

LESSON 6-4: Healthy Communication

Crucial Conversations

“One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears - by listening to them.”

- Dean Rusk

“Something does not have to be my fault to be my responsibility.” - Scott Nickel

“Building and earning respect is the currency for having meaningful relationships and conversations.” - Unknown

WELCOME & PRAYER

PREVIOUS LESSON FOLLOW UP

- For individuals who had an issue “processed” in the last lesson, share your action items and results with the group.

KICK OFF QUESTION

- Why is it that we are prone to really listen to what some folks have to say and not others? What is different between these two types of people?

PRIMARY SCRIPTURES

So the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to tell David this story: “There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle. The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man’s own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter. One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man’s lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest.”

David was furious. “As surely as the Lord lives,” he vowed, “any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are that man!”

Then David confessed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

(2 Samuel 12:1-7,13 - This is the Scripture where Nathan confronts David about him sending Bathsheba’s husband into battle so he will be killed.)

Discussion Question:

- What tools did Nathan use to confront David, the King of Israel? What can you learn from this exchange?

BIG PICTURE

For having crucial conversations, you must:

- Make the conversation safe for dialog
- Be committed to staying in dialog
- Seek to understand the perspective of others

CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTAND

In Lesson 6-1 we learned that earning influence, the right to be heard and listened to, is a critical component of healthy communication. Lesson 6-2 discussed the importance of emotional intelligence in crucial conversations. This lesson is the next step: how to conduct a crucial conversation.

A crucial conversation is a discussion between two or more people where:

1. The stakes are high,
2. Opinions vary, and
3. Emotions run high.

Note: This lesson focuses on conversations with the above characteristics. Subsequent lessons will discuss specific application of these concepts in giving and receiving feedback.

Crucial conversations might be between spouses, parents and teenagers, co-workers, teams or staff at work. One of the big problems is that when emotions run high, things are said that do not contribute to solving the issue but only elevate emotions beyond a healthy level. This typically leads to poor decisions and damaged relationships.

In the book *Crucial Conversations*, the authors tell the story of Kevin and why he was so effective in his company.

Kevin was one of eight vice presidents but was regarded by his peers as the most influential due to his ability to get things done. The authors followed Kevin for one week and saw nothing different between Kevin and the seven other VPs. He did the typical things everyone else did. That all changed though when they observed Kevin in a meeting with the president and other VPs of the company. The goal of the meeting was to pick the final location for their new corporate office.

In the meeting, several VPs made recommendations about various potential office locations, while answering questions from the group. Lastly, the CEO made his pitch for his recommended location. However, when people tried to engage him or disagree with him, the CEO responded poorly, becoming defensive and effectively shutting down the conversation. The CEO's inadequate proposal was quietly accepted... almost. All of a sudden, Kevin spoke up. His words were simple - "Hey Chris (CEO), can I check something out with you?" Everyone was stunned, but Kevin plunged ahead. He told the CEO that he appeared to be violating his own decision-making guidelines. He was using his power to locate the new offices in his hometown, which was a move that was personally more favorable for the CEO, but not the company. Kevin continued to explain what he observed. The CEO was quiet for a few seconds, but then concluded, "You are absolutely right." Meaningful dialog then occurred that led to selecting a location that was better and that the entire team supported.

One of Kevin's peers turned to the authors and said, "Did you see that? Please tell me how he is able to do this."

Kevin had mastered the art of having crucial conversations. Because of the skill of this one person, an office location was chosen that best met the need of the staff and the company. This likely saved many jobs and allowed the company to continue to grow and expand.

The key for having crucial conversations is creating an environment where everyone feels safe in sharing their needs and ideas. As you know, this is very difficult when people feel fearful, intimidated, jealous, put down, etc. For people to stay in dialog, there must be a safe environment where everyone's ideas can be discussed openly, while respecting the other person or people involved.

There are two overarching requirements for having a conducive environment for crucial conversations. There must be (1) a mutual purpose, and (2) mutual respect. As you plan a crucial conversation, you must establish these two aspects of the conversation. You must put enough thoughtful energy toward establishing these points. We mutually share the same goal, and we must mutually respect each other. When we establish these, it is much easier to find common ground to open and maintain healthy dialog.

Once the conversation begins, we must focus our energy on staying in dialog. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Do:
 - Listen
 - Be patient
 - Allow all information to get on the table
 - Make it comfortable for everyone to speak
 - Be open to change your opinion
 - Look for signs that the environment is headed in an unsafe direction
 - Assume that the more you understand about the other person's perspective, the more things will make sense
 - Discover the best solution
- Do Not:
 - Get angry
 - Use authority to make your point
 - Let your body language betray you
 - Become defensive
 - Try to win an argument
 - Become passive/aggressive
 - Use an accusing tone

EXERCISE

Below is a table to help plan a crucial conversation. Please complete this for a conversation you have had in the past or one that you are currently facing. Make sure you focus on what the mutual purpose is for the collective participants.

Planning for a Crucial Conversation

Issue/Topic:	
Participants	Needs/Concerns
Me	
What is our Mutual Purpose?	
How do we show Mutual Respect?	
Cautions:	
Goal of Meeting:	
First Sentence to Start Conversation:	

Discussion Questions

1. What are crucial conversations you have had in the past that you wished had gone better (excluding giving or receiving feedback from fellow employees since this is covered in subsequent lessons)? Where did the conversation get off track? What might have been done to create a safer environment for dialog?
2. How do you react when someone takes a cheap shot at you? What can you do to overcome your initial emotional reaction?
3. You have likely met someone like Kevin. What skill do people like Kevin possess that allows them to be so good at having difficult conversations, even challenging the boss?
4. Make a list of phrases that help create a safe environment. Make a second list of phrases that destroy a safe environment.

Note: We have just scratched the surface in having crucial conversations, whether these are at work or at home. If you want to learn more about how to have these type conversations, we suggest you obtain a copy of Crucial Conversations referenced below. It is an excellent resource with many helpful examples.

TAKE ACTION

- Look back to question 2. The first 20 seconds after somebody has taken a shot at you is critical. What might you say back to this kind of person that will defuse the situation and keep you in a crucial conversation? Write your thoughts down and share them with the group next week.

CLOSING PRAYER

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Crucial Conversations-Tools for Talking when the Stakes are High* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler
- *Radical Candor* by Kim Scott