1-Page Book Summary of Crucial Conversations

In *Crucial Conversations: Tools For Talking When The Stakes Are High*, authors Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler argue that **many problems are caused by how people behave when they disagree with others about high-stakes, emotional issues.** Organizational performance and the quality of relationships improve significantly when people learn the skills to handle these crucial conversations effectively.
A crucial conversation is a discussion characterized by high stakes, differing opinions, and strong emotions. Crucial conversations are often typical daily interactions as opposed to planned, high-level meetings. These conversations can have a huge impact on your life. Examples include: ending a relationship, asking a roommate to move out, resolving an issue with an ex-spouse, confronting a coworker about his/her behavior, or giving the boss critical feedback.

We often try to avoid having these conversations because we’re afraid well make matters worse. And in fact, when we do have crucial conversations, we usually handle them badly. **We behave our worst at the most critical moments.** We may withdraw, or rage and say things we later regret.

We typically fail at these conversations because:

- **Nature works against us.** When under stress, we get an adrenaline surge and blood is diverted from the brain to muscles so that our thinking ability suffers.
- **We get caught off guard.** Crucial conversations often catch us by surprise — we have a knee-jerk reaction and later end up wondering, what was I thinking?
- **We lack the right skills.** We don't know where to start in terms of responding to or initiating a crucial conversation, so we just plunge in.
- **Our reaction is self-defeating.** We act in ways that keep us from getting what we want. We're our own worst enemies. For example, when one partner is neglecting the other, the aggrieved partner may respond with sarcasm and sniping — which causes the offending party to spend even less time with him or her.

But this doesn't have to happen. **People can learn the skills to handle these conversations effectively.** And when they do, their career, health, personal relationships, and their organization or company benefit tremendously.

For crucial conversations to be constructive, they must have a shared purpose and the conditions must be safe for everyone to contribute. It's important that all parties participate in order to reach the best conclusion or outcome. Many conversations, however, go off the rails as people act out by pushing their views aggressively, withholding their views, or acting from motives that undercut the shared purpose.

Specifically, there are seven key dialogue principles, including implementation skills you can learn.

### The Seven Dialogue Principles

#### Know Your Heart

In high-risk discussions, stay focused on what you really want (your big-picture goal, such as a stronger relationship), so you don't sidetracked by conversational games, such as trying to win, punish the other person, or keep the peace.

Also, refuse the fool's choice of limiting yourself to an either/or alternative (I can stay silent and keep the peace, or I can speak up and ruin my relationship). Look for ways to do both: speak up and have a stronger relationship.

#### Make the Conditions Safe

The first prerequisite for healthy dialogue is safety. You can't have constructive dialogue when people don't feel safe, because they start acting in unproductive ways and stop contributing to the dialogue. To maintain safety in a conversation, you must **monitor** two elements: what's being discussed and what people are doing in response — both the **content** and the **conditions** of the conversation.

To ensure safe conditions for conversation:

- Notice the point when a conversation turns crucial, and could go off track due to emotional responses.
- Look for safety problems (people withdrawing or behaving aggressively) that short-circuit dialogue, and intervene before they get out of hand.
- Beware of reverting to your style under stress. In crucial conversations, you'll revert to tactics you grew up with (debate, silent treatment, manipulation, etc.). You need to be alert to these tendencies in order to counteract them.

#### Make the Content Safe

For people to feel safe in speaking their minds, there are two requirements: 1) a **mutual purpose** for the conversation (agreement on what we're trying to accomplish); and 2) **mutual respect** — each participant's views and feelings are respected.

When someone doesn't feel safe in saying something potentially controversial, either they don't trust in a mutual purpose (they're
suspicious of ulterior motives), or someone has undermined mutual respect (for instance, by attacking another person, sighing, or eye-rolling). The dialogue can’t resume until respect has been restored.

You need to clarify or rebuild mutual purpose if your motives and goals, or someone else’s, seem to be suspect. Use CRIB skills:

- Commit to seek a mutual purpose (commit to stay in dialogue until finding something that satisfies everyone)
- Recognize the purpose behind the strategy (ask people why they want what they’re pushing for)
- Invent a mutual purpose (if you’re still at odds)
- Brainstorm new strategies (with a clear mutual purpose)

When you need to repair a misunderstanding to restore respect, you can use the skill of contrasting. Contrasting is a don’t/do statement that:

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

An example of contrasting in a couple’s conversation: “I don’t want to suggest that this problem is yours. I think it’s ours. I don’t want to put the burden on you. What I do want is to be able to talk so we understand each other better.”

Control Your Emotions

Our emotions are generated by “stories” we tell ourselves when someone does or says something. These stories are our interpretations of what we saw and/or heard. Negative interpretations lead to negative feelings and then to unproductive actions.

But we can change our emotions by rethinking our stories, or retracing our path from our feelings and actions back to the incident that prompted them: notice your behavior, identify your feelings, analyze the story creating your feelings, and go back to facts (ask yourself, what evidence you have to support your story, and whether the facts might support a different story or conclusion). Also, make sure you’re telling yourself the full story, and haven’t omitted any facts to justify your reaction.

Share Your Stories

Express your views (tell your story) in such a way that others will be receptive, encourage feedback, and be willing to alter your views or story when additional facts warrant. When caught up in unproductive emotions and actions, retrace them to the facts to test their accuracy.

This process can be broken down as follows, remembering the acronym STATE:

- Share your facts: Start with the least controversial.
- Tell your story: Explain what you’re beginning to conclude.
- Ask for others’ paths: Encourage others to share both their facts and their stories.
- Talk tentatively. State your story as a story (your opinion), not a fact.
- Encourage testing: Proactively seek opposing views, so you can test your theory against additional information.

Explore Others’ Paths

To have a constructive conversation, you need to encourage, listen to, and understand others’ views. Start with an attitude of curiosity and patience. Use four listening skills to trace the other person’s path to action (AMPP).

- Ask: Express interest in the others’ views.
- Mirror: Acknowledge the emotions people appear to be feeling.
- Paraphrase: Restate what you’ve heard.
- Prime: If others hold back, offer a guess as to what they may be thinking and feeling to get the discussion started.

As you begin to share your views, remember ABC:

- Agree: Agree when you share views for the most part, rather than arguing over minor points of disagreement.
- Build: Agree where you can, then build. (“I agree completely. In addition, I noticed that…”)
- Compare: When you differ substantially, compare your two views. (“I think I see things differently. Let me explain.”)
Move From Conversation to Results

Once everyone contributes his or her information to a crucial conversation, the final step is action. All the conversational effort is moot unless there's an action plan and follow-through to achieve...

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Here's a preview of the rest of Shortform's Crucial Conversations summary:

Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 1: Recognizing a Crucial Conversation

The authors of Crucial Conversations argue that:

- How people behave when they disagree with others about important, emotional issues is the cause of many problems in work and home life.
- People can learn to handle crucial conversations effectively.
- When people learn how to handle these conversations, their relationships improve and organizational performance improves.

So what are crucial conversations? They're not limited to important people talking about high-level things. They're typical interactions you have every day — which can have a huge impact on your life.

