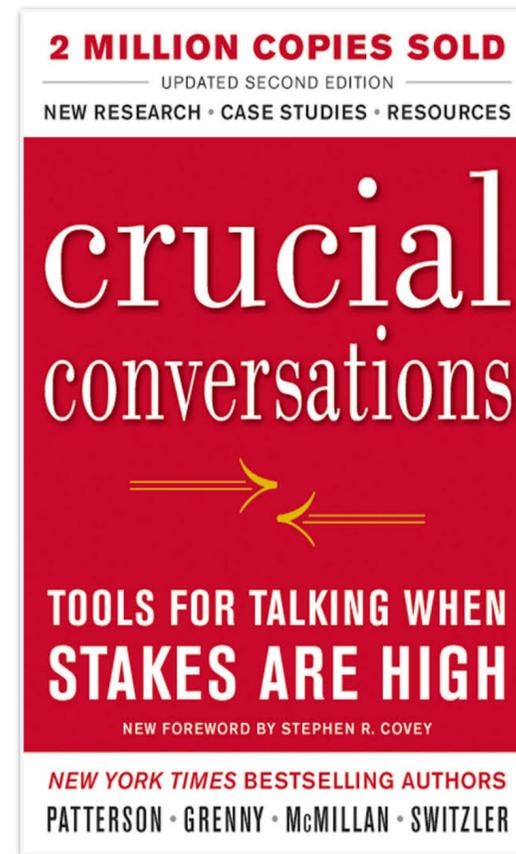




How to Have

Difficult Conversations



**This is my summary of a book
called Crucial Conversations**

“ The single greatest problem in communication is the *illusion* that it had taken place.

– GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

“ Our lives begin to end the day we become *silent* about things that matter.

– MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

A Crucial Conversation is:

- A discussion between two or more people where:
 1. stakes are high
 2. opinions vary, and
 3. emotions run strong
- and the outcome greatly impacts their lives.

The Fool's Choice:

**Choosing between honesty and
keeping a friend**

3 ways of handling crucial conversations:

- **Avoid them**
- **Face them and handle them poorly**
- **Face them and handle them well**

Ask Yourself:

**How can I be 100% honest and
yet 100% respectful?**

Why conversations go poorly:

1. *Biology* – high adrenaline causes a fight or flight response.
2. *Surprise* – they arise without warning.
3. *Confusion* – they often require us to improvise without time to rehearse.
4. *Self-defeating behavior* – we do or say something that makes it worse.

Mastering Crucial Conversations: *The Power of Dialogue*

**Dialogue: The free flow of meaning
between two people.**

**Pool of shared meaning (thoughts,
feelings, and experiences) needs to
grow**

**Successful dialogue results when
everyone feels safe to add their
meaning to the *shared* pool of
meaning**

**First principle of dialogue: start
with heart**

Work on me first, us second

The problem is not that behavior degenerates, it's that motives do

Start with Heart:
*How to Stay Focused on
What You Really Want*

Start conversations with the right motives, and stay focused. How?

- 1. Be smart when it comes to knowing what you want. Don't get distracted.**
- 2. Don't make fools choices.**

When feeling threatened, people tend to create a new goal of protecting themselves.

Protective behavior includes:

- Saving face
- Avoiding embarrassment
- Winning
- Being right
- Punishing others

Alternatively, we choose personal safety (silence) over dialogue

**Instead, focus on what you REALLY
want**

**Relax your body tension, take a
deep breath**

"You know what? We need to talk about this. I'm glad you asked the question. Thank you for taking that risk. I appreciate the trust that it shows in me."

How can you move from anger to gratitude when confronted during a conversation?

**Here are the three steps to
refocusing your brain**

1. As you begin the discussion, start by examining your motives. Ask yourself what you really want.

2. As the conversation moves forward, pay attention to what's happening to your objectives. Are you starting to save face? Save embarrassment? Win? Be right? Or punish others?

**Realize that our motives change
without us thinking about it.**

In order to move back to motives that benefit dialogue, you MUST step away from the conversation and look at yourself like an outsider.

Ask yourself: what am I doing? And if I had to guess, what does it tell me about my underlying motive?

3. Ask yourself:

- what do I really want for myself?**
- what do I really want for others?**
- what do I really want for my relationship?**

Then:

How would I behave if I really wanted these results?

Why do this?

