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# Your business success hangs on your ability to handle high-stakes, high-emotion conflict conversations...

In business, as in life, there are a handful of moments when your actions will profoundly affect the **results** you achieve and the quality of the **relationships** you experience.

In your own life, you'll likely have experienced a conflict with a parent, a teenager or another family member where the stakes were high and emotions ran even higher.

Perhaps you disagreed with your siblings about how to care for your elderly mother. Or maybe you discovered alcohol or drugs in your teenager's bedroom. Discussing child visitation rights with an ex-partner may have taken a turn for the worse.

With regard to your business, an important team member may have failed to finish a vital project. Maybe you had to tackle an escalating attitude problem with a fellow leader. Perhaps a key client relationship was breaking down and needed a quick resolution.

## Crucial conversations, crucial outcomes...

The outcome of these crucial conversations can have a significant,



long-lasting impact on the individuals involved, on the business or on the family or team. The quality of the **results** you achieve and the **relationships** you enjoy are determined by your skills in managing these crucial moments.

Are your 'conflict' skills strong enough? Could you be better at managing these crucial conversations?

## IN A NUTSHELL:

To avoid the negative consequences of mis-managing conflict, **build your crucial conversations** skills to better resolve these important issues, improve results and preserve, or even build, stronger relationships.



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## The 3 elements of a crucial issue...

1. **Opposing opinions** – disagreement exists
2. **Strong emotions** – feelings are running high
3. **High stakes** – the outcome is important

So how do you respond? Naturally, when someone says something with which you heartily disagree, on a topic that matters a great deal to you, your body registers the threat. The threat triggers your adrenal glands and you get ready to fight, flee or freeze. Your body takes over and you can feel the adrenaline pumping – you can't help it!

But wait!

You **can** help how you **choose to respond**.

## Your possible responses...

- A. You can avoid the discussion – **SILENCE** – flight or freeze
- B. You can deal with the discussion and handle it poorly – **VIOLENCE** – fight
- C. You can deal with the discussion and handle it well – **DIALOGUE** – apply your crucial conversation skills  
Will you choose silence, violence or dialogue?

When you acknowledge the need to have a crucial conversation – because you recognise the 3 elements of the crucial issue – it is possible to choose the best response, dialogue.

**Dialogue** is the free flow of meaning between two or more people.

**STOP** – rushing into high-emotion, high-stakes conflict like someone drunk on adrenalin

**START** – recognising the 3 elements of the crucial issue and then pursue genuine, respectful dialogue that builds the pool of meaning

## Grow the pool of meaning...

At the core of the landmark publication *Crucial Conversations*, by Joseph Grenny et al., is the pursuit of genuine, respectful dialogue.

Dialogue involves building a shared pool of thoughts and feelings.

At the start of a crucial conversation, we rarely share the same pool of meaning – *"I believe one thing; you another. I have one story; you another."*

For great dialogue, you must ensure that it's safe for people to add their own views to the *shared pool of meaning*. No matter how controversial or wrong they may appear, do your best to ensure that **all** ideas find their way into the shared pool of meaning.

*"Shared meaning is a measure of a group's IQ."* – by Joseph Grenny et al., *Crucial Conversations*

If ideas remain in people's heads rather than being shared with the wider group, they may end up quietly criticising, passively resisting or even quitting. Without genuine dialogue, the group's IQ is less than it should be when it's making a crucial decision.

*"A larger shared pool of meaning leads to better decisions, better relationships, and more unified action."* – by Joseph Grenny et al., *Crucial Conversations*

## Avoid the fool's choice...

**Example:** How would you react if, despite having received two well-thought-out proposals regarding where to locate new offices, your CEO appeared to railroad the decision so that both are ignored in favour of a location close to where she lives?

Silence around a bad decision could break trust across the leadership team and could even break the company. Speaking up could make the CEO an enemy for life!

