Crucial Confrontations:

Tools for Resolving Broken Promises, Violated Expectations and Bad Behavior
By: Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillian and Al Switzler

Summary

When I chose the book, *Crucial Confrontations*, I was expecting to read a human resource book about dealing with difficult co-workers. I was pleasantly surprised that the authors of *Crucial Confrontations* not only described ways to have difficult conversations at work, but that they also discussed how to deal with the broken promises, violated expectations and bad behavior, that are consistent when dealing with all forms of relationships. The book was written in a way that engaged the reader and put them in the drivers' seat of several common examples. Often the authors referred to the reader as 'you' to impel the reader to feel the urgency of the situation. From there the authors would walk the reader through solutions for the situation. Because this personal writing style was very effective and distinct, I will attempt to maintain this form throughout my executive book summary.

What makes an excellent leader?
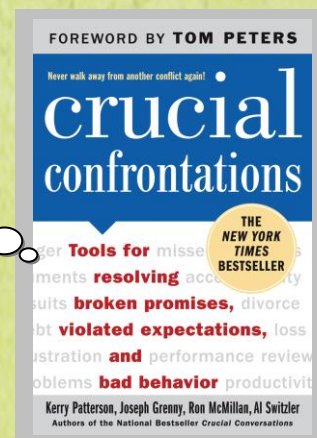
Ever dealt with a gossip at work, a friend that has broken a promise or a teenager that has skipped curfew? Chances are that you were faced with a crucial confrontation. How did you handle it?

Fight or Flight?

Introduction

The Authors sympathized with how we all face crucial confrontations. They determined that for the most part people have reacted in two instinctual ways: fight or flight. They argue that there is a third reaction to these critical situations. Throughout the book the authors share the results of a study of 25, 000 people, that were identified by their colleagues, as the most effective people in their companies. The research led to the following hypothesis about effective leaders: "It wasn't their technical skills, their title, or even something as intangible as, say, charisma…they were the best at stepping up to colleagues, coworkers, or even their bosses, and holding them accountable" (287 of 5051). From this research they developed a third reaction or method to handling crucial confrontations. They provided insight as to how to develop the skills necessary to interact in a crucial conversation without referring to a fight or flight instinct. This method will maintain a positive relationship while correcting the unwanted behavior. The authors discussed the importance of stepping up to difficult conversations. They suggested, "Most organizations are losing between 20 and 80 percent of their potential performance because of leaders' and employees' inability to step up to and master crucial confrontations" (461 of 5051).

When people are not held accountable they begin a process that Fredrick Taylor (1916) referred to as *soldiering*. This phenomenon occurs when workers purposely work below their capacity. The authors felt that if leaders, parents, and coworkers learn to step up to and hold people accountable, the gap between achievers will decrease. They suggested, "if you learn how to hold people accountable in a way that will solve problems without causing new ones, you can look forward to significant and lasting change" (511 of 5051).

Self-Assessment:

Complete the following by answering whether or not the statement applies to you. Keep track of the total amount of yes'.

1. *Rather than get into an argument, I tend to put off certain discussions longer than I should.*
2. *When others don't deliver on a promise, there are times when I judge them more quickly than I should.*
3. *Sometimes I bring up problems in a way that makes others defensive.*
4. *There are people I routinely deal with who, to be honest, just can't be motivated.*
5. *When someone can't do something, I tend to jump in with my advice when all they really want is a chance to talk about their ideas.*
6. *When talking to others about problems, sometimes I get sidetracked and miss the original problem.*
7. *Sometimes I work through a problem, but forget to clarify who is supposed to do what by when.*

Scoring:

Add up the number of yes' you had. Here's what your total score means:

6-7 Go buy Crucial Confrontations!

4-5 You could use some help but at least you're honest

2-3 You're capable and likely to be succeeding

0-1 You could teach us all a thing or two

(398 of 5051)

Part One: Work on Me First

"Crucial Confrontations live and die on the words people choose and the way people deliver them" (539 of 5051).