1. It reminds you of your goal
2. Asking yourself abstract, complex questions will literally pull your body out of fight or flight mode

How to avoid the fools choice:

Turning either/or into and

1. Clarify what you really want

e.g. What I want is for my coworker to be more reliable. I'm tired of being let down by them when they make commitments that I depend on.

2. Clarify what you really don't want

Think about what you're afraid will happen if you back away from your current strategy of trying to win or stay safe. What bad thing will happen?

e.g. To have a useless and heated conversation that creates bad feelings and doesn't lead to change.

3. Present your brain with a more complex problem

Combine the two into an and question.

e.g. How can I have a candid convo about #1 and avoid #2?

Learn to Look:
*How to Notice When Safety
Is a Risk*

**Watch for CONTENT (what) and
CONDITIONS (why) of the
conversation**

**The sooner you notice conditions
have changed, the sooner you can
change it**

**It takes knowledge and practice to
know what to look for, and then
actually see it**

What do you look for?

1. The moment a conversation turns crucial
2. Signs that people don't feel safe: Silence or Violence
3. Your own style under stress

Spotting crucial conversations:

Notice *physical* signals

- Sweaty hands, dry mouth or eyes, loud heartbeat

Notice *emotional* signals

- Scared, hurt, angry

Notice *behavioral* signals

- Raising voice, pointing finger, getting quiet

Learn to look for safety problems

- Watch for signs that people are afraid
- Nothing kills the flow of meaning like fear
- Fear reduces your ability to see beyond yourself
- Pulling back from content and watching for fear opens your ability to see

**When it's safe, you can say
anything**

**When you fear people aren't
buying into your ideas, you push
hard (fight)**

**When you fear harm, you become
silent (flight)**

**People feel unsafe because of the
conditions, not content, of a
conversation**

**There are TWO CONDITIONS
required for safety**

People feel safe when they:

1. Believe the other person has their best interests at heart (motives)
2. Respect the other person's opinion (ability)

Don't let safety problems lead you astray:

- Others may attack you when their safety is at risk
- Recode *silence* and *violence* as signs that people are feeling unsafe

SILENCE:
purposefully withholding
information from the dialogue

e.g. sarcasm, sugar coating

3 most common forms of silence:

1. **Masking.** Understating or selectively showing true opinions.
e.g. sarcasm, sugar coating, couching
2. **Avoiding.** Not addressing the real issues.
e.g. changing the subject, shifting the focus to others
3. **Withdrawing.** Not engaging in the conversation any longer.
e.g. exiting the conversation, exiting the room

Masking. Understating or selectively showing true opinions

e.g. sarcasm, sugar coating, couching

**“ I think your idea is... brilliant.
Yeah that's it. I just worry that
others won't catch the subtle
nuances. Some ideas come
before their time so expect
some... minor resistance**

= YOUR IDEA IS INSANE AND PEOPLE WILL FIGHT IT

“ Oh yeah that’ll work like a charm. Offer people a discount and they’ll sign up just to save \$5. Where do you come up with this stuff?

= WHAT A DUMB IDEA

Avoiding. Steering completely away from sensitive subjects

e.g. changing the subject, shifting the focus to others

“ How was your blog post? Well, you know, I thought it was provocative.

= WHAT HAPPENED? DID YOU NOT DO ANY EDITING?

“ Speaking of ideas for cost cutting, what if we bought less office supplies? Or took people out to lunch less?

= IF I OFFER TRIVIAL SUGGESTIONS, MAYBE WE CAN AVOID SENSITIVE THINGS LIKE STAFF INEFFICIENCY

Withdrawing. Pulling out of a conversation altogether

e.g. exiting the conversation, exiting the room

“ Excuse me, I’ve gotta take this call.

= I DON'T WANT TO BE IN THIS USELESS MEETING

“ Sorry I’m not going to have this discussion again. I’m not sure our relationship can handle it.
Exit

= WE CAN'T TALK ABOUT EVEN THE SIMPLEST TOPICS WITHOUT ARGUING

VIOLENCE:
convincing, controlling, or
compelling others to your
viewpoint

e.g. name calling, monologuing,
making threats

3 most common forms of violence:

1. **Controlling.** Coercing others to your way of thinking.
e.g. cutting others off, overstating your facts, speaking in absolutes, dominating the conversation
2. **Labelling.** Stereotyping or categorizing people.
e.g. name-calling, generalizing
3. **Attacking.** Making the other person suffer.
e.g. belittling, threatening

Controlling. Coercing others to your way of thinking.

e.g. cutting others off, overstating your facts, speaking in absolutes, dominating the conversation

“ There’s not s person in the world who haven’t bought one of these things. They’re the perfect gift.