*"Would you prefer to tell the truth OR keep a valued friend?"*

Rather than this 'fool's choice', here's a better question:

*"How do you achieve absolute candour AND maintain a strong respectful relationship?"*

## A PROVEN SOLUTION FOR YOU...

When you're committed to respectfully building the pool of meaning for everyone involved in the high-emotion, high-stakes conflict, you'll be the catalyst for success in your business. Build your crucial conversation skills and you'll achieve greater results and build stronger relationships.

## Mutual respect, mutual purpose...

These are the two conditions of genuine dialogue. If either are in doubt, your crucial conversation will likely break down because psychological safety has been lost.

People feel safe with you when they are certain of your intentions. They need to feel assured that:

- You care about their concerns (mutual **purpose**) – seek out genuine understanding and you create a climate to find a shared goal that sponsors a healthy constructive conversation.
- You care about them (mutual **respect**) – this involves a simple commitment to honouring them as fellow human beings with similar basic wants and desires.

## Respect is like air...

Take respect away and it's all that people think about. Once a person perceives disrespect, the content of a conversation is irrelevant, as it's now all about defending dignity. And you can't fake respect...

*"When we recognise that we all have weaknesses, it's easier to find a way to (genuinely) respect others."* – by Joseph Grenny et al., *Crucial Conversations*

Choose to be sincerely respectful and demonstrate respect by seeking genuine, deep understanding of their view of the facts, their story and their feelings.

## Avoid cross-purposes...

The phrase says it all – if you're at cross-purposes in your crucial conversation, you're unlikely to make the best decision or to obtain buy-in once the decision is made.

Mutual purpose can be found when you've worked on trying to obtain a better understanding of their perception of the facts and their story and their feelings. With humble curiosity, ask for their thoughts and ideas, as well as how they **feel** about the issue at hand. Repeat back and rephrase what they say and reflect back their feelings – this will demonstrate that you really have heard them and really do understand them. Only then will they be open to hearing your view of the facts, your story and your feelings. Only then will you be able to find a mutual purpose, together.

## Win-lose or win-win?

The true test of whether you're serious about engaging in real dialogue is the degree to which you encourage alternative views and insights. If your motive is to win a debate or to obtain unconditional agreement for your decision, then mutual respect and mutual purpose are thrown to the wind.

*"...the only limit to how strongly you can express your opinion is your willingness to be equally vigorous in encouraging others to challenge it."* – by Joseph Grenny et al., *Crucial Conversations*

Productive dialogue builds the pool of meaning. Here's a proven formula you can follow.

## STATE your case...

Here are 5 steps to productive dialogue – **STATE**

State your own case well and urge others to state their cases too, and you increase the likelihood of turning potentially damaging conversations into constructive conversations.

**Share** your facts – indisputable, obvious and clear to all

**Tell** your story – your interpretation of the facts and the impact they have on you and others

**Ask** for their views and their story

– humbly urge them to share their story and their feelings to build the pool of meaning

**Talk** tentatively – being realistic about your own capabilities/ limitations in your approach can take any arrogance, resistance and heat out of the conversation and promote open dialogue

**Encourage** (Explore) alternative views – you're seeking a third way, not necessarily yours or theirs, but a third and better way

**NB** You may need to start with their story rather than your own.

## GET YOUR BITESIZE SUPPORT TOOLS NOW

<https://businessbreakthrough.online/crucial-moments-decide-tools-and-resources/>

# 4 helping hands for you...



Crucial conversations can determine the results you achieve and how successful you are at building functional, rewarding relationships. But crucial conversations are never easy to manage. It takes skill. It takes commitment to build the skill.

