

Crucial Conversations

Day-to-day conversations that affect your life AND occur when we're generally on our worst behaviour AND more often than not come out of nowhere.

They occur when:

- opinions vary
- stakes are high
- emotions run strong

Although the results have a huge impact on the quality of your life, we often back away from them because we fear we'll make matters worse.

There are three ways to deal with them:

- Avoid them – revert to silent fuming
- Face them and handle them poorly – digress into threats and name calling
- Face them and handle them well – speak openly, honestly, and effectively

Examples:

- Ending a relationship
- Asking a friend to stop asking to borrow money
- Dealing with a rebellious child
- Talking to a team member who isn't keeping commitments
- Asking your in-laws to stop interfering
- Talking to a co-worker about a personal hygiene problem

Research shows that the ability to master high-stakes discussions is a key to a healthier and longer life. A modest improvement in our ability to talk and connect with others corresponds to a two-thirds decrease in death rate. The way you talk or don't talk can kill you!

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Strategies to handle crucial conversations well:

- Clarify what you want and do not want
- Attempt to find a mutual purpose
- Put aside the content of the disagreement and first create a safe environment
- Use facts to understand both perspectives
- Try to put yourself in the other person's position
- Focus on mutual purpose rather than personal gains

As with many of the skills we have, we improve with practice. Role playing an improvised conversation is perhaps the best way to prepare for the real thing.

Improv Activity:

Choose a partner and select one of the examples OR create one of your own. Write a few opening lines, assume the 'position' and say something inflammatory to begin your improv.