= I CAN'T JUSTIFY SPENDING OUR HARD EARNED SAVINGS ON THIS EXPENSIVE TOY, BUT I REALLY WANT IT

“ We tried their product, but it was an absolute disaster. Everyone knows they don’t really care about the user and have the worst customer service.

= I'M NOT CERTAIN OF THE REAL FACTS, SO I'LL USE
HYPERBOLE TO GET YOUR ATTENTION

Labelling. Stereotyping or categorizing people.

e.g. name-calling, generalizing

“ Honestly, I’ve been doing this for a lot longer than you.

= I CAN'T ARGUE MY CASE ON ITS MERITS, SO TO GET WHAT I WANT I'LL ATTACK YOU PERSONALLY

“ You’re not going to listen to them are you? First, they’re from headquarters. Second, they’re engineers. Need I say more?

= IF I RELY ON PRE-EXISTING STEREOTYPES,
THEN I WON'T HAVE TO EXPLAIN ANYTHING

Attacking. Making the other
person suffer.

e.g. belittling, threatening

“ I dare you to try and see what happens.

= I WILL GET MY WAY ON THIS EVEN IF I HAVE TO
THREATEN SOME VAGUE PUNISHMENT

“ Don't listen to a word Jim is saying. He's just trying to make it better for him. I'm sorry but someone has to have the guts to tell it like it is.

= TO GET MY WAY I'LL SAY BAD THINGS ABOUT AND THEN PRETEND I'M THE ONLY ONE WITH ANY INTEGRITY.

Look for your Style Under Stress

**This is the hardest thing to
monitor during a conversation**

**What's your style under stress?
Take the survey:**

www.vitalSMARTS.com/styleunderstress

Make It Safe:
*How to Make It Safe to Talk
About Almost Anything*

Step out of the content of the conversation, make it safe, then step back in

Example: A conversation about physical intimacy

Jotham thinks they're not physically intimate enough, Yvonne thinks they are. When Jotham tries and Yvonne says no, he sulks.

Yvonne brings up the conversation, *"Can we talk about what happened last night?"*

He responds with *"I don't know if I'm in the mood."*

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I'm sick and tired of you deciding when we do what."

(Yvonne walks out)

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"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I'm sick and tired of you deciding when we do what."

(Yvonne walks out)

He uses sarcasm because he doesn't feel safe using dialogue

If you really want to have a healthy conversation that may make or break your relationship, then you may have to set aside confronting the sarcasm for a moment

Making dialogue safe

- WORST – Ignore the safety issues or conclude the topic is unsafe and move to silence.
- GOOD – Realize safety is at risk but fix it in the wrong way, by sugarcoating the message.
- BEST – Don't play games. no pretending, sugarcoating or faking. Step out of content, make it safe, and step back in.

Back to Yvonne and Jotham

- Yvonne: *“Can we change gears for a minute? I’d like to talk about what happens when we’re not romantically in sync. It would be good if we could both share what’s working and what isn’t. My goal isn’t to make you feel guilty, and i certainly don’t want to become defensive. What I’d really love is for us to come up with a solution that makes us both satisfied in our relationship.”*

Notice which conditions are at risk

1. Mutual Purpose (the entrance condition)
2. Mutual Respect (the continuance condition)

Mutual Purpose (the entrance condition)

**Crucial conversations often go
awry because the CONTENT
suggests a malicious INTENT**

Mutual Purpose means:

- Others perceive that you're working towards a common outcome in a conversation.
- That you care about their goals, interests, and values (and vice versa, you believe they care about yours).

**Mutual purpose is the entry
condition of dialogue**

Watch for signs that mutual purpose is at risk:

- end up in debate
- defensiveness
- hidden agendas
- accusations
- circling back to the same topic

Two crucial questions to determine when mutual purpose is at risk:

- 1. Do others believe I care about their goals in this conversation?**
- 2. Do they trust my motives?**

Example: How could you tell your boss you don't trust him?

Does his behavior cause you to miss deadlines he cares about? Or incur costs he frets over? Or lose productivity?

