

Crucial Conversations Cheat Sheet

*Excerpts and Concepts adapted from
Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High
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Click [here](#) for an overview of why mastering crucial conversations is essential for building a High Impact Team. And buy the book [here](#).

What is a crucial conversation?

A discussion between two or more people where

1. stakes are high
2. opinions vary
3. emotions run strong, and
4. the outcome greatly impacts their lives.

Why should you master crucial conversations?

- Friction among teammates blocks or slows down progress and growth.
- The more you care about an issue, the less likely you are to be on your best behavior.
- When you're the boss, especially if you're outspoken, remember others tend to hold back their opinions rather than risk making you mad or disappointing you.

"[When it's not safe, you] opt for either competition or submission. Both strategies end up making winners and losers, and the problem continues long beyond the initial conversation."

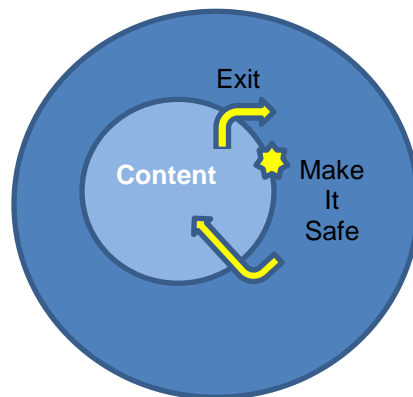
When we feel threatened, or unsafe, we resort to silence or violence.

- *Silence*: avoiding confrontation; changing the subject; understating the situation or getting sarcastic; leaving the conversation or the room: “Forget it! I don’t want to deal with this!”
- *Violence*: getting angry, attacking, belittling, name-calling; controlling, getting bossy or manipulative, cutting the other off; blaming (anyone other than yourself)

“Nothing kills the flow of meaning like fear.”

So how do you have a difficult conversation successfully? How do you make sure it is safe?

- Ask yourself: “Am I having a good or bad impact on safety? How can I make it safe for the other person?”
- Step out of the conversation until you’ve addressed these:
 - Is our Mutual Purpose at risk? Do others believe I care about their goals in this conversation? Do they trust my motives?
 - Is our Mutual Respect at risk: To restore mutual respect – recognize your respective humanity, no matter your differences.
 - Have I created a story that is driving my own behavior?



Step 1. Find a shared pool of meaning: understand the situation.

- When it comes to risky controversial and emotional conversations, skilled people find a way to get all the relevant information (from themselves and others) out in the open before getting further into the discussion.
- Share views, opinions, feelings, theories, even when controversial and unpopular.
- The time you spend up front establishing a shared pool of meaning is more than paid for by faster, more committed action later on.
- Think before talking:
 - What do I really want for myself and others in a relationship?
 - How would I behave if this was what I really wanted?
 - Identify what I don't want and what I do want.

Step 2. Arrive at a Mutual Purpose (we're after the same thing). Use CRIB.

- **Commit** to seek mutual purpose
Remember the Mutual in Mutual Purpose. To master a crucial conversation, we have to be sincere about our own understanding of the destination. The purpose really needs to be mutual.
- **Recognize** the purpose behind the strategy
Often, we find ourselves disagreeing on a path, but we're both interested in the same destination. Rise above the path to get a look at the bigger picture. Where do you both want to be?
- **Invent** a mutual purpose.
If you seem to have conflicting goals, look for a way where your paths connect.
- **Brainstorm** new strategies. Try to find a different or modified path together.

Step 3. Restore Mutual Respect.

When you feel disrespected, emotions and self-preservation take over. You tend toward defending yourself and your dignity.

- Do others believe you respect them?
- Apologize if you made a mistake, or caused or didn't prevent pain or difficulty for others, whether intentional or not.
- Contrast when there's been a misunderstanding. When something you've said or want to say is or might be taken the wrong way, contrast (don't/do) for context and perspective: "I don't mean X. What I do mean is Y."
- If you feel like you can't respect someone because they seem selfish, careless or unmotivated...remember your mutual humanity. We all have our own quirks and our own frameworks in which we developed.

"Lord, help me forgive those who sin differently than I."

Step 4. Master Your Stories

We often come to misguided conclusions about people's behavior or situations. We create a story about their intentions, what they are thinking about us, and what they are feeling. These stories beget emotions that then drive our own behavior.

- Think about your emotions, choose your emotions.
- Get to the facts: What other possible alternatives exist? The other person may have a completely different reason for their behavior than the story that you have been telling yourself.
- Watch out for stories that make you the victim or helpless, or that make others the villain.
- Speaking out requires confidence and humility. By thinking through the facts, you'll gain confidence. Inviting others to share their stories so that you can learn, that's humility.

Improve your dialogue skills: STATE and AMPP

STATE:

- **Share** your facts. Facts are real and persuasive, not controversial or insulting.
- **Tell** your story. It takes courage and confidence to show some vulnerability and tell your side. So don't make this about being right. Make it about making sure your feelings and thoughts are heard.
- **Ask** for others' paths. We've told our story, now ask about theirs. What does the other person really want? What is important to them, what are their goals?
- **Talk** tentatively. This does NOT mean be a wimp. Hold on to what you believe. Just soften your delivery a bit: "I was wondering...", "perhaps you were unaware...", "it seems to me..."
- **Encourage** testing. Challenge your own perception of where you are now. Go for a trial close: "Does this sound right?," "What are your thoughts on this?," "Does this make sense?"

AMPP: Power Listening. Seek to understand, not necessarily agree.

- **Ask**: find out what's going on with sincerity, it's probably not what you think.
- **Mirror**: let someone know how they are behaving, in a way that preserves safety and shows you are concerned: "you seem nervous," "your tone of voice worries me," "you seem tense/angry with me."
- **Paraphrase**: so I think what you are saying is....
- **Prime** (the pump): share a guess at what they might be thinking or feeling