

Being People Smart

Lesson 7-7: Crucial Conversations

Discussion Guide – Confidentiality Reminder

One Word Check-in

Update – Personal, Business, Leadership

“So the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to tell David this story: ‘There were two men in a certain city, one very rich, owning many flocks of sheep and herds of goats; and the other very poor, owning nothing but a little lamb he had managed to buy. It was his children’s pet, and he fed it from his own plate and let it drink from his own cup; he cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter. Recently a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing a lamb from his own flocks for food for the traveler, he took the poor man’s lamb and roasted it and served it.’ David was furious. ‘I swear by the living God,’ he vowed, ‘any man who would do a thing like that should be put to death; he shall 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 rich man!’” 2 Samuel 12:1-7 (TLB)

Crucial conversations are discussions in which there are strong emotions, different opinions and high stakes.⁽¹⁾ These conversations are easy to ignore because they represent some type of conflict. Many (and maybe most) times, we respond with emotion or, even worse, anger. This lesson series has demonstrated the importance of controlling our emotions and responding appropriately. Crucial conversations can be destructive when emotions are triggered, and we don’t exercise emotional intelligence by controlling them. These crucial conversations occur between spouses, family, co-workers, management and friends. So, what can we do? What should we do?

Joseph Grenny said, "If you don't talk it out, then you'll act it out." Talking something out seems so simple, yet we know it is not. First, you must begin in dialogue, then continue in dialogue, which means everyone in the conversation freely expresses their thoughts in a safe manner. No one can be condescending, disrespectful or use their position to steer a decision. Respecting people and their opinions is imperative, even if you disagree. A big sigh or some other visual mannerism as someone speaks is not showing respect. In fact, it inhibits free expression from the entire group.

How do you move the conversation in the right direction? You must make it a safe place for everyone to share their thoughts. If you are not the leader, you still have an opportunity to direct the conversation in a unifying direction. The conversation should start upstream of the issue in which there is common unity. People should listen well, which we typically do not do. We should listen well enough that we are able to paraphrase back what the person just articulated. This takes focused energy to accomplish. Phrases such as: “We all want _____”, “We want all ideas laid on the table,” “Tell me more,” etc. are helpful examples. The better this can be done, the more likely a good decision will be reached in which everyone has buy-in. This is a skill that is learnable, but it takes work and time to build this muscle.

You are the problem and the solution. As we have learned in the previous lessons in this series, having meaningful dialogue starts with ourselves. You must work on your heart to get yourself right first. We like to point to the other person as the problem, but if we do this, we point the finger right back to ourselves. As an example, if you are confronted with something you have done, do you listen and process or do you defend yourself and react poorly? Even if you feel you are right, do not become defensive, but promote dialogue to resolve the issue.

Shared Experiences:

- Can someone share the good and the bad of how they have handled a difficult conversation? What did you learn from this?
- Who in your organization does this well? Why do you think this?
- How well do you keep emotions out of your conflicts in your marriage? How might you apply crucial conversation techniques in your marriage?
- Can someone share a story of how they received feedback in a negative manner? What did you learn from this?

Bottom line: Nathan had a crucial conversation with the King of Israel, David. He shared a story and David clearly could see the wrong that he committed. He was deeply remorseful. If we learn how to have crucial conversations, we will not have regrets like David, but will have a more meaningful and stress-free life.

One Word Check-out

Dig Deeper

Want to learn more?

- *Podcast:* [Eli talks with Joseph Grenny about his book "Crucial Conversations."](#) 210Leaders Podcast, January 21, 2019
- *Video:* [Mastering The Art of Crucial Conversations](#) by Joseph Grenny, the keynote speech at the 2015 VitalSmarts REACH conference
- ⁽¹⁾*Book:* [Crucial Conversations, Tools for Talking When Stakes are High](#) by Patterson, Grenny, McMillian and Switzler. This is an excellent resource.
- *Book:* [HBR Guide to Dealing with Conflict - Understand the players, Manage your emotions, Move on](#) by Amy Gallo
- *Video:* [Roadmap to Handling Conflicts at Work](#) presented by Amy Gallo at Talks at Google
- *Article:* [People Who Are Good at Dealing With Conflict Ask This 1 Question, Says a Harvard Communications Expert - When conversations get tough, good leaders get curious](#) by Minda Zetlin published in Inc.com
- *Scripture:* [Psalm 51](#), David's remorse after a crucial conversation with Nathan

Simple dos and do nots for team members to understand:

- **Do:**
 - Listen
 - Be patient
 - Allow all information to get on the table
 - Make it comfortable for everyone to speak
 - Be open to changing your opinion
 - Look for signs that the environment is heading 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
 - Use an accusing tone

Planning a crucial conversation

This is something for you to individually process prior to an important meeting.

- Make a list of participants including yourself. Then list each person's needs and concerns.
- Determine what is the mutual purpose.
- List how you can show mutual respect.
- List the cautions.
- Write down the meeting goal.
- Write the first sentence to start the conversation. This should be something that all participants would agree upon. Start the conversation united.