“I’ve got some ideas for how I can be much more reliable and even reduce costs for a few thousand dollars in preparing the report each month. It’s going to be a bit of a sensitive conversation, but I think it will help a great deal if we can talk about it.”

**Mutual Respect
the continuance condition)**

**Will we be able to remain in
dialogue?**

The instance people perceive disrespect in a conversation, the interaction is no longer about mutual purpose. It's about dignity.

To tell if respect has been violated, watch for signs people are defending their dignity:

- Highly charged emotions (fear to anger)

**Ask yourself: Do others believe I
respect them?**

How can I respect people I don't respect?

- Different backgrounds
- Someone has let you down repeatedly
- Etc

**Dialogue would be doomed if you
had to respect every element of
someone's character before
starting**

**Honor someone's basic humanity.
Look for ways they are similar.**

**“Lord, help me forgive those who
sin *differently* than I.”**

Three skills for rebuilding Mutual Purpose or Mutual Respect:

- *Apologize* when you have made a mistake that has negatively effected others
- *Contrast* to repair misunderstandings.
- *CRIB* to get to Mutual Purpose

Example:

- You're escorting VP and something important comes up so you don't bring them by the product team like you promise. The product team is mad.
- Don't get hooked and fight back: step back

Apologize

**When you've made a mistake that
has hurt others, start with an
apology.**

**An apology:
a statement that sincerely
expresses your sorrow at your role
in causing (or at least not
preventing) pain or difficulty to
others.**

“I’m sorry I didn’t give you a call when I learned we would be coming by. You worked all night. It would have been a wonderful chance to showcase your improvements and I didn’t even explain what happened. I apologize.”

To offer a sincere apology, your motives have to change.

Watch to see if the sincere show of respect has helped restore safety

- if yes, you can safely explain what happened
- if no, you'll need to use a more advanced skill

Contrast

**Sometimes an apology isn't
appropriate**

Contrasting is a don't / do statement that:

- addresses others concerns that you don't respect them or have a malicious purpose (don't)
- confirms your respect or clarifies your real purpose (do)

“(The DON’T part) The last thing I wanted to do was communicate that I don’t value the work you put in, or that I didn’t want to share it with the VP. (The DO part) I think your work has been nothing short of spectacular.”

**Now that you've addressed threat
to safety, address the issue itself
and move to remediation**

**The DON'T is the more important
because it deals with the
misunderstanding that puts safety
at risk.**

Back to Yvonne and Jotham

- Yvonne: *“I think it makes things worse when you withdraw and won’t talk to me for days at a time.”*
- Jotham: *“So you expect me not only to put up with regular rejection but also be sociable and happy when I do?”*

**Jotham appears to believe
Yvonne's motive is to reshape him.
It's unsafe, mutual purpose is at
risk.**

Back to Yvonne and Jotham

- Yvonne: *“I don’t want to suggest that this problem is yours. The truth is, I think it’s ours. I’m not trying to put the burden on you. I don’t even know what the solution is. What I do want is to be able to talk so that we can understand each other better. Perhaps that will help me change how I’m responding to you too.”*
- Jotham: *“I know where this is going. We talk, I continue to get rejected, but you get to feel good about yourself because we’ve communicated. Have you been reading your self-help library again?”*

He still believes that she wants to confirm that their existing relationship is okay.

Back to Yvonne and Jotham

- Yvonne: *“Seriously honey, I’m not interested in discussing why our current relationship is strong and healthy. I can see that it isn’t. I merely want to talk about what each of us likes and doesn’t like. That way we’ll be able to see what we need to improve and why. My only goal is to come up with some ideas that will make both of us happy.”*

**Contrasting is not apologizing. It's
a way of making sure what was
said didn't hurt more than it should
have.**

**Contrasting provides CONTEXT
and PROPORTION.**

If you give small feedback, like about punctuality, and the other person seems crushed, don't give in to temptation to water it down (“you know, it's really not that big of a deal”)

Instead, put your remarks in context. Use contrast to clarify.

“Let me put this in perspective. I don’t want you to think I’m not satisfied with the quality of your work. I want us to continue working together. I really do think you’re doing a good job. This punctuality issue is important to me and I’d just like you to work on that. If you’ll just be more attentive to that, there are no other issues.”

