

Chaos Management, Ltd.

Notes on *Crucial Conversations* by K. Patterson, J. Grenny, R. McMillan, and A. Switzler, 2002, NY: McGraw Hill

### Notes from *Crucial Conversations*

**1. Definition of a crucial conversation:**

A discussion between two or more people where: (a) stakes are high, (b) opinions vary, and (c) emotions run strong.

**2. Definition of dialogue:**

The free flow of meaning between two or more people.

**3. Purpose of dialogue:**

- a. To fill the pool of shared meaning.
- b. The greater the shared meaning in the pool, the better the decision.

**4. Start with yourself – which you can control.**

- a. Ask what you really want (not winning; not revenge; not safety); e.g., for yourself, for others, for the relationship.
- b. Clarify what you don't want.
- c. Present your brain with a more complex problem/creative solution: an *and* vs. an *either/or* – e.g., is there a way to say what you need without coming across as demanding and self-righteous? Or, can you tell the truth and not insult anyone?
- d. Learn to look/know when you are in a crucial conversation.
- e. Are you behaving like what you really want?

**5. Notice when:**

- a. Safety is at risk: *Silence* (withholding meaning from the pool) or *violence* (forcing meaning into the pool). *Stop and make it safe*.
- b. Silence: Masking, avoiding, and withdrawing.
- c. Violence: Controlling, labeling, and attacking.

**6. Making it safe.**

- a. Find a mutual purpose: Do others believe you care about their goals?
- b. Mutual respect: Do others believe you respect them?
- c. Step out/stop when mutual respect or purpose are at risk.
  - i. Apologize
  - ii. Contrast: a do-don't statement – e.g., I don't want to suggest it's your fault. What I'd like to do is find the cause of the problem and help us find a solution.

## Notes from *Crucial Conversations*

- iii. CRIB:
  - 1. **C**ommit to seek mutual purpose: Agree to agree
  - 2. **R**ecognize the purpose behind the strategy: Don't equate what you're asking for with what you want
  - 3. **I**vent a mutual purpose: A higher level/more encompassing goal
  - 4. **B**rainstorm new strategies

### **7. Mastering stories – *Staying in dialogue while scared, angry or hurt***

- a. Retrace your steps in the path from feelings to action: see/hear (data and sensations) → tell a story → feel → act<sup>1</sup>
- b. Resist dangerous stories:
  - i. Victim: "It's not my fault."
  - ii. Villain: "It's all your fault."
  - iii. Helpless: "There's nothing else I can do."
- c. Changing the discourse:
  - i. Turn victims into actors.
  - ii. Turn villains into humans.
  - iii. Turn helpless into ables.
  - iv. Tell the rest of the story; e.g., my role, what I want, what I would do if I acted like what I want.
- d. STATE: A tool for getting your meaning a fair hearing:
  - i. **S**hare your facts: Observable; not controversial
  - ii. **T**ell your story: What you are beginning to conclude
  - iii. **A**sk for others' path: Ask for others' facts and conclusions
  - iv. **T**alk tentatively: Differentiate your facts from the story you've constructed
  - v. **E**ncourage testing: Ask for different meanings, opposing views; play devil's advocate
- e. Communication tools for getting others to share their path:
  - i. **A**sk to get things rolling
  - ii. **M**irror to confirm feelings
  - iii. **P**araphrase
  - iv. **P**rime: If everything else fails, pour some meaning into the pool
- f. Moving on after the stories:
  - i. Agree when you do
  - ii. Build on what has been said; add what's missing or needs adding
  - iii. Compare (Confront): Explore and explain differences

### **8. From dialogue to action**

- a. Decide how to decide by attending to:
  - i. Who cares/will be impacted?
  - ii. Who knows/has expertise?
  - iii. Who must agree/has authority/can block?
  - iv. How many people is it worth involving without leaving a blocker out?

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<sup>1</sup> See also The Ladder of Inference

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- b. Four types of decision-making:
  - i. Command: Explain why; explain which elements are flexible; don't overuse
  - ii. Consult: Don't consult if you've made up your mind; announce what you are doing; report back your decision
  - iii. Vote: Creates winners and losers; don't cop-out by voting
  - iv. Consensus: Don't apply to everything, don't pretend everyone will get first choice, don't take turns, commit to support the decision and outcomes no matter what, have a fall-back if time is an issue.
- c. Finish with who, what, by when; i.e., an action plan, plus follow-up.
  - i. Record the decision and agreements

### **9. Coaching summary**

- a. Start with heart: What do I want/don't want; refuse "the Sucker's choice."
- b. Learn to look for when the conversation becomes crucial: For safety, for your style under stress.
- c. Make it safe: Apologize; Contrast; CRIB (**c**ommit, **r**ecognize, **i**nvent, **b**rainstorm)
- d. Master your stories: Retrace path to action, separate facts from stories, watch for clever stories, tell the rest of the story.
- e. STATE your story: **S**hare facts, **T**ell your story, **A**sk for other's path, **T**alk tentatively, **E**ncourage testing.
- f. Explore others' path: **A**sk, **m**irror, **p**araphrase, **p**rime: Agree, Build, Compare.
- g. Move to action: Decide how to decide, use appropriate decision-making style, document decision and action plan, follow up.

### **10. Important tips – Yeah, but...**

- a. Hold crucial conversations with teammates that don't come through on team agreements: Don't leave it to the boss.
- b. As leader, ask for feedback from peers, not subordinates, when you experience deference. Hold crucial conversations with direct reports when you have more data on your behavior.
- c. If others don't want to talk about the tough issues, make it safe by establishing a compelling mutual purpose.
- d. When actions are both subtle and unacceptable, retrace your "path to action" to put your finger on what others are doing that's problematic. If there are no facts or consequences, *work on your tolerance*.
- e. When others don't meet your expectations, clarify them or establish new and higher ones.
- f. Learn to look for patterns, not the one instance; e.g., coming late vs. failing to live up to commitments made.
- g. If one needs time out, come to mutual agreement about it and commitment to resume conversation at another time.
- h. Show zero tolerance for insubordination: Speak up immediately and respectfully. Catch disrespect before it turns into abuse and insubordination.
- i. Emotions: Your ability to pull yourself out of the content of a discussion and focus on the process is inversely proportional to your level of emotion.