

Crucial

Conversations:

Strong Emotions

Opposing Opinions

High Stakes

Cleveland Consulting Group, Inc.
9796 Cedar Road
Novelty, Ohio 44072
440/338-1705

Crucial Conversations

Definition of Crucial Conversations

The Goal of All Conversations is to create a shared pool of meaning—a dialogue. The conversation becomes crucial when there are:

- » Strong emotions
- » Opposing opinions
- » High stakes

The Law of Crucial Conversations

Anytime you find yourself stuck with another person or situation, there are crucial conversations keeping you stuck. Identify the crucial conversations that you're not holding or not holding well and get better at everything.

Think Back

Are there persons or situations that evoke

- » **Strong emotions**
- » **High Stakes**
- » **Opposing Opinions**

How are you handling it.....

Start with Your Purpose

Get clear on **what you Want** from the conversation. Be clear and steadfast in holding on to it. At the first sign of emotion or conflict or loss, most people tend to lose sight of what is wanted and divert into old patterns. At that point, the conversation is diverted away from dialogue and into disappointment.

Goals Leading to Disappointment

- Be right
- Look good/save face
- Keep the peace
- Win (at all costs)
- Punish or blame
- Avoid conflict

Goals Leading to Dialogue

- Learn from each other
- Find the truth
- Produce results
- Strengthen relationship
- Stay present without judgement
- Engage differences

Think Back

Remember a conflict that started well, with good intentions and suddenly ended not so well.

Sucker's Choice

One of the reasons that good intentions turn into bad conversations is the **sucker's choice**. Dialogue seeks to hold all views which is "both/and" thinking versus discussion or debate which seeks to hold opposing views as seen through "either/or" thinking. Often, we set up a debate within our own minds before the conversation even begins.

Internal Debate---"If I speak up, they'll think I am an Uncle Tom, Red Apple, etc.. If I don't, it'll drive me crazy."

Internal Dialogue—"How can I say what's true for me and not worry about what other's think about me."

To avoid the sucker's choice, stay fully present with yourself and focus on what you want from the conversation.

Old Patterns

At the first sign of a conversation going bad, we tend toward fight or flight — more commonly, experienced as moving into silence or violence. Silence and violence surface through three respective behaviors for each.

Fight or Flight

Silence	»	Masking	»	Avoiding	»	Withdrawing
Violence	»	Controlling	»	Labeling	»	Attacking

Silence

Silence is defined as any action taken to withhold information from the pool of meaning. It ranges from playing verbal games to avoiding a person entirely. It occurs via masking, avoiding, and/or withdrawing.

Masking

It consists of understating or selectively showing our true opinions. Sarcasm, sugarcoating, and couching are some ways we mask our meaning.

Avoiding

It involves staying completely away from sensitive subjects. We talk—but without addressing the issues that are uncomfortable or upsetting.

Withdrawing

We pull out of communication altogether. We lose even the possibility of dialogue by steering clear of those who might raise difficult subjects. In some cases we go so far as to withdraw from a team or a project or to transfer others in order to avoid dealing with them.

Violence

It is defined as any action taken to compel others toward your point of view. It occurs via controlling, labeling, and/or attacking.

Controlling

It is coercing others through how we share our views or drive the conversation itself. It includes cutting others off, overstating our opinions, speaking in absolutes, forcefully changing the subject, or using directive questions to control the conversation.

Labeling

It is putting a label on people or ideas so we can dismiss them under a general stereotype or category.

Attacking

It is the stage of violence where we've given up on convincing other people and have adopted a goal of punishing them personally. We resort to abusive tactics such as belittling, name-calling, and threatening.

Which Conversation—CPR

When deciding which conversation is the right one to hold, think

- » CONTENT
- » PATTERN
- » RELATIONSHIP

Content

If you're dealing with a problem for the first time, it makes sense to talk about the content.

"You missed a deadline."

"You promote others over me."

"You appear to be angry"

Pattern (or Process)

If the problem continues, you'll want to talk about the pattern.

"I can live with missing an assignment. I cannot live with it happening every day."

"I noticed that every time I intervene as facilitator, you become agitated."

Relationship

If the problem is beginning to harm the relationship, then shift to how the behavior is impacting it.

"I am concerned that we will not be able to work together.
I can't trust you to do what you say you will do within the allotted time."

"I am concerned that we will not be able to work together,
if you continue to attack me whenever I intervene with the group."

Structuring A Conversation

In groups of 3 or 4, discuss a real crucial conversation using the following guidelines

- (1) Minimize Defensiveness:** Stay fully present and only deal with the known facts. Do not use judgements and/or value-laden projections. Own your own experience without blaming others for it.
- (2) Begin with Facts, not accusations:** Using descriptive and not prescriptive language, what are the data points behind the emotions and/or conflict?
- (3) Uncover the hidden values or sensitive areas by creating safety:** Explore what values might underlie the situation that has led to the conflict or emotional eruption. State what you want to happen within the conversation, as well as what you don't want to happen.
- (4) Acknowledge the difference in experiences:** Using "I" statements describe how the behavior was experienced as conflictual or emotive?
- (5) Don't personalize or undermine character:** Without use of judgement (shame or blame) and using "I" statements along with CPR—content, patterns, relationship—how was meaning made of the descriptive data points?
- (6) Determine Common Ground:** How have each of you heard the other's position...is there common ground and/or a better understanding?
- (7) List the Next steps:** Describe what each of you will do to address the situation or conflict.