The authors cautioned that the methods described in this book were not intended to provide you with a magic solution that can be used to "fix everyone else". It is exhausting to be perfect and to try to teach everyone around you to be perfect. It is also annoying and never true. The strategies described in this book began with a personal reflection. The authors remind you that "crucial confrontations live and die on the words people choose and the way people deliver them" (539 of 5051). No matter how long a person pauses to reflect upon and choose the 'right' words to say in a crucial confrontation, if not in the right frame of mind they can all go to waste. When faced with a crucial confrontation people who want to be successful need to understand how to choose *what* and *if* and to master their own stories.

Choosing WHAT and IF:

Issues never fit into a tiny box; they are often complicated and layered. When faced with a breach of contract it is important to determine what the most important or main issue is before dealing with it. As mentioned, problems often do not take on a 'yes or no' format and it is important to choose the issue that is the core of the

problem or the one that needs immediate attention. The second thing that must be considered is if you are going to address the problem at all. When trying to determine the 'what' the authors recommend considering CPR: content, pattern and relationship. When an issue occurs for the first time the authors recommend discussing the content. If the issue persists then a discussion could be about the pattern of the problem. The impact of the violation may begin to take a toll on how you relate to one another and the conversation about the relationship may be more fitting. When trying to determine which route should be taken in the conversation it is always important to consider what it is you want and what you don't want from the conversation. When considering if the conversation needs to take place or not the authors suggested reflecting on four questions:

1. Am I acting it out?
   o Sometimes when we choose not to respond to an issue we think that we are better at hiding our disappointment then we actually are. Sarcasm begins to rear its ugly head, followed shortly after by cutting humor. The authors caution, "when you've gone silent, but your body language keeps sending out hostile signals or you're dropping hints or relying on sarcasm, you probably ought to speak up" (845 of 5051).

C.P.R.
Content - Pattern - Relationship

2. Is my conscience nagging me?
   o "If social pressure can cause people to lie, it can certainly drive people to silence. Pay attention to a nagging conscience – it may be indicating a confrontation that you need to step up to" (862 of 5051).
3. Am I choosing the certainty of silence over the risk of speaking up?
   o This question forces you to reflect on whether you are choosing to remain silent because you fear that the issues that are experienced are better than the horrific response that you may experience if you decide to participate in a crucial confrontation. The authors highlight that in order to choose silence people trick themselves by "downplaying the cost of not speaking and exaggerating the cost of expressing our views" (945 of 5051).

"Quietly embracing the devil we know" (945 of 5051)

4. Am I telling myself that I'm helpless?

    o   Sometimes people do not feel confident in their abilities to hold a crucial confrontation and may convince themselves that it is the others problem because 'they never listen anyway'. It is important to recognize if not confronting is a cop out or a reasoned decision.

Master My Stories

Continuing with the theme of starting with your own reflection the authors remind you of the importance of the climate of a conversation. It is important to avoid a horrible climate by charging in half-informed and half-cocked. They recommend before entering into any conversation asking yourself "why a reasonable, rational, and decent person would do what you've just seen as well as if you yourself are playing a role in the problem" (1425 of 5051). Try to determine what is influencing the person to act the way they have.

"Have you ever noticed…anybody going slower than you is an idiot, and anyone going faster than you is a maniac?"
~George Carlin~
(As seen in Patterson, et Al, 2005, 1034 of 5051)

Part Two: Confront with Safety

Before having a crucial confrontation you must create an environment of safety for everyone involved. Safety can be created through: describing the gap, making it motivating, making it easy and staying focused and flexible.

Describe the Gap

Before having a crucial confrontation it is important to understand what you want to confront. The authors describe this as a broken promise, "a gap; a difference between what you expected and what actually happened" (1478 of 5051). The authors also refer to the gap as missed commitments, disappointed expectations and bad behavior. Before describing the successful strategies that were observed in their study the authors first discuss ways that have good intent, but ultimately failed at confronting the issue and maintaining a positive relationship.

Unsuccessful Strategies:

•   Sandwich Technique- Start and end with a compliment. Stick the concern somewhere in the middle. The authors felt that this technique was a type of game being played. They suggested avoiding games and getting to the point.

