

Crucial Conversations

Study Guide

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Study guide for Crucial Conversations by
Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler.

Intro

Crucial conversations blend intellectual (IQ) and emotional (EQ) intelligence to enable effective conversations.

1-What's a Crucial Conversation?

Definition

A **crucial conversation** is one in which (1) opinions vary, (2) the stakes are high, and (3) emotions are strong.

Your Choice in Handling a Conversation

You may choose to:

- avoid the conversation
- face the conversation and handle it poorly
- face the conversation and handle it well.

Though it seems obvious that we would choose to handle a crucial conversation well, there are factors that get in our way. We become our own worst enemies.

- Our adrenal glands prompt a fight or flight response.
- Blood flows away from your logic center to support body parts that can assist with fighting or fleeing.
- Often crucial conversations catch us off guard with no time to prepare.
- We lack the knowledge we need to engage in effective communication.

Why Spend Time Learning to Have Effective Crucial Conversations?

The best-performing organizations hold everyone accountable through face-to-face conversations. They promptly have a crucial conversation about topics such as:

- safety
- failing to meet commitments
- diversity
- quality

Personal relationships are improved if we can speak openly and effectively rather than using threats or silent fuming.

Discussion

From your perspective, how well do you tend to handle crucial conversations?

1 -- 2 -- 3 -- 4 -- 5 -- 6 -- 7 -- 8 -- 9 -- 10

I always
fight or
flee

I always speak
openly and
effectively.

2-Mastering Crucial Conversations

The “One Thing”

Those skilled in crucial conversations find a way to get all relevant information from themselves and others into the open.

Dialogue = free flow of meaning between two or more people

How Dialogue Works: Filling the Pool of Shared Meaning

People skilled at dialogue make it safe for everyone to add their meaning to the shared pool. Filling the pool improves the quality of decisions. People tend to hold back from sharing for fear of angering someone in a position of power.

If you want to become effective at dialogue, you must learn to create conditions in yourself and others that make dialogue the path of least resistance.

3-Start with Heart

Me First

More often than not, you do something to contribute to the problems you are experiencing.

As much as others may need to change, as much as you may want them to change, the only person you can continually inspire, prod, and shape is the person in the mirror.

Moment of Truth

The moment of truth is when someone confronts you on a topic with high stakes. Do you let your natural physical response hook you into fighting or do you focus on what you really want and avoid the Sucker's Choice?

Focus on What you Really Want

1. Refocus your brain. Ask yourself, “What do I really want here?” (for myself, for others, for the relationship) “How would I behave if I really wanted those results?”
2. Find your bearings. Don't respond until you have answered the questions.
3. Take charge of your body. Force your brain to focus on the questions. That will get some

blood flowing to your brain and help you remain in dialogue.

4. Avoid the overwhelming urge to win or prove you are “right.”
5. Avoid the urge to seek revenge or harm the person who is confronting you.
6. Refrain from avoiding the issue hoping to remain “safe.”

Refuse the Sucker's Choice

- Understand, it's a false dichotomy.
- Open yourself up to possible change.
- Search for the illusive AND. Clarify what you want. Clarify what you don't want. Present your brain with a challenge: Is it possible that there is a way to accomplish both? Always look for a third option.

Discussion

What practical ways could you use to remind yourself to focus on what you really want for yourself, others, and the relationship?

How often do you get stuck in either/or thinking? Your challenge for the coming week is to find a third option every time you realize you are taking the Sucker's Choice.

4-Learn to Look

Learn to Spot Crucial Conversations

Before we can become effective at dialogue, we need to know when a conversation has turned crucial. Pay attention to:

- your physical signals: tight stomach, dry eyes, dry mouth (this varies from person to person, learn how you respond)
- your emotional signals: fear, anger, hurt
- your behavioral signals: pitch of voice gets higher, gestures get more forceful. stop talking, muscles tense, arms cross

Learn to Look for Safety Problems

When a person responds to you with silence or aggression, it may be because the person does not feel safe with you in the conversation. (the book uses violence, aggression may be more accurate)

<i>SILENCE</i>	<i>AGGRESSION</i>
Masking: understating, sugarcoating, sarcasm Avoiding: steering away from sensitive subjects Withdrawing: stop talking or leaving the room	controlling: cutting others off, overstating facts, speaking in absolutes labeling: calling names to belittle attacking: verbally threatening

The biggest challenge is to watch for these behaviors in yourself. Pay attention to how others react to you. When they react poorly, consider how you are behaving that might be prompting those responses.

Discussion

When under stress, are you more likely to resort to silence or aggression?

[See self-assessment tool in book.]

5-Make It Safe

Step Out

When the other person resorts to silence or aggression, step out of the situation.

Notice which Condition is at Risk

Mutual Purpose: Does the other person know that you care about their needs? If your objective is to simply get your way, you won't achieve mutual purpose. Strive to meet both sets of needs.

