

# Crucial Conversations with a Cross-Cultural Twist

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:: *Welcome* ::

Tapping into what you already know

Highlights from *Crucial Conversations*

What I learned in Vietnam

Your style under stress and adapting it for  
successful crucial conversations in any culture

Practice how you will hold a crucial conversation

:: *Wrap-up* ::

## Objectives

**Increase** self-awareness in handling crucial conversations

**Apply** techniques to strengthen your ability to have successful crucial conversations

**Gain insight** into having successful crucial conversations with individuals of different cultures

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### **Crucial Conversation** (*as defined in the book*)

A discussion between two or more people where

- (1) stakes are high
- (2) opinions vary
- (3) emotions run strong

### **Crucial Conversation** (*defined cross culturally*)

A discussion between two or more people where

- (1) the issues are critical
  - (2) emotions are strong, and
  - (3) opinions vary
  - (4) cultures differ
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For more insights, go to the *Crucial Conversations* authors' website [www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com)

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# Highlights from **CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS<sup>1</sup>**

Page numbers follow each entry.

## **Crucial Conversations defined** (3)

A discussion between two or more people where (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong.

## **Dialogue defined** (20)

The free flow of meaning between two or more people.

## **Filling the pool of shared meaning** (21)

Each of us enters conversations with our own opinions, feelings, theories, and experiences about the topic at hand. This unique combination of thoughts and feelings makes up our personal pool of meaning.

When two or more of us enter crucial conversations, by definition we don't share the same pool.

Make it safe for everyone to add their meaning to the shared pool

As the Pool of Shared Meaning grows, it helps in two ways. First, as individuals are exposed to more accurate and relevant information, they make better choices. In a very real sense, the Pool of Shared Meaning is a measure of a group's IQ.

## **The birthplace of synergy** (23)

*The Pool of Shared Meaning  
is the birthplace of synergy.*

## **Don't look at me!** (29)

Although it's true that there are times when we are merely bystanders in life's never-ending stream of head-on collisions, rarely are we completely innocent. More often than not, we do something to contribute to the problems we're experiencing.

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<sup>1</sup> Patterson, Kerry, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler. *Crucial Conversations*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

#### **4 great questions to return to dialogue** (34-35)

- What do I really want for myself?
- What do I really want for others?
- What do I really want for the relationship?
- How would I behave if I really wanted these results?

#### **A paradox** (37)

Sometimes we choose personal safety over dialogue. We're so uncomfortable with the immediate conflict that we accept the certainty of bad results to avoid the possibility of uncomfortable conversations.

#### **The Sucker's Choice** (38)

In order to justify an especially sordid behavior, we suggest that we're caught between two distasteful options. Either we can be honest and attack our spouse, or we can be kind and withhold the truth. The person making the choice never suggests there's a third option that doesn't call for unhealthy behavior. For example, maybe there's a way to be honest and respectful. In summary, Sucker's Choices are simplistic tradeoffs that keep us from thinking creatively of ways to get to dialogue, and that justify our silly games.

#### **Search for the elusive And** (40)

The best at dialogue refuse Sucker's Choices by setting up new choices. They present themselves with tougher questions – questions that turn the either/or choice into a search for the all-important and ever elusive and.

Is it possible that there's a way to accomplish both?

#### **When it's safe, you can say anything** (49)

Dialogue calls for the free flow of meaning—period. And nothing kills the flow of meaning like fear. When you fear that people aren't buying into your ideas, you start pushing too hard. When you fear that you may be harmed in some way, you start withdrawing and hiding. Both these reactions—to fight and to take flight—are motivated by the same emotion: fear.

#### **Look for safety and then be curious, not angry or frightened** (51-54)

As people begin to feel unsafe, they start down one of two unhealthy paths. They move either to silence (withholding meaning from the pool) or to violence (trying to force meaning in the pool).