Unsuccessful Strategies (Cont.):

- Luring- Talking the guilty party into denying a problem only to punish them for lying. This is also a type of game. The authors felt that it was manipulative.

- Playing Charades- Relying on nonverbal hints and subtle innuendo. The authors noticed that some people feel most comfortable dealing with an issue by frowning, smirking or looking concerned. They authors felt that this was a dangerous approach because it may be misinterpreted and is very difficult to document.

- Passing the Buck- Blaming someone else for the issue that is being brought up in order to take the hones off of you. This method is also disloyal, dishonest, and ineffective.

- Mind Readers- Trying to have people read your mind is also a strategy that will not present the best results. Having people guess what the issue is can be irritating and ineffective. It can appear patronizing or manipulative.

The most effective method of approaching a difficult conversation was to describe the gap. Before describing the gap the authors felt that it was important to set the right tone. From the studies that they had conducted they noticed a pattern with the successful leaders: start with safety, share your path and end with a question.

Start With Safety:
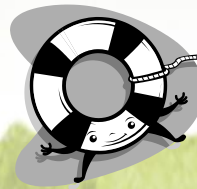
"The Big Surprise – At the foundation of every successful confrontation lies safety. When others feel frightened or nervous or otherwise unsafe, you can't talk about anything. But if you can create safety, you can talk with almost anyone about almost anything – even about failed promises" (1571 of 5051)

With every crucial confrontation it is important to describe the gap. There should be no reason to dance around the topic. However, if you feel that the person that is receiving the confrontation will feel at all threatened, intimidated or insulted, measures should be taken in order to ensure that the person feels safe.

Watch for Safety Signs:

The authors suggested that people will feel unsafe when they believe one of two things: the person that initiates the confrontation does not have mutual respect or mutual purpose. They observed that people would monitor their safety based on whether or not something bad is currently happening to them or that bad things are about to happen.

When the person being addressed begins to show signs of fear or silence it is an indicator that they are feeling a lack of mutual respect or purpose. It is the goal of the initiator to determine which is being affected.

"Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret"
~Ambrose Bierce
(As seen in Patterson, Et Al, 2005, 1469 or 5051)

Maintaining Mutual Respect:

If approaching a conversation with a tone of voice or a facial expression that suggests a lack of mutual respect the individual being addressed will feel that bad things are currently happening to them.

1. Remember to tell the rest of the story: it is important to remember that when someone violates a promise the initial story that you create in your head may not be reasonable. Take time to reflect upon reasons why the person did this. Ask yourself why a reasonable person would do this?

2. Use Contrasting: This is a technique that can be used when initially describing the broken promise. It addresses safety before it is threatened.

Maintaining Mutual Purpose:

If a conversation is based on your goals without considering the goals of the person being addressed, the addressee may feel that their goals being overlooked is a sign of something bad about to happen.

1. "Build a common ground before you even mention a problem. Let others know that your intentions are pure-that your goal is to solve problems *and* make things better for both of you. Start with what's important to you and them-not just you. Establish Mutual Purpose" (1664 of 5051)
2. Ask for Permission: avoid rushing into a crucial conversation without asking permission first. By asking permission the individual that is being addressed will feel that they have been given respect and that the intent is not malicious.
3. Speak in Private: Public confrontations do not lend themselves to a feeling of safety.

Path to Action Model

Share your Path:

Go back to the Path to Action Model to be clear about what you want to discuss. Try to reflect on what should be shared from the journey that was taken. The authors recommend avoiding judgments. If you share what you initially thought of their reaction the person that is being addressed will immediately feel that you have already come to a conclusion about their behavior and safety is at risk. Start with the facts. Describe to the person what they did and the result. Try to describe the facts that tell what happened and not why you think they happened.

End with a Question:

After ensuring safety and sharing the path that you have taken to get to this confrontation while maintaining safety it is time to ask a question in order to wrap up the beginning of the conversation. After your opening statement your goal should be to hear the other person's perspective. By asking an open and honest question it allows the person a chance to explain their point of view. As they are explaining their point of view remember to listen for the underlying cause and which of the six sources of influence are at play.