**Use contrasting for (a) prevention
or (b) first-aid**

If something could cause defensiveness, use contrasting

CRIB to get to Mutual Purpose

**Sometimes contrasting won't do
the trick.**

For example:

- You've been offered a promotion but it involves displacement. You expected your spouse to be ambivalent, but they think it's bad news. You have to move and you'll work longer hours. More money and power doesn't seem to compensate for loss of time.

Use CRIB to create mutual purpose

- Commit to seek mutual purpose
- Recognize the purpose behind the strategy
- Inv_ent a new purpose
- Brainstorm new strategies

1. Commit to seek mutual purpose

- You have to agree to agree. Stop using silence or violence to get others to your view. Commit to staying in conversation until you invest a solution you can both share.
- Step back from conversation and say:
 - *“It seems like we’re both trying to force our views on each other. I commit to staying in the conversation until we have a solution that satisfies both of us.”*
- Then, watch whether safety takes a turn for the better.

2. Recognize the purpose behind the strategy

- Don't confuse what you're asking for with what you want. What you're asking for is the strategy to what you want.
- We confuse WANTS or PURPOSE with STRATEGIES
- Focus on real purposes.

Example: watching a movie vs relaxing

- I want to see a movie, you want to relax, so we debate. We assume we'll never resolve differences because going out and staying home are incompatible.
- Ask: *"Why do you want that?"*
 - *"I'm tired of running around and dealing with the hassle of the city."*
 - *"So you want peace and quiet?"*
 - *"Mostly. Why do you want to go to the movies?"*
 - *"So I can spend time with you away from the kids."*
 - *"So if we can find something that is both quiet, and away, we'll both be happy? What if we take a drive up the canyon?"*

Sometimes you find out your genuine wants and goals can't be served without sacrificing the other purpose. You have to INVENT a mutual purpose.

3. Invent a mutual purpose

- Move to more encompassing goals. An objective that's more meaningful or rewarding than those on either side.
- Example: moving for a promotion
 - You and your spouse don't agree on whether you should take the promotion
 - You can agree the need of relationship and children come before career aspirations

4. Brainstorm new strategies

- If you're not willing to give creativity a try, it will be impossible for you to come up with a mutual outcome.

Master My Stories:

*How to Stay in Dialogue When
You're Angry, Scared, or Hurt*

Emotions don't settle on you like a fog – you make your own emotions

You have only two options

1. Act on them
2. Be acted on by them

Worst at dialogue: hostage to their emotions and don't even know it.

Good at dialogue: know they need to control emotions so they fake it.

Best at dialogue: influence and change their emotions by thinking them out.

The Path to Action Model



STORIES create feelings

**We make a guess at the motive of
the behavior**

**We add judgment: was it good or
bad?**

“ Nothing in this world is good or bad, but *thinking* makes it so.

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Stories

- Are interpretations of facts
- Explain what we see and hear
- Help us evaluate the situation
- Tell us what we should do in the situation
- Once told, they take a life of their own

While it's true that at first we are in control of the stories we tell – after all, we do make them up of our own accord – once they're told, the stories control us.

Skill for mastering our stories

(retrace your steps)



***Notice your
behavior – ask:***

*Am I in some form of
silence or violence?*

Skill for mastering our stories

(retrace your steps)



*Get in touch with
your feelings – ask:*

*What emotions are
encouraging me to act
this way?*

Skill for mastering our stories

(retrace your steps)



Analyze your stories
– ask:

*What story is creating
these emotions?*

Skill for mastering our stories

(retrace your steps)

See and
Hear



Tell a
Story



Feel



Act

*Get back to the facts –
ask:*

*What evidence do I have
to support this story?*

Get in touch with *your* feelings

People are bad at identifying emotions. Common mistakes:

- Words like *bad*, *angry*, or *frightened*.
- *Angry* often really means *embarrassed* and *surprised*.
- *Unhappy* often really means *violated*.
- *Upset* often really means *humiliated* and *cheated*.

Is your emotional vocabulary robust and accurate?

Analyze your stories

Regain emotional control by asking

- Is this the only right emotional response to the situation?

Questioning our feeling leads to questioning our stories.

Separate subjective conclusions from objective facts by asking:

- Can I see or hear this thing I'm labeling a fact?
- Was it an actual behavior?

Conclusions explain what you think, not what actually happened.

Watch for emotionally laden words by asking:

- What words carry an undertone of judgment or attributes?

Less volatile descriptions allow for multiple interpretations.