Discussion

Do others believe you respect them?
How do you know?

What to Do Once You Step Out

Apologize when Appropriate

When you harm someone, admit your mistake and express your regret. Make it clear that you understand what you did that violated their trust.

Contrast to Fix Misunderstanding

State what you don't mean (the misunderstanding that has put safety at risk). Explain what you do mean.

- Contrasting is not apologizing.
- Contrasting is putting things in perspective by putting them in context.
- Contrasting is helpful in preventing misunderstandings.

CRIB to Get to Mutual Purpose

C	Commit to Seek Mutual Purpose	Make a unilateral public commitment to stay in the conversation until you arrive at something that serves everyone.
R	Recognize the Purpose Behind the Strategy	Find out what's behind what you and others are requesting. What purpose does each serve?
I	Invent a Mutual Purpose	After you are clear on everyone's purpose, if you are still at odds, attempt to invent a higher and longer-term purpose that is more motivating to everyone.
B	Brainstorm New Strategies	Once you have agreed on a Mutual Purpose, you can join forces to find a solution that serves everyone.

6-Master My Stories

Stories Create Feelings

You are responsible for your own emotions. Either find a way to master them or fall hostage to them. We generate feelings based on the stories we tell ourselves about what we see and hear. The stories we create are theories about why and how others do and say things. Any given set of facts can be the basis for many stories. We must take control of our stories.

Retrace Your Path

Notice your behavior.	Are you responding with silence or aggression?
Get in touch with your feelings.	What emotions are you having?
Analyze your stories.	Question your conclusions about what you see and hear. Look for other possible explanations. What story is creating your emotions?
Get back to the facts.	Clearly separate the facts (what you see or hear) from your stories (conclusions, interpretations). What evidence does/does not support your story?

<i>Story Traps</i>	<i>Tell the Rest of the Story</i>
VICTIM: It's not my fault. You refuse to see how you contributed to the problem.	Turn victim into ACTOR. What did you do or say that contributed to the problem?
VILLAIN: It's all your fault. You overemphasize the other person's guilt. You use labels to dehumanize the other person.	Turn villain into HUMAN. What would motivate a reasonable, rational, decent person to do what this person did or said? (Don't excuse bad behavior.)
HELPLESS: There's nothing else I can do. You claim to be powerless in the situation. Sometimes, we are a victim, someone is a villain, and we are helpless; however, that is usually not the case. We use those story traps to avoid accepting responsibility for our own actions and feelings. When we don't admit our errors, we seek ways to justify them.	Turn the helpless into the ABLE. Remind yourself what you want for yourself, others and the relationship. What would you do right now if you really wanted those results?

Discussion

How often are you tempted to blame others for your feelings?

What types of stories do you tell yourself that may be traps?

7-State My Path

Be totally frank and completely respectful.

S	Share your facts.	Gather the facts. State them without interpretation.
T	Tell your story.	Be alert to safety problems. Use contrasting to be sure you don't send a message you don't intend. Don't apologize for your views; however, don't state your story as fact.
A	Ask for the other's story.	Ask the other person to share his/her path (facts, story, feelings). Listen carefully. Reshape your story if the information the person provides warrants it.
T	Talk tentatively.	Leave room for others to clarify. "Perhaps..." "I was wondering if..." "It appears to me that..." Avoid the extremes of being dogmatic or wimpy.
E	Encourage testing.	Invite opposing views. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does anyone see it differently?• What am I missing here? Mean it. "Let's hear some other views." Play devil's advocate to show you are open to other views. "What if..."

Discussion

In the State your Path sequence, which step is most challenging for you? What about it causes you the most difficulty?

8-Explore Other's Paths

Stay curious and patient.

Ask	Express interest in the other person's views. "Please let me know what you think."
Mirror	Respectfully acknowledge the other person's feelings. In a calm voice, "You say you're okay, but your tone of voice seems to indicate..."
Paraphrase	Restate so the other person knows you understand. Calmly state your understanding, "Let me see if I understand, you..."
Prime	Take your best guess at what the other person is thinking and feeling. If the other person fails to engage, calmly state your best guess as to what they may be thinking. "Are you thinking...?"
Agree	Agree when you do. Actively look for points of agreement. (Understanding the other's point of view does not mean you agree with it.)
Build	If others leave out something, agree where you do and build from there. "Absolutely, in addition , I noticed that..."
Compare	When you differ significantly, don't suggest that the other person is wrong. Compare your two views. "I think I see things differently, Let me describe how."

Discussion

Is it more difficult for you to stay curious about the other person's path or to be patient with the other person?

9-Move to Action

Two Risky Times in Dialogue

Beginning: The beginning is risky because if you fail to create safety, things will go awry and dialogue will end.