Excerpted from Joseph Grenny, Kerry Patterson, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler, *Crucial Conversations*, 2002, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Crucial Conversation's Style Under Stress

The following questions explore how you *typically* respond when you're in the middle of a crucial conversation. Before answering, pick a specific relationship at work or at home. Then answer the items while thinking about how you typically approach risky conversations in that relationship.

Answer	Question
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	1. At times, I avoid situations that might bring me into contact with people I'm having trouble with.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	2. I have put off returning phone calls or emails because I simply didn't want to deal with the person who sent them
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	3. Sometimes when people bring up a touchy or awkward issue, I try to change the subject.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	4. When it comes to dealing with awkward or stressful subjects, sometimes I hold back rather than give my full and candid opinion.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	5. Rather than tell people exactly what I think, sometimes I rely on jokes, sarcasm, or snide remarks to let them know I'm frustrated.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	6. When I've got something tough to bring up, sometimes I offer weak or insincere compliments to soften the blow.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	7. In order to get my point across, I sometimes exaggerate my side of the argument.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	8. If I seem to be losing control of a conversation, I might cut people off or change the subject in order to bring it back to where I think it should be.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	9. When others make points that seem stupid to me, I sometimes let them know it without holding back at all.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	10. When I'm stunned by a comment, sometimes I say things that others might take as forceful or attacking—comments such as "Give me a break or "That's ridiculous!"
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	11. Sometimes when things get heated, I move from arguing against others' points to saying things that might hurt them personally.
<input type="checkbox"/> T <input type="checkbox"/> F	12. If I get into a heated discussion, I've been know to be tough on the other person. In fact, the person might feel insulted or hurt.

Your style under stress will show you which forms of silence or violence you turn to

most often. Your silence and violence scores give you a measure of how frequently you fall into these less than perfect strategies. A high score means you use this technique fairly often and provide an opportunity for increasing your self awareness and for making different choices in how you respond under stress.

Silence	Violence
Masking [] 5. T [] 6. T	Controlling [] 7. T [] 8. T
Avoiding [] 3. T [] 4. T	Labeling [] 9. T [] 10. T
Withdrawing [] 1. T [] 2. T	Attacking [] 11. T [] 12. T
Total from above:	Total from above:

Reflections on your test results

Are you violent?

How?

- [] Controlling
- [] Labeling
- [] Attacking

How does it serve you?

How does it dis-serve you?

What do you want to do differently?

Are you silent?

How?

Masking

Avoiding

Withdrawing

How does it serve you?

How does it dis-serve you?

What do you want to do differently?

Crucial Conversations Try Again

Develop in writing (and discuss) a real crucial conversation using the following guidelines:

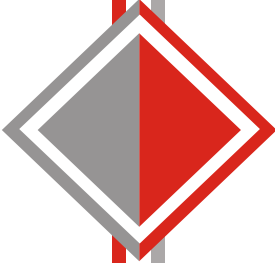
- (1) **Get Centered and Minimize Defensiveness:** Stay fully present and only deal with the known facts. Do not use judgements and/or value-laden projections. Own your own experience without blaming others for it.

- (2) **Begin with Facts, not accusations:** Using descriptive and not prescriptive language, what are the data points behind the emotions and/or conflict?

- (3) **Uncover the hidden values or sensitive areas by creating safety:** Explore what values might underlie the situation that has led to the conflict or emotional eruption? State what you want to happen as well as what you don't want to happen.

Want to Happen

Don't Want to Happen



(4) **Acknowledge the difference in experiences:** Using “I” statements describe how the behavior (as descriptive data points) was experienced as conflictual or emotive?

(5) **Don’t personalize or undermine character:** Without use of judgement (shame or blame) and using “I” statements (and using CPR—Content, Patterns, & Relationship), how was meaning made of the behavior? Try to use descriptive data points.

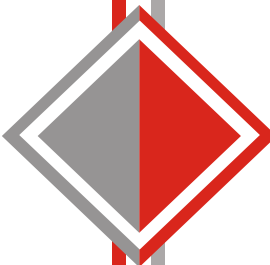
(6) **Determine Common Ground:** How have each of you heard the other’s position...is there common ground, pattern or theme, and/or a better understanding?

(7) **List the Next Steps:** Describe what each of you will do to address the situation or conflict from this point forward.

I will

I will

Crucial Conversations



Set-up the Boundaries of the Conversation: Clearly state what you hope to happen in the conversation and what you hope does not happen in the conversation; i.e. use CPR—**C**ontent: clarify understanding, **P**rocess: address recurring incidents, **R**elations: address relationship.

Minimize Defensiveness: Stay fully present and only deal with the known facts. Do not use judgements and/or value-laden projections. Own your own experience without blaming others for it.

- (1) **Begin with Facts, not accusations:** Using descriptive and not prescriptive language, what are the data points behind the emotions and/or conflict?

- (2) **Uncover the hidden values or sensitive areas:** Explore what values might underlie the situation that has led to the conflict or emotional eruption?

- (3) **Acknowledge the difference in experiences:** Using “I” statements describe how were the data points experienced as conflictual or emotive?

- (4) **Don’t personalize or undermine character:** Without use of judgement (shame or blame) and using “I” statements, how was meaning made of the descriptive data points?

- (5) **Determine Common Ground:** How have each of you heard the other’s position...is there common ground and/or a better understanding?