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Signs of Silence</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Silence consists of any act to purposefully withhold information from the pool of meaning</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Signs of Violence</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Violence consists of any verbal strategy that attempts to convince, control, or compel others to your point of view.</p>
<p><i>Masking</i></p> <p>...consists of understating or selectively showing our true opinions. Sarcasm, sugarcoating, and couching are some of the more popular forms.</p> <p><i>Avoiding</i></p> <p>...involves steering completely away from sensitive subjects. We talk, but without addressing the real issues.</p> <p><i>Withdrawing</i></p> <p>...means pulling out of a conversation altogether. We either exit the conversation or exit the room.</p>	<p><i>Controlling</i></p> <p>...consists of coercing others to your way of thinking. It's done through either forcing your views on others or dominating the conversation. Methods include cutting others off, overstating your facts, speaking in absolutes, changing subjects, or using directive questions to control the conversation.</p> <p><i>Labeling</i></p> <p>...is putting a label on people or ideas so we can dismiss them under a general stereotype or category.</p> <p><i>Attacking</i></p> <p>...speaks for itself. You've moved from winning the argument to making the person suffer. Tactics include belittling and threatening.</p>

### **Contrast to fix misunderstanding** (76-77)

Contrasting is a don't/do statement that:

- Addresses others' concerns that you don't respect them or that you have a malicious purpose (the don't part)
- Confirms your respect or clarifies your real purpose (the do part)

For example:

[The don't part] "The last thing I wanted to do was communicate that I don't value the work you put in or that I didn't want to share it with the VP."

[The do part] "I think your work has been nothing short of spectacular."

### **Make it safe** (91-92)

*Step out*

When others move to silence or violence, step out of the conversation and Make It Safe.

When safety is restored, go back to the issue at hand and continue the dialogue.

*Apologize when appropriate*

When you've clearly violated respect, apologize.

*Contrast to fix misunderstanding*

When others misunderstand either your purpose or your intent, use Contrasting. Start with what you *don't* intend or mean. Then explain what you *do* intend or mean.

### **Watch for three "clever" stories** (106-114)

We call these imaginative and self-serving concoctions "clever" stories. They're clever because they allow us to feel good about behaving badly. Better yet, they allow us to feel good about behaving badly even while achieving abysmal results.

*Victim Stories – "It's Not My Fault"*

Victim Stories, as you might imagine, make us out to be innocent sufferers. When you tell a Victim Story, you ignore the role you played in the problem.

Turn victims into actors. Am I pretending not to notice my role in the problem?

*Villain Stories – "It's All Your Fault"*

We create these nasty little tales by turning normal, decent human beings into villains. In Victim Stories we exaggerate our own innocence. In Villain Stories we overemphasize the other person's guilt.

Turn villains into humans. Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person do what this person is doing?

*Helpless Stories – "There's Nothing Else I Can Do"*

In these fabrications we make ourselves out to be powerless to do anything. They get us off the hook. They conveniently excuse us from any responsibility.

Turn the helpless into the able. What do I really want? For me? For the relationship?

### **STATE my path** (124-125)

Once you've worked on yourself to create the right conditions for dialogue, you can then draw upon five distinct skills that can help you talk about even the most sensitive topics. These five tools can be easily remembered with the acronym STATE. It stands for:

Share your facts

Tell your story

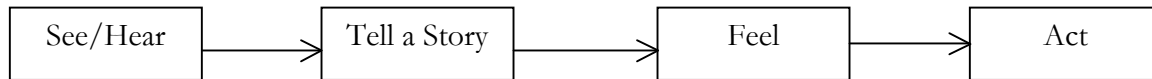
Ask for others' paths

Talk tentatively

Encourage testing

The first three skills describe *what* to do. The last two tell *how* to do it.

## **The Path to Action** (125)



## **Ask for others' paths** (131)

The key to sharing sensitive ideas is a blend of confidence and humility. We express our confidence by sharing facts and stories clearly. We demonstrate our humility by then asking others to share their views.

## **Putting it all together: tools for preparing and learning** (179-181)

We've learned that most people make progress not by focusing on specific skills – at least to start with – but instead by applying two of the main principles of this book.

### *Learn to Look*

That is, people who improve their dialogue skills continually ask themselves whether they're in or out of dialogue.

### *Make it Safe*

If you simply realize that your challenge is to make it safer, nine out of ten times you'll intuitively do something that helps.