Ending: The ending is risky because if you handle it poorly, you will violate expectations making it difficult to be in dialogue in the future.

Decide How to Decide

Make it clear who will participate in decision making and why. Not everyone who participated in the dialogue will necessarily participate in decision making. If the lines of authority are not clear, jointly decide how you will decide.

<i>Method</i>	<i>Best When</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Command	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you must decide quickly • there is a clear line of authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People respond better if you explain why you made the decision. • You may opt to delegate to someone in whom you have confidence.
Consult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you have others with relevant expertise you should consider • you want to increase buy-in from key people • there are many options • some options are controversial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear that you are gathering input but will be making the decision yourself. (otherwise some may think you are letting them make the decision just by asking) • Inform all those you consulted of the final decision and the reason why. Thank them for their input. • Whenever there is time to consult others, it is best to do so. Outcomes are better when key people are part of the process.
Vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the conversation is not crucial • the participants agree that any of the options up for vote would be acceptable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, voting is least preferable since it creates winners and losers. • [If the list is long, use a multi-voting technique - Pam]
Consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there are high-stake issues • issues are complex • support of the decision is critical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus can be time consuming. • Be sure all understand that they are selecting a decision for the overall group. • Participants should commit to support the decision

Discussion

Think about the decisions you made during the past week that involved other people.

- Which of the decision-making methods did you use?
- Considering the table above, did you select the best method for each circumstance?

Putting Decisions into Action

If the decision generates some tasks, build an action plan.

<i>Who</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Follow-up</i>
You may assign several people to work on a task; however, there should be one person assigned as the responsible party - Task Owner.	Be specific about the deliverable you want. Describe the visible or measurable characteristics that would make a good deliverable.	Get commitment from each Task Owner on a date for completion.	Establish a follow-up procedure. Agree on when you will check on progress and the method. (email, meeting)

10-Putting It All Together

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Crucial Questions</i>
Start with Heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on what you really want for yourself, others, and the relationship. • Refuse the Sucker's Choice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I acting like what I really want? • How would I behave if I really did want this? • What do I not want? • How can I get what I want and avoid what I don't want?
Learn to Look	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice when a conversation becomes crucial. • Look for safety problems. • Notice your style under stress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I moving toward silence or aggression? • Are others?
Make it Safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apologize when appropriate. • Contrast to fix understanding. • CRIB to get Mutual Purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I established Mutual Purpose? • Am I maintaining Mutual Respect? • What will I do to rebuild safety?
Master My Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retrace my path to action. • Separate fact from story. • Watch for "clever" stories. • Tell the rest of the story. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is my story? • What am I not admitting about my role in the problem? • Why would a reasonable person do this? • What should I do right now to move toward what I really want?
STATE my Path	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share your facts. • Tell your story. • Ask for others' paths. • Talk tentatively. • Encourage testing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I really open to others views? • Am I talking about the real issue? • Am I confidently expressing my own views?
Explore Others Paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask > Mirror > Paraphrase > Prime • Agree > Build > Compare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I actively exploring others' views? • Am I avoiding unnecessary disagreement?
Move to Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how you will decide. • Put decisions into action. • Document and follow-up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will we make decisions? • Who will do what by when? • How will we follow-up?

Discussion

Which part(s) of this process are still awkward for me? Why?

11-Yeah, But

For the tough problems,

- Review the process to see where things get off track.
- Begin by addressing your contribution to the problem first.
- For large or complex issues, address one small part at a time.

12-Change Your Life

Transfer Tips

Master the Content

Learn to recognize what works and why.

To reinforce your learning:

- Review chapters that address your major challenges.
- Discuss the content with others.
- Teach the content to others.

Master the Skills

While it's helpful to talk the talk, you must walk the talk. Begin using the content often.

To reinforce your skills:

- Rehearse with a friend.
- Practice on the fly. (Don't wait until you are perfect to try.)
- Practice in a training session.

Enhance Your Motive

To change, you must want to change. Actively seek opportunities to improve.

To motivate yourself:

- Apply incentives (give yourself a reward after every improved crucial conversation)
- Apply disincentives (set a distasteful task for yourself if you fail to use your skills)
- Go public (tell people what you are doing, social pressure)
- Talk with your coach or boss (see if your boss is agreeable to setting improved dialogue skills as one of your objectives)
- Focus on the longer-term rewards (remind yourself of the benefits of improved dialogue

compared to the immediate satisfaction of falling into your old habits]

Watch for Cues

Be alert for times when you can apply the content and skills. The more opportunities you miss, the more likely you will revert to your old habits.

You can also build in cues as reminders such as:

- Hot spots (visual or auditory reminders associated with typical environmental triggers for crucial conversations)
- Scheduled times (put time on your calendar to go in search of opportunities to practice)
- Others' reactions (watch for how others react to you)

Discussion

Which of these transfer tips will you try?