Use these 4 helping hands to help you build the skills of constructive dialogue in your crucial conversations:

1. **Recognise you're in a crucial moment.** The issue is important, we disagree, and emotions are running high – this sounds, looks and feels like it needs a crucial conversation. Chances are your adrenaline has kicked in and is triggering you to respond with either silence or violence rather than with dialogue. Time to acknowledge the adrenaline rush and avoid the natural physiological fight-flight-freeze response of your neanderthal self. You're responsible, so you determine whether dialogue happens or not.
2. **Avoid the fool's choice.** In order to avoid the 'fool's choice' of *'tell the truth OR keep a friend'*, pursue deep understanding. Be curious, listen intensely, rephrase what they say and reflect the feelings they express, and you'll create a safe space for dialogue. Dialogue that builds mutual respect and mutual purpose means you are pursuing *'absolute candour AND maintaining a strong, respectful relationship'*.
3. **Seek out mutual respect and mutual purpose.** Show that you care about others' concerns, goals and feelings, and show that you respect them as human beings, and you'll be well on your way to successfully managing a crucial conversation. Your commitment to understanding their story will be of great help here too.
4. **STATE your case.** Take the path of productive dialogue. **Share** your facts. **Tell** your story. Respectfully **Ask** for their understanding of the facts and their story. **Talk** tentatively throughout. **Encourage** alternative views through mutual respect, mutual purpose, and mutual understanding.

Reading this report and the additional downloadable tools and resources is a great first step in building your crucial conversation skills.

Because the crucial moments in your business and your life are so important, it pays to learn more, don't you think?

When you're open and when you invite or encourage opposing views, you create a safe space for genuine dialogue. If you aren't receiving alternative viewpoints, try playing devil's advocate. Introduce alternative views to grease the wheels for genuine dialogue.

For more on the 5 steps to productive dialogue, check out the download tools at the link below.

## Time to disagree:

"What's the point of building crucial conversation skills if some people just don't play their part in constructive dialogue?"

It would all go better if we could just convert those dissenters, don't you think? Yes, a minority of people are closed shops, but most are not. Most people want to succeed. Most people are not trying to mess things up but do the best they can with their existing knowledge, skills and experiences. Your skills in handling a crucial conversation can help them achieve more, provided you're ready and willing to take responsibility.

When you establish a sense of mutual respect, purpose and understanding in a conversation, most people will play ball. Your crucial conversation skills will determine whether you are able to build a sense of "we're in this together". Take responsibility for growing the shared pool of meaning.

"It takes too much time to work on genuine dialogue when all we need is a good decision."

Yes, we want a good decision. We also want genuine buy-in to the decision, otherwise the action needed to follow through will be half-hearted at best or, more likely, will be resisted or even derailed.

Think about it. What can you do to get someone's wholehearted buy-in to a decision and action following your high-stakes, high-emotion dispute?

## ULTIMATE ARGUMENT:

"It's impossible for me to choose an unemotional and logical response when feelings run so high. It's just not me!"

It's likely that there has been a time or two in your life when you were calm in the face of emotional challenges, despite the adrenalin-fuelled challenge you faced. There may have been other times when you resorted to silence or violence (metaphor). We have all experienced both sides. No matter how badly behaved a 4-year-old might be, you'd choose not to resort to violence, and so you can choose similarly at work or in other situations.

Learning any new skill is initially hard. But just like learning to ride a bike, you have to climb on the bike and push off. So why not climb onto the crucial conversation skills bike and give it a whirl?

## Want to know more?

"For 20+ years, *Crucial Conversations* has been the go-to resource for people, teams, and organisations looking to improve how they work and live together."

– Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*



Over the last 30 years, the team at Crucial Learning have been researching, testing and formulating the strategies needed for better human relationships. In their book, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*, all of these insights will be at your disposal. As Stephen R Covey of 7 habits fame suggests – "this book deserves to take its place as one of the key thought leadership contributions of our time."

**Read the book.** In this report we have skimmed the surface of the deep and powerful insights you'll get from reading and applying the information found in the *Crucial Conversations* book, and we can't recommend it highly enough.

## GET YOUR BITESIZE SUPPORT TOOLS NOW

<https://businessbreakthrough.online/crucial-moments-decide-tools-and-resources/>

Use these tools and resources to build and improve your crucial conversation skills and build stronger, more rewarding relationships within your business.

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