## **Coaching for Crucial Conversations** (186-188)

What am I pretending not to know about my role in the problem?

Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person do this?

What should I do right now to move toward what I really want?

## **Failed trust** (200-201)

Trust doesn't have to be universally offered. In truth, it's usually offered in degrees and is very topic specific. It also comes in two flavors – motive and ability. For example, you can trust me to administer CPR if needed; I'm motivated. But you can't trust me to do a good job; I know nothing about it.

Deal with trust around the issue, not around the person. When it comes to regaining trust in others, don't set the bar too high. Just try to trust them in the moment, not across all issues.

Don't use your mistrust as a club to punish people.

# HOW TO HOLD A CRUCIAL CONVERSATION

From the JE<sup>2</sup> Team Retreat | 24 April 2007 | Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

A Crucial Conversation is one where

- The issues are critical
- Emotions are strong
- Opinions vary
- Cultures differ

What have you done when you have had a successful crucial conversation? What does your culture teach you about dealing with crucial conversations?	
Techniques	Cultural Lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Be prepared</li> <li>b. Simplify and clarify</li> <li>c. Control emotions</li> <li>d. Be a good listener</li> <li>e. Take longer time because difficult conversations take more time</li> <li>f. Be sensitive to language</li> <li>g. Involve a third party if necessary</li> <li>h. Learn to read body language</li> <li>i. Check for understanding</li> <li>j. Have the facts and data</li> <li>k. Don't agree to anything, <u>but</u> let the other person know they've been heard</li> <li>l. Ask, "What are the criteria for a good decision?"</li> <li>m. Be aware of your body language</li> <li>n. Don't pretend to be a good listener</li> <li>o. Interrupt politely to return to dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>p. Be open minded</li> <li>q. Begin with encouragement</li> <li>r. Recognize the other person as an equal</li> <li>s. Know about hierarchy</li> <li>t. Never, ever lose your temper</li> <li>u. Give good news in public, bad news in private</li> <li>v. Be aware that silence can mean something</li> <li>w. Be ready for compromise</li> <li>x. Be polite</li> </ul>

Below are two optional formats for holding a crucial conversation. Use either one depending on your preference and the context of the situation.

Option A	Option B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Raise the issue</li> <li>2. Listen</li> <li>3. Advocate your view</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell your story and how you got there</li> <li>2. Ask for the other person's story and how they got there</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> JE = Japanese Encephalitis

# YOUR STYLE UNDER STRESS TEST<sup>3</sup>

The following questions explore how you typically respond when you're in the middle of a crucial conversation. Before answering, pick a specific relationship at work or at home. Then answer the items while thinking about how you typically approach risky conversations in that relationship.

- T F 1. At times I avoid situations that might bring me into contact with people I'm having problems with.
- T F 2. I have put off returning phone calls or emails because I simply didn't want to deal with the person who sent them.
- T F 3. Sometimes when people bring up a touchy or awkward issue, I try to change the subject.
- T F 4. When it comes to dealing with awkward or stressful subjects, sometimes I hold back rather than give my full and candid opinion.
- T F 5. Rather than tell people exactly what I think, sometimes I rely on jokes, sarcasm, or snide remarks to let them know I'm frustrated.
- T F 6. When I've got something tough to bring up, sometimes I offer weak or insincere compliments to soften the blow.
- T F 7. In order to get my point across, I sometimes exaggerate my side of the argument.
- T F 8. If I seem to be losing control of a conversation, I might cut people off or change the subject in order to bring it back to where I think it should be.
- T F 9. When others make points that seem stupid to me, I sometimes let them know it without holding back at all.
- T F 10. When I'm stunned by a comment, sometimes I say things that others might take as forceful or attacking—comments such as “Give me a break!” or “That’s ridiculous!”
- T F 11. Sometimes when things get heated, I move from arguing against others’ points to saying things that might hurt them personally.
- T F 12. If I get into a heated discussion, I’ve been known to be tough on the other person. In fact, the person might feel a bit insulted or hurt.
- T F 13. When I’m discussing an important topic with others, sometimes I move from trying to make my point to trying to win the battle.