3 Clever Stories

Clever stories allow us to feel good about behaving badly even while achieving abysmal results

Victim Stories

“it’s not my fault”

- We are innocent sufferers
- We ignore the role we play in contributing to the problem
- We have nothing but the most noble intentions

Villain Stories

“it’s all your fault”

- We attribute negative motives to the other person
- We exaggerate our own innocence
- We overemphasize the other person’s guilt
- We dehumanize the other person by making unfair generalizations
- We justify our own ineffective behavior

Helpless Stories

“there’s nothing else I can do”

- We assume there is no alternative to our predicament
- Explains why we can’t do anything to change our situation
- Attribute fixed and unchangeable traits to the other person

Villain and Victim stories look back
Helpless stories look forward

**It's easy to act helpless when we
see other people's behavior as
fixed and unchangeable**

Why we tell clever stories

1. They sometimes match reality
2. They get us off the hook
3. They keep us from acknowledging our own sell-outs

What is a “sell-out”?

- Consciously going against your sense of what’s right
- We’ve done something we feel a need to justify
- Examples:
 - Closing the gap when someone tries to merge into your lane
 - Not bringing up annoying trait in your spouse
- Notice: your selfish behavior comes before the story, not after
- Sell-outs can be small

Common sell-outs:

- You believe you should help someone but don't
- You believe you should apologize but don't
- You believe you should stay late to finish up on a commitment but go home instead
- You say yes when you know you should say no, then hope no one follows up
- You believe you should talk to someone about concerns you have with them but don't
- You do less than your share and think you should acknowledge it but don't, knowing no one else will bring it up either
- You believe you should listen respectfully to feedback, but become defensive instead
- You see problems with a plan someone presents and think you should speak up but don't
- You fail to complete an assignment on time and think you should let others know but don't
- You know you have information a coworker could use but keep it to yourself

Tell the rest of the story

**The best people recognize they're
telling clever stories, stop, and do
what it takes to tell a useful story**

**A useful story creates emotions
that lead to healthy actions like
dialogue**

What turns a clever story into a useful one?

What turns a clever story into a useful one?

The rest of the story

**Clever stories are all incomplete -
they omit crucial information
about us, others, and options**

Turn victims into actors

Turn villains into humans

Turn helpless into able

Turn victims into actors

- *Ask: Am I pretending not to notice my role in the problem?*
- Doesn't necessarily mean you had malicious motives
- Maybe it's just omission – nonetheless, acknowledge your contribution
- Add these important facts into the story

Turn villains into humans

- *Ask: Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person do what this person is doing?*
- The purpose is to humanize someone, not to excuse their bad behavior
- Focus less on their intent and more on the effect their behavior has on you

Turn helpless into able

- Return to your original motive
- *Ask: What do I really want? For me? For others? For the relationship?*
- Then kill the fools choice
- *Ask: What would I do right now if I really wanted these results?*

State My Path:
How to Speak Persuasively

Sharing risky meaning can be hard when ideas contain delicate, controversial opinions

**When the topic turns from things
to people it's always harder**

3 ingredients to maintaining safety while speaking honestly:

- Confidence
- Humility
- Skill

STATE: How to talk about sensitive topics

1. **Share your facts**
2. **Tell your story**
3. **Ask for others paths**
4. **Talk tentatively**
5. **Encourage testing**

Share your facts:

- We often start by sharing our conclusions, which are often ill founded, rather than the facts that led to our conclusions.
- Facts are:
 - Less controversial than conclusions.
 - More persuasive than conclusions.
 - Less insulting than conclusions.

The goal isn't to persuade others that you are right. You want to add to the pool of meaning.

Gathering the facts is the homework required for crucial conversation.

**If you want to share your story,
don't start with it. Start with
facts.**

Tell your story

- This can be tricky. The other person can still become defensive.
- Facts alone are rarely worth mentioning. It's the facts plus the conclusion that call for a face-to-face conversation.
- When telling your story, remember:
 - It takes courage and confidence.
 - Don't pile it on. Decide which of your stories to share.
 - Keep a look out for safety problems

Use contrasting, but be careful not to water down or apologize for your views.

Ask for other's paths

- *Confidence* is about sharing your facts and stories. *Humility* is about inviting others to do the same.
- If your goal is really to expand the pool of meaning, then you'll be willing to listen to others.
- Ask:
 - What does the other person know, what are their facts?
 - What are the other person's intentions?
 - What does the other person really want?

