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).*

Staff Ombuds Office: (510) 642-7823; [http://staffombuds.berkeley.edu](http://staffombuds.berkeley.edu)
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<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Key Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start with Interests</td>
<td>Focus &amp; Reflection</td>
<td>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?</td>
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<td>Make it Safe</td>
<td>Emotional &amp; Social Intelligence</td>
<td>Where &amp; 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?</td>
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<td>Know Your Style</td>
<td>Self Awareness</td>
<td>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?</td>
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<td>Manage Emotions</td>
<td>Emotion Regulation</td>
<td>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?”</td>
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<td>Inform &amp; Assert</td>
<td>Verbal Communication of Facts &amp; Feelings</td>
<td>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?</td>
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<td>Actively Listening</td>
<td>Inquiry, Paraphrasing, Summarizing</td>
<td>How will I actively explore others’ views? What questions will I ask? How will I convey my understanding? How will I avoid unnecessary disagreements?</td>
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<td>Generate Options</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>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?</td>
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