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<sup>3</sup> *Crucial Conversations*, pp. 56-62

- T F 14. In the middle of a tough conversation, I often get so caught up in arguments that I don't see how I'm coming across to others.
- T F 15. When talking gets tough and I do something hurtful, I'm quick to apologize for mistakes.
- T F 16. When I think about a conversation that took a bad turn, I tend to focus first on what I did that was wrong rather than focus on others' mistakes.
- T F 17. When I've got something to say that others might not want to hear, I avoid starting out with tough conclusions, and instead start with facts that help them understand where I'm coming from.
- T F 18. I can tell very quickly when others are holding back or feeling defensive in a conversation.
- T F 19. Sometimes I decide that it's better not to give harsh feedback because I know that it's bound to cause real problems.
- T F 20. When conversations aren't working, I step back from the fray, think about what's happening, and take steps to make it better.
- T F 21. When others get defensive because they misunderstand me, I quickly get us back on track by clarifying what I do and don't mean.
- T F 22. There are some people I'm rough on because, to be honest, they need or deserve what I give them.
- T F 23. I sometimes make absolute statements like "The fact is..." or "It's obvious that..." to be sure I get my point across.
- T F 24. If others hesitate to share their views, I sincerely invite them to say what's on their mind, no matter what it is.
- T F 25. At times I argue hard for my view—hoping to keep others from bringing up opinions that would be a waste of energy to discuss.
- T F 26. Even when things get tense, I adapt quickly to how others are responding to me and try a new strategy.
- T F 27. When I find that I'm at cross-purposes with someone, I often keep trying to win my way rather than looking for common ground.
- T F 28. When things don't go well, I'm more inclined to see the mistakes others made than notice my own role.
- T F 29. After I share strong opinions, I go out of my way to invite others to share their views, particularly opposing ones.

- T F 30. When others hesitate to share their views, I do whatever I can to make it safe for them to speak honestly.
- T F 31. Sometimes I have to discuss things I thought had been settled because I don't keep track of what was discussed before.
- T F 32. I find myself in situations where people get their feelings hurt because they thought they would have more of a say in final decisions than they end up having.
- T F 33. I get frustrated sometimes at how long it takes some groups to make decisions because too many people are involved.

**Scoring**

Please fill out the score sheets below. Each domain contains two or three questions. Next to the question number is either (T) or (F). For example, under “Masking,” question 5 on Scoresheet #1, you’ll find a (T). This means that if you answered it true, check the box. With question 13 on Scoresheet #2, on the other hand, you’ll find (F). Only check that box if you answered the question false—and so on.

Your style under stress score (Scoresheet #1) will show you which forms of silence or violence you turn to most often. Your Dialogue Skills score (Scoresheet #2) is organized by concept and chapter so you can decide which chapters [in the book] may benefit you the most.

Scoresheet #1		Scoresheet #2	
Your Style Under Stress		Dialogue Skills	
Silence	Violence		
<b>Masking</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 5 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 6 (T)	<b>Controlling</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 7 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 8 (T)	<b>Ch 3: Start with Heart</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 13 (F) <input type="checkbox"/> 19 (F) <input type="checkbox"/> 25 (F)	<b>Ch 7: STATE MY Path</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 17 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 23 (F) <input type="checkbox"/> 29 (T)
<b>Avoiding</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 3 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 46 (T)	<b>Labeling</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 9 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 10 (T)	<b>Ch 4: Learn to Look</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 14 (F) <input type="checkbox"/> 20 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 26 (T)	<b>Ch 8: Explore Other's Paths</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 18 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 24 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 30 (T)
<b>Withdrawing</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 1 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 2 (T)	<b>Attacking</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 11 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 12 (T)	<b>Ch 5: Make It Safe</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 15 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 21 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 27 (F)	<b>Ch 9: Move to Action</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 31 (F) <input type="checkbox"/> 32 (F) <input type="checkbox"/> 33 (F)
<b>Total _____</b>	<b>Total _____</b>	<b>Ch 6: Master My Stories</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 16 (T) <input type="checkbox"/> 22 (F) <input type="checkbox"/> 28 (F)	