**Be willing to abandon your story
as more info comes in.**

Talk tentatively

- Tell your story as a story rather than disguising it as a hard fact.
- When sharing a story, strike a blend between confidence and humility.
- Express appropriate confidence while demonstrating that, if called for, you want your conclusions challenged.

Use tentative language

Change:

- "The fact is..."
- "Everyone knows that..."
- "It's clear to me..."

To:

- "In my opinion..."
- "I've talked to three customers who think that..."
- "I'm beginning to wonder if..."

Why soften?

- We're trying to add meaning to pool, not force it down peoples throats.
- The more clear and forceful you are, the most resistant others become.
- The more tentatively you speak, the more open people become.

Is this manipulative?

- No.
- If you're faking this, you're not in dialogue.
- Don't be more confident than you limited capacity allows.

Be tentative but not wimpy

- Don't begin with a total disclaimer (“*I know this probably isn't true...*” or “*Call me crazy but...*”) and have a tone that expresses it



The Goldilocks Test

Example: You think someone stole something

- *Too soft:* This is probably stupid but...
- *Too hard:* How come you ripped us off?
- *Just right:* It's starting to look like you're taking this home for your own use. Is that right?

Example: You think someone is using drugs

- *Too soft:* I'm ashamed to even mention this
- *Too hard:* Just when did you start using hard drugs?
- *Just right:* ...it's leading me to conclude that you're starting to use drugs. Do you have another explanation that I'm missing here?

Example: You think someone has trust issues

- *Too soft:* It's probably my fault but
- *Too hard:* You wouldn't trust your own mother to make a one minute egg
- *Just right:* I'm starting to feel like you don't trust me. Is that what's going on here? If so, I'd like to know what I did to lose your trust

Example: You want to bring up intimacy issues

- *Too soft:* Maybe I'm just oversexed or something but...
- *Too hard:* If you don't pick up the frequency I'm walking.
- *Just right:* I don't think you're intending this but I'm beginning to feel rejected.

Encourage testing

- Don't just invite others to talk, make it clear that you want to hear people.
- The only limit to how strongly you can express your opinion, is your willingness to encourage others to challenge it.
- Remember to:
 - Invite opposing views when none are forthcoming.
 - Make your invitation genuine.
 - Play devil's advocate – challenge your own thinking.

Actively invite opposing views

- Make it clear you want to hear their views
 - *“Does anyone see it differently? What am I missing here?”*
 - *“I’d really like to hear the other side of this story”*
- Respect them for finding the courage to express what they’re thinking

Mean it

- Use words *and* tone.
- *“I know people have been reluctant to speak up about this, but I would really love to hear from everyone”*
- *“I know there are at least two sides to this story. Could we hear differing views now? What problems could this decision cause us?”*

Play devil's advocate

- Sometimes you can tell that people aren't buying into the facts or story but they're not speaking up.
- Model disagreeing by disagreeing with your own view.
 - *“Maybe I'm wrong here. What if the opposite is true? What if the reason sales have dropped is because...”*
- Do it until your motive becomes obvious.
 - People can be skeptical if you've invited their opinion in the past and then brushed them off.

To initiate *STATE* skills

- Turn your attention from the topic to yourself.
- Remember others have something to say – listen.
- Catch yourself before pushing too hard.
- Hold to your belief; just soften your approach.

Explore Others' Paths:
*How to Listen When Others
Blow Up or Clam Up*

Clamming Up:
refusing to speak our mind

Blowing Up:
*speaking in an abusive or insulting
manner*

Help others retrace their paths to action:

- We see the action at the end of their stories.
- Move them from emotions to conclusions to observations.
- This helps resolve emotions at its source.
- All this requires genuine listening on our part.

AMPP: Listening tools for helping others share their paths to action

1. Ask them to tell their stories
2. Mirror to confirm feelings
3. Paraphrase to acknowledge their story
4. Prime when you're getting nowhere

Ask them to tell their stories

- Common invitations:
 - *What's going on?*
 - *I'd really like to hear your opinion on this.*
 - *Please let me know if you see it differently.*
 - *Don't worry about hurting my feelings. I really want to hear your thoughts.*

Mirror to confirm feelings

- Describe how they look or act.
- Most useful when tone of voice or gestures are inconsistent with their words – e.g. *“Don’t worry, I’m fine.”*
 - *“Really? From the way you’re saying that it doesn’t sound like you are.”*
- Staying with observed actions shows respect & concern.
- Be aware of tone of voice & delivery - create safety by showing that we’re okay with them feeling how they feel.

