Crucial Conversations: Communicating When Tension is High and Results are Needed
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OBJECTIVES

• Identify when and how a conversation turns crucial and how that impacts results and relationships
• Recognize two potential reactions in crucial conversations called “silence” and “violence” and how they impact safety in a conversation
• Learn how to restore safety to a conversation when someone misunderstands your motives or level of respect for them
TABLE DISCUSSION

What did you do to get your way as a child?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>SOLUTION</th>
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<td>We’re all stuck or not achieving what we want in a variety of areas,</td>
<td>Learn how to identify the crucial conversations that are the key to</td>
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<td>ranging from awkward or failing relationships to dysfunctional teams</td>
<td>organizational, team, and interpersonal success.</td>
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<td>to cost, quality, or safety problems at work.</td>
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What’s Wrong Here?

Let’s watch an interaction between Michelle, the subject matter expert, and her manager, Bruce. They are meeting to discuss a project plan. If you’re Michelle, how are you feeling and what different issues are you facing in this conversation?
What makes a conversation crucial?
Three elements.
How Does She Do?

How do we typically respond to crucial conversations? Let’s return to Michelle and Bruce and see what Michelle does.
How About This Time?

Going to silence didn’t work very well for Michelle. Let’s give her another chance. Watch how she approaches the crucial conversation this time.
The Silence to Violence Continuum

We Make a Fool’s Choice. When facing a crucial conversation, we often feel we have to choose between responding with silence or with violence.

We assume we can either share our honest opinion OR be respectful.

We are blind to the dialogue option.
COMMON EXAMPLES

So, we know “why” we toggle between silence and violence. But, “when” do we go to silence and violence?

- What are the common crucial conversations we experience where we see people going to silence or violence?

- What are the consequences?
Crucial Conversations

Let’s listen as Joseph Grenny, one of the authors of *Crucial Conversations*, introduces the research behind it.
The Key

When we start having these conversations effectively, we will see our issues get solved and our bottom line improve.
Getting Unstuck

To see how the Crucial Conversations skills can help us get unstuck, let’s watch as Michelle steps up to the right crucial conversation and uses several dialogue skills. How does this compare to her previous approaches?
SKILLS AND PRINCIPLES

• Identify the right problem to hold the right conversation.
• Stay focused on what you really want when motives degrade.
• Take control of your emotions instead of losing your cool.
• Speak persuasively, not abrasively.
• Watch for signs that safety is at risk and make it safe to talk.
• Help others into dialogue when they’re feeling hurt, scared, or defensive.
• Go from talking to getting results.
PROBLEM
People go to silence and violence because they feel unsafe sharing their meaning.

SOLUTION
When you see silence or violence, step out of the conversation and restore safety.
THE SOLUTION

• People don’t become defensive because of what you’re saying (the content)
• People become defensive because of why they think you’re saying it (the intent)
THE SOLUTION

• Step out of the content
• Rebuild safety
  – Mutual Purpose: “I care about what you care about”
  – Mutual Respect: “I care about you as a person”
• Then step back in
## Tools for Rebuilding Safety

### Mutual Respect
- **Clear Problem**: Apologize
- **Misunderstanding**: Contrast

### Mutual Purpose
- **Clear Problem**: Create Mutual Purpose
- **Misunderstanding**: Contrast

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Ask yourself: Why is safety at risk?
THE SKILL: CONTRASTING

When others misunderstand your intent, step out of the content and rebuild safety by using Contrasting.

**Contrasting: A Don’t/Do Statement**

**Don’t:** Explain what you don’t intend; this addresses other’s concerns that you don’t respect them or that you have a malicious purpose.

**Do:** Explain what you do intend; this confirms your respect or clarifies your real purpose.
HELPFUL TIPS

- Keep your big “but” out of it
- “However” is just a prettier “but”
- Say it, then zip it!
- Avoid using Contrasting to soften the blow when delivering a difficult message
THE PRACTICE

Clarifying by Contrasting

• As a group, we’ll read problems that stem from misunderstandings related to Mutual Purpose, Mutual Respect, or maybe both

• Then, in pairs, you’ll practice applying your Contrasting skills to fix the misunderstanding

• Think of a don’t/do statement and share it with your learning partner
THE TAKE-OVER ARTIST

There are four members on your team: you (the team leader), a research assistant, an administrator, and a professor. The professor is tenured and has been around for years. During the team meetings, he offers opinions on how to do things without being asked, tells team members they’re wrong and contacts his department chair when issues arise rather than address them with you. You decide to address this with the professor, who responds with, “I don’t have time to talk with everybody about issues. We just have to keep things moving.” Prepare a response that begins with a Contrasting statement. Then make that statement to your learning partner.

Don’t want:

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Don’t want: I don’t want you to think I’m saying you have to talk to everyone. That would be inefficient.

Do want: I do want to talk about you bringing team issues to me so that we can work together at solving the issues.
THE PERFECTIONIST

This person is a perfectionist who is very critical of others. He belittles people for making mistakes, makes them feel stupid, and insults them. For example, he says things like, “Did you go to a school for idiots?” This person has a lot technical knowledge and experience. You’d like this person to be less abrasive and more constructive. You explain your concerns to him, and he replies, “I guess you don’t have to like me and I don’t have to like you. We just have to work together.”

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Don’t want: I don’t want to talk about liking each other or being friends. This isn’t about that.

Do want: I do want to talk about how you give work-related feedback to the people on our team.
THE MICRO-MANAGING COLLEAGUE

This colleague treats you as if you are stupid. This morning she told you how to handle an issue that you handle every day. Later she stopped by to suggest different ways to organize your work area. When she learned you were driving to visit your parents this weekend, she told you which routes to take and when to begin driving. You explain your concerns to her, and she replies, “I guess you don’t need to listen to me. After all, I’m just an administrator.”

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Don’t want: I don’t want you to think I don’t respect your knowledge. I do.

Do want: I want talk about some areas where I’m the expert — where giving me advice sends the wrong message.
THE LEAD RESEARCHER

This person, a lead researcher who spends a lot of time in your area, has “favorite” employees. She is friends with some employees, but doesn’t know others very well at all. You are concerned that her friends may have more influence with her than other employees do. Other employees are beginning to complain about favoritism. You explain your concerns to her and she replies “I don’t think you should try to tell me who I can have as friends. I’ve known some of these people for more than ten years.”

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Don’t want: I don’t want to tell you who to have as friends.
Do want: I do want to make sure there isn’t any appearance of favoritism.
THE PROCRASTINATOR

You’re delivering a presentation at 9:00am. You asked your peer for data that’s critical to your presentation one week ago. Two days ago you checked in and your peer promised the information. It’s 5pm the day before your presentation and you still don’t have the data. You run into your peer and decide to talk about the lack of response and its impact on you. You explain your concerns to her and she replies “You’re not the only person asking me for help, you know. It’s not like I’m sitting around doing nothing.”

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Don’t want: I don’t want to imply you’re sitting around doing nothing.

Do want: I do want to talk about setting realistic expectations for response times.
SUMMARY

• When people get defensive — go to silence or to violence — it’s because they feel unsafe

• They think you’re attacking them or disrespecting them, but often you’re not
  • They’ve misunderstood your intent
  • Contrasting can often clear it up
CONCLUSION

• Use Contrasting to clear up misunderstandings

• Prepare Contrasting statements before a conversation if you anticipate someone will become defensive about something you’re going to say

• Practice Contrasting statements to develop the habit of “don’t / do” statements so that when a misunderstanding happens in the moment, you can slip into a Contrasting statement more easily
QUESTIONS