Make it Motivating

Sometimes when confronting someone about a gap you may realize that motivation is a factor. They may say things like 'what's the big deal? Is it really worth the effort?' or 'I had more important things to do'. In the case of motivation the authors remind us that "power doesn't matter all that much. In fact, in many cases the more you think you need power to influence others' motivation, the less likely you are to do it well" (1917 of 5051). The authors felt that motivation is often wrongly defined. Most people see it as a strategy that is implemented with power or fear to be effective. The authors argue that motivation is about expectations, information, and communication.

Common INEFFECTIVE ways to motivate:

1. Charisma- Although charisma is a requirement in a good movie, it is not required when trying to motivate someone.
2. Power and Force-When relying on power and force to motivate it can come with costs. Force works against relationships, motivates resistance and usually doesn't last. Although the initial results of power and force can seem successful, in the long run there are too many costs for it to be effective.
3. Perks-Using perks to motivate can also be damaging. Adding perks to necessary work can be undermining and begins to destroy satisfaction.

"Research supports the idea that employees' job satisfaction and job performance are related."
Steen, Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2009)

Satisfaction

Performance

Recipe for a Motivational Cocktail:
2 c. charisma
1 c. chutzpah
Dash of fear
"Blend two parts charisma, one part chutzpah, and a healthy dash of fear into a perfect motivational cocktail"
(1948 or 5051)

EFFECTIVE ways to motivate:

1. Natural Consequences- Apply the natural consequences for the persons' behavior in order to motivate them. The authors felt that "natural consequences are always present and always serve as a potential source of motivation" (2111 of 5051). Sometimes people are too busy or unable to see the long-term results to see how their actions have natural consequences. By exposing the consequences of their behavior and how their current actions are contrary to their values or beliefs, a long-term motivation to change their action can occur.
2. Connect Short-Term Benefits with Long-Term Pain- Help them to see that their current actions may seem best in the short-term, but that in the long term they can be very damaging.
3. Place the Focus on Long-Term Benefits-Help the person to become motivated by sharing with them how the long-term benefits outweigh the short-term benefits of their current actions.
4. Introduce the Hidden Victims- The action of one person often affects several others. If someone is unmotivated to complete a task it is sometimes helpful to share with them how their actions affect other people around them. To help introduce how their action have social implications describe how their behavior is affecting the other people around them.

Remember when explaining natural consequences to someone do not overload. Once you notice that they are beginning to show motivation stop sharing reasons for them to be.

Don't forget

~Motivation and ability are joined at the hip~

Make it Easy

Motivation and ability are very closely related. If the job is difficult or tedious it can decrease motivation. When diagnosing how to motivate someone it is important to determine whether the individual is dealing with a motivation or an ability issue. It is not always clear which one it is either. Often people will give explanations of why something isn't done that aren't true to avoid the real reason. This is where it is important to ask questions to make sure you are helping in the best way. If the issue is ability it is the leaders' role to help make the job easy.

Tools for making it Easy:

1. Jointly Explore Barriers: Work with the person to describe the barriers that they are facing and help them to brainstorm ways to prevent the barriers. If the person has ownership of the solution they are more likely to be motivated to attempt the job.
2. Explore Ability Barriers: In order to uncover all barriers it will be important to discuss ability barriers. Ability barriers stem from self, others and things.
   a. Self: Personal ability issues can be difficult. Always check in with the person's safety. Make sure that they are comfortable in this conversation. Keep the conversation upbeat.
   b. Others: Discussing how others are affecting their ability to complete the task is typically easier. Again, safety is important. People will not explain how other colleagues are barriers if they feel that they are 'ratting' someone out.
   c. Things: The role of the physical world is typically the easiest barrier to discuss. How something is affecting someone's ability to complete the task is something that can be discussed with little fear of consequence. The difficult thing to overcome in this conversation is often people's view of the physical world is that it is unchanging. Help them to see that equipment can be updated or changed.

Stay Focused and Flexible:

If another problem arises during a crucial confrontation it is important to be able to determine if this is a greater problem or if you bookmark it and come back to it after the current issue is dealt with. The authors recommend:

1. Be Focused: Note new problems and select the right one. Resolve the problem that you decide to work on and come back to the other one another time.
2. Be Flexible: Deal with problems one at a time and consciously choose to deal with new issues, don't allow them to be force upon you.

The authors presented four emergent problems and how to address them:

1. People Feel Unsafe: The issue of safety is always important to address in any conversation. Always deal with safety before moving on to another issue.
2. People Violate Your Trust: The issue of 'something came up' allows people to be unaccountable. In order to address this issue it is important to send out the message that if something does come up it is essential to inform someone immediately.
3. A completely different issue becomes a problem: If a bigger issue appears during a crucial confrontation and you feel that it is important to address make sure that you inform the person of the change in conversation and leave a bookmark in the initial confrontation.
4. Explosive emotions take over: In crucial confrontations the other person may go silent or violent at the onset of the conversation. The standard methods to

create safety are not sufficient in these extreme cases. The person must be given the opportunity to calm down. When dealing with anger:
   a. Ensure your own safety: You don't have to be a hero. If you are unsafe, leave the room and allow the person time to cool off.
   b. If you feel safe to talk to the person deal with their emotion and not the issue. Try to see more than the action. Apply AMPP to listen to someone who is emotionally distraught.

A.M.P.P.
Ask - Mirror - Paraphrase - Prime

Part Three: Move to Action

Agree on a Plan and Follow-up

Completing a crucial confrontation is just as important as having one. The authors reiterate this point when they described how "if you do this well, you build commitment and establish a foundation for accountability" (3250 of 5051). When establishing an action plan make sure that the plan is clear for everyone. A complete plan assumes nothing. The authors provide another acronym to maintain a complete plan: WWWF.

W.W.W.F.

WHO-does WHAT-by WHEN-FOLLOWUP

The authors caution that the follow-up should not appear as a micromanagement or abandonment. The authors' described two types of follow-ups:
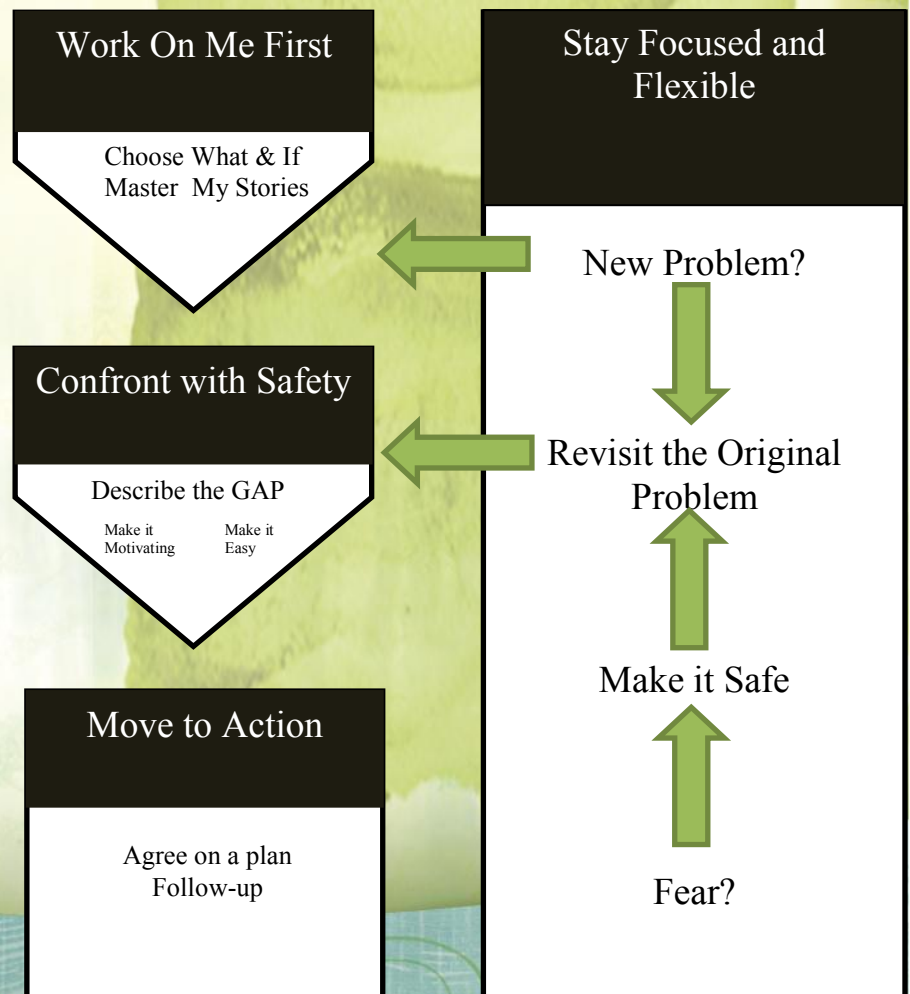
1. Checkups: Do checkups when you're giving the assignment and are nervous or have questions. During the conversation set a time for the checkup letting the person know how important the task is to you and the value of the review.
2. Checkbacks: are designed for a task that is routine and has been assigned to someone who is experienced and productive. Once you have agreed on a plan make sure to follow through with the plan.

The Seven 'Yeah-buts':

1. Confronting Authority
   a. Danger Point- you don't want the person in charge mad at you.
   b. Solution- Here you need to choose between coping and cutting out.
2. Breaking from the pack
   a. Danger Point- You are exposing yourself and others to a whole range of risks.
   b. The solution-Remember to make it safe. Use a contrasting statement to eliminate a possible misunderstanding.
3. Married to a mime
   a. Danger point- when one person wants to talk and the other doesn't.
   b. Solution-Make sure the person knows that talking will strengthen the relationship.

4. Hearsay
   a. Danger point- When others consistently complain to you about a problem, but you never actually see the problem yourself.
   b. Solution-master your own story. Don't adopt other people's stories.
5. Potentially Devastating
   a. Danger point- Most people will not devastate another person.
   b. Solution- Begin to hold people accountable one step at a time.
6. Way out of Line and Scary
   a. Danger point- people who are way out of hand and hold leaders hostage.
   b. Solution- Hold the employee accountable.
7. Confronting the Past
   a. Danger point- Repeating the same mistakes.
   b. Solution- Confront the past.

Put it all Together:

Work On Me First

Choose What & If
Master My Stories

Confront with Safety

Describe the GAP

Make it Motivating   Make it Easy

Move to Action

Agree on a plan
Follow-up

Stay Focused and Flexible

New Problem?

Revisit the Original Problem

Make it Safe

Fear?

Critical Evaluation:

This book was very helpful when dealing with everyday situations. It is an excellent resource for support in knowing what to do in difficult situations where sturdy relationships and accountability are tested. A lot of times when there are broken promises a new program or a policy change is implemented in order to solve the issue. The authors of "Crucial Confrontations" (2005) pointed out that this is not a long-term solution. They suggested, "Physical changes and changes in policies are generally insufficient to propel improvement" (490 of 5051). Although a physical change can temporarily improve things it does not consistently remain positive. As the saying goes "Change people's hearts by changing their minds". In order to make a positive substantial change within an organization you must consider the people who make the organization what it is. If you are able to hold a conversation with someone who has broken a promise they are more likely to succeed if faced with this challenge again. If the people feel heard and have the opportunity to be accountable they will have a better chance of facing challenges and mastering new ideas. This type of workplace atmosphere promotes engagement and employee wellbeing which leads to a successful organization.

About the Authors:

All Four authors have been recognized for their writing. They are all cofounders of the leading coming in corporate training and organizational performance: VitalSmarts.

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Patterson has taught at Bringham Young University's Marriot School of Management.

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Switzler has been involved with training and management initiatives with many organizations around the world. He has taught at the Marriott School of Management at Bringham Young University, at Auburn University, and at the Universtiy of Kentucky.

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