Examples of mirroring:

- *You say you're okay, but by the tone or your voice you seem upset.*
- *You seem angry at me.*
- *You look nervous about confronting him. Are you sure you're willing to do it?*

Paraphrase to acknowledge their story

- Don't parrot back exactly, put message in own form.
 - *“Let's see if I got this right. You're upset because I voiced my concerns about some of the clothes you wear, and this seems controlling and old fashioned to you.”*
- Indicates you are trying to understand and that it is safe to continue talking.
- Remain calm and collected (like mirroring).

Prime when you're getting nowhere

- When you believe the other person still has something to share, but needs a little more effort from you.
- Offer your best guess at what the other person is thinking or feeling before they will do the same.
- Only do this if nothing else is working.

If you disagree, use the ABCs

1. Agree: on facts and stories you share.
 - Disagreement typically is over only 5-10% of the facts and stories.
2. Build: if others leave important things out.
3. Compare: when you differ.

Move to Action:

*How to Turn Crucial Conversations
into Actions and Results*

There are 2 reasons ideas fail to get put into action:

1. Expectations are unclear about how decisions will be made.
2. Neither side follows up on taking action.

Dialogue is *not* decision-making

**Beginnings of dialogue are risky
because they require safety**

**Endings of dialogue are risky
because they require clarification
of conclusions and decisions**

Solve problems by deciding **how
you're going to decide, **who** will
be involved, and **why****

When line of authority is clear:

- Example: boss or parents.
- The person with authority decides how to decide.

When line of authority is unclear:

- Example: roommates or a relationship.
- Openly talk about who decides and why.

4 methods of decision making:

1. Command
2. Consult
3. Vote
4. Consensus

These each represent increasing degrees of involvement.
Additional involvement increases time and effort.

Command:

Decisions made by authority without involvement of others

When there's an external authority, it's not our job to decide what to do. It's our job to decide how to make it work.

Delegation happens when either:

- Authority doesn't care enough to get involved.
- Authority trusts another person enough to make the decision.

**In strong teams, many decisions
get turned over to others.**

Consider the following:

- If people can make choices, allow them to do so.
- Define degrees of freedom and allow others to choose within them.
- Explain your reasons for making your decision.

Consult:

Decisions-maker invites others to influence them before making a decision

Use consultation when:

- Many people are affected.
- Information can be gathered relatively easily.
- People care about the decision.
- There are many options, some of which are controversial.

Consider the following:

- Don't pretend to consult.
- Announce what you're doing – set expectations up front.
- Report your decision and explain your reasons.

Vote:

*Used when selecting from a number
of good options*

Consider the following:

- Voting is a great time saver but should not be used when people don't agree to support whatever decision is made.
- Use voting only when you know that the losers don't really care about the result.
- Consider using voting for reducing long lists to a short list; follow-up with consensus.
- Never replace patient analysis and healthy dialogue with voting.

Consensus:

Everyone honestly agrees to one decision

Use only with

- High-stakes and complex issues.
- Issues where everyone absolutely must support the final choice.
- Everyone shares a common agenda.

Consider the following:

- Don't force consensus onto everything.
- Don't pretend that everyone will get their first choice.
- If you don't get your choice, don't be a martyr.
- Don't take turns, base your decision on merit.
- Don't engage in post-decision lobbying.
- If the decision fails, don't say "I told you so."

4 questions to ask when deciding how to decide:

1. *Who cares?* Determine who wants to be involved. Don't involve those who don't care.
2. *Who knows?* Determine who has the expertise you need to make the decision. Don't involve those who contribute new information.
3. *Who must agree?* Involve those people whose cooperation you might need in the form of authority or influence in any decision you make.
4. *How many people is it worth involving?* Involve the fewest number of people that will still make a quality decision.

4 elements for putting a decision to action:

1. *Who?* Assign a name to every responsibility.
2. *Does What?* Define the exact deliverable.
3. *By When?* Set deadlines.
4. *How will you follow up?* Set up an accountability process.

Document the above. When someone fails to deliver on a promise, it's time for dialogue.

Thanks!

– M