

How to Have a Crucial Conversation

A crucial conversation is any conversation where the stakes are high, opinions differ, and emotions run strong. We often fear them because our past experience has taught us that if we're both emotional and honest, bad things are

likely to happen. However, if we have the skills to speak up both candidly and honestly, we can actually strengthen relationships while solving problems. Follow these steps to help you succeed in your next crucial conversation.



BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

1. **Start with Heart:** Before you begin, examine your motives. Ask yourself what you really want for you, for the other person, and for the relationship? This question activates your brain and diffuses your strong emotions.
2. **Prepare to STATE Your Path**—STATE stands for Share your facts, Tell your story, Ask for others' paths, Talk tentatively, and Encourage testing. Make sure you identify only the facts of the situation and the story you have drawn as a result of those facts.
3. **Identify a Mutual Purpose and Desired Outcome:** Identify goals both you and the other person care about. Clearly outline the actions or outcomes you'd like to see. If you can't identify these beforehand, ask the other person how you can solve the issue together.
4. **Practice:** Practice these skills ahead of time to prepare for your meeting.



AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CONVERSATION

1. **Get Buy-In:** Begin by getting agreement from the other person to have the conversation. If he or she wants to discuss something else or isn't prepared, schedule another time to meet.
2. **Clarify and Agree:** Reach agreement with the other person that there is an issue, identify what the issue is, and clearly articulate what a successful resolution would look like for both parties.



DURING THE CONVERSATION

1. **Make It Safe:** The antidote to defensiveness in crucial conversations is to make it safe. To create safety, help others understand that you respect them and care about their interests as much as you care about your own. When they believe this, they open up to your views. When they don't, they shut down. After you create a safe environment, confidently share your facts and your story.
2. **Invite Dialogue & Listen:** Once you've safely stated your path, invite differing opinions. Encourage the other person to disagree with you and then listen. Those who are best at crucial conversations want to learn. If your goal is just to dump on others, they'll resist you. If you are open to hearing others' points of view, they'll be more open to yours.



AT THE END OF THE MEETING

1. **Move to Action:** It's easy to let assignments fall through the cracks. When ending a crucial conversation, document WHO does WHAT by WHEN, and how you will FOLLOW UP. This will help you turn a conversation into real action and results.

To learn more, visit www.crucialskills.com

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

TOOLS FOR TALKING WHEN STAKES ARE HIGH

A crucial conversation is a discussion between two or more people when opinions vary, stakes are high, and/or emotions run strong.

Silence
 Withdrawing
 Avoiding
 Masking

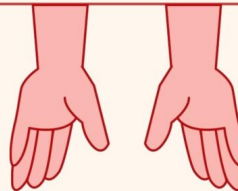
Avoid



Violence
 Controlling
 Labeling
 Attacking

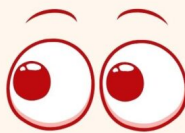


Start with the Heart
 Focus on what you really want. This AND that.
 Refuse the Fool's Choice.



Make it Safe
 Step out of the *content*. **Apologize** when appropriate.

Learn to Look
 Notice when safety is at risk.
 Look for your own style under stress: Silence or Violence?



Contrast and CRIB:

Master My Stories
 Retrace my **Path to Action**.
 Separate fact from story. Watch for **Victim, Villian, and Helpless** stories. Get **curious**: What do you mean by that?



Commit to Mutual Purpose
 Recognize the purpose
 Invent an MP
 Brainstorm new strategies

State My Path



Share your facts.
 Tell your story.
 Ask for others' paths.
 Talk tentatively.
 Encourage testing.



Explore Others' Paths

AMPP & **ABC**
 Ask Agree
 Mirror Build
 Paraphrase Compare
 Prime

Move to Action



Share your facts.
 Tell your story.
 Ask for others' paths.
 Talk tentatively.
 Encourage testing.

Graphic created by Karin Stateler in Canva.

Information from *Crucial Conversations* (Patterson et al., 2012, p. 214-216).