

Conversations come in many forms, from friendly to professional, from low-risk to high-stakes, and from relaxed to tense. Every day we engage in numerous conversations, each which play important roles in shaping our expectations, relationships, and outcomes. Navigating conversations effectively takes certain skills, such as social intelligence, courage, self-control, and even humility.

I encourage you to read *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzer. This book offers tools for talking when stakes are high and led the Athos team through an engaging discussion about crucial conversations.

What exactly is a crucial conversation? According to the authors, a crucial conversation is defined as “A discussion between two or more people where the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong.” (p.3)

Here are the top 10 Team takeaways from *Crucial Conversations*.

#1

Safety First

When stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong, it’s important that everyone involved in the conversation feels safe. Look for signs of fear and bring the conversation back to safety.

#2

Let the Facts Lead

It’s important to stick to the facts during a crucial conversation. While it can be easy to confuse the stories we tell ourselves (which may not be the whole truth) and the facts, always focus on the facts to keep dialogue on track.

From the Book:

“Get back to the facts. Abandon your absolute certainty by distinguishing between hard facts and your invented story.” (p. 129)

#3

Look Within

The key to a successful crucial conversation is having an open dialogue, and to do so you must start with yourself. While you can’t be sure you can control anyone else in the dialogue, you can control yourself.

#4

Find Mutual Purpose

When engaged in a crucial conversation, it’s necessary to find mutual purpose. This means being genuine when looking for a common goal and honestly working to achieve the shared goal instead of manipulating or leading toward a personally desired outcome.

From the Book:

“Mutual purpose means that others perceive that you’re working toward a common outcome in a conversation, that you care about their goals, interests, and values. And vice versa.” (p. 77)

#5

Curiosity is Key

During crucial conversations, it’s common for people to either shut down and walk away or react with anger. In order to bring dialogue back to a safe place, it’s important to become curious. Ask questions and find out why they are feeling the way they are. Be sincere when trying to get to the source of their anger or denial.

#6

Watch Your Words

Words matter, what we say matters, and the way that we say it matters. This doesn't mean we shouldn't engage in crucial conversations, we just have to approach them with purpose. Turning to sarcasm, humor, or negative body language instead of engaging in dialogue is not productive. Words matter, what we say matters, and the way that we say it matters. This doesn't mean we shouldn't engage in crucial conversations, we just have to approach them with purpose. Turning to sarcasm, humor, or negative body language instead of engaging in dialogue is not productive.

#7

What You Say vs. What They Hear

There's often a gap between what we say, what we mean, and how someone else perceives what was said. When engaging in a crucial conversation, blend confidence with humility. Be confident enough to state opinions and facts, but also be open to accept a challenge.

#8

My Way or The Highway

Crucial Conversations defines the "Fool's Choice" as either/or choices. Those who make the "Fool's Choice" believe they have to choose between two outcomes or behaviors — but there are always options in dialogue.

From the Book:

"Watch to see if you're telling yourself that you must choose between peace and honesty, between winning and losing, and so on. Break free of these Fool's Choices by searching for the AND." (p. 49)

#9

Listen Up!

Be genuine when asking others to share their facts and their stories. As they share, *Crucial Conversations* says it's important to remember the ABC's to be a skillful listener: Ask, mirror, paraphrase, and prime.

#10

Self-Assess for Success

According to *Crucial Conversations*, becoming a vigilant self-monitor is important to dialogue. Make sure to frequently step out of the discussion and evaluate your own actions and reactions. Then evaluate how others are reacting to you and adjust your behavior to return to the common goal.