

Crucial Conversations

How to Plan for a Constructive Conversation and find Common Ground

Presented by the Staff Ombuds Office

Definitions of a Crucial Conversation: A discussion between 2 or more people where the (1) stakes are high; (2) there are differences of opinion; and (3) emotions run strong.

Challenge & Opportunity: How do we think about problem situations and how do we prepare for them? This requires self-awareness, knowledge about our conflict behavior styles under stress, and the ability to understand and manage emotions before they get out of hand.

Key Principles to Reflect On Prior to the Conversation:

- Develop & practice our own skills first
- Ask: What Do I REALLY want & why (Interests)
- Consider how to align intentions with behavior
- Measure & manage emotions
- Right timing & setting
- Instead of defending, debating, dominating or disagreeing – use DIALOGUE

Typical Behaviors When the Conversation turns Crucial:

- Silence
 - Masking
 - Avoiding
 - Withdrawing
- Aggression
 - Coercing
 - Labeling
 - Attacking

*Adapted from **Crucial Conversations Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High**, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler, (2002).*

Planning for Crucial Conversations

| Principles | Skills | Key Questions |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Start with Interests | Focus & Reflection | What do I really want? For me? For others? For the relationship? How would I behave if I really wanted this? What do I NOT want. How should I behave to get what I want and avoid what I don't want? What might their interest be? Which of the interests are SHARED, which are DIFFERENT, and which are in CONFLICT? |
| Make it Safe | Emotional & Social Intelligence | Where & when should the conversation take place? Have I establish common purpose? How can I show and maintain mutual respect? If things become unsafe, what will I do to rebuild safety? |
| Know Your Style | Self Awareness | What style do I typically use under stress? Will that style serve my interests here? How might I need to adjust my style? What role do I have in the problem? What can I do or say to move toward what I really want? |
| Manage Emotions | Emotion Regulation | How do I feel about this situation? How do I think the other person is feeling? How can I use positive emotions to further my interests and build common ground? How will I stay calm if things get "hot?" |
| Inform & Assert | Verbal Communication of Facts & Feelings | How can I confidently express my own views on the situation? How would a reasonable, rationale, and decent person express their views? How can I show openness to other's views? |
| Actively Listening | Inquiry, Paraphrasing, Summarizing | How will I actively explore others' views? What questions will I ask? How will I convey my understanding? How will I avoid unnecessary disagreements? |
| Generate Options | Creativity | What possible agreements or pieces of agreements might satisfy both of our interests? What are some ways to use our different interests to create value? |