

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking when Stakes are High

By Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler

Book Report by Susan Schilke

What's a Crucial Conversation?

- Opinions vary
- Stakes are high
- Emotions run strong

When it Matters Most

- Genetics get in the way – adrenalin kicks in
- Fight or flight
- Self-defeating behavior

Silence Fails

- Most common complaint – silos
- 80% of projects that require cross-functional cooperation... cost more and produce less



Leaders respond with new processes, systems and structure... But it's about behavior.

The Fool's Choice

- Option 1: Speak up and turn a powerful person into an enemy
- Option 2: Suffer in silence and make a bad decision that hurts the company
- There's a third choice... **dialogue.**

The Pool of Shared Meaning

- Enter conversations with our own feelings and experiences
- Enter *crucial* conversations in a different pool
- Dialogue makes it safe to add to the *shared* pool – get all ideas into the open
- As the Pool of Shared Meaning grows, decisions get better

Step 1: Start with the Heart

- Focus on what you really want
 - What do I want for myself?
 - For others?
 - How would I behave if this is what I really want?
- Refuse the Fool's Choice
 - Search for the 'and'
 - Clarify what you don't want, add it to what you do want, and start looking for good options

Step 2: Learn to Look

- Be aware of when things become crucial
- Look to see if others are moving toward silence or violence
- Monitor your own style under stress

Step 3: Make it Safe

- When it becomes crucial, step out of the conversation and make it safe
- Do you have mutual purpose?
- Do you have mutual respect?
- Clarify with contrast – what you don't intend, then what you do mean
- Find mutual purpose and respect then continue to dialogue on strategies

Step 4: Master Your Stories

- We see and hear something, then tell ourselves a story... feel and act
- To master your stories
 - Retrace your path – question your conclusions
 - Get back to the facts
 - Ask yourself what you really want?
 - Turn the facts into a useful story – that leads to healthy action like dialogue

Step 5: State Your Path

- Share your facts – facts are the least controversial and most persuasive
- Tell your story – explain your conclusions
- Ask for others' paths – ask about others' facts and conclusions
- Talk tentatively – it's a story, not a fact
- Encourage testing – make it safe

And: Explore Others' Paths

- Ask. Interest in the others' views.
- Mirror. Acknowledge feeling
- Paraphrase. What did you hear?
- Prime. If they hold back, take your best guess at what they may be thinking or feeling
- ABCs – agree when you share views; build from there; compare where views differ

Finally: Move to Action

- Decide how to decide:
 - Command
 - Consult
 - Vote
 - Consensus – the best choice for high stakes, complex issues where everyone must support the final decision
 - Decide who does what when

Key Concepts to Remember

- Dialogue is about contributing to the pool of shared meaning to make better decisions
- Keep the conversation safe for dialogue – mutual purpose and respect – contrast tool
- Master your stories – go back to the facts to find more useful stories
- State your path – Share, Tell, Ask, Talk, Encourage