you really want?
 - Turn the facts into a useful story – that leads to healthy action like dialogue

Step 5: State Your Path

- Share your facts – facts are the least controversial and most persuasive
- Tell your story – explain your conclusions
- Ask for others' paths – ask about others facts and conclusions
- Talk tentatively – it's a story, not a fact
- Encourage testing – make it safe

And: Explore Others' Paths

- Ask. Interest in the others' views.
- Mirror. Acknowledge feeling
- Paraphrase. What did you hear?
- Prime. If they hold back, take your best guess at what they may be thinking or feeling
- ABCs – Agree when you share views; Build from there; Compare where views differ

Finally: Move to Action

- Decide how to decide:
 - Command
 - Consult
 - Vote
 - Consensus - the best choice for high stakes, complex issues where everyone must support the final decision
- Decide who does what when

Key Concepts to Remember

- Dialogue is about contributing to the pool of shared meaning to make better decisions
- Keep the conversation safe for dialogue – mutual purpose and respect – contrast tool
- Master your stories – go back to the facts to find more useful stories
- State your path – Share, Tell, Ask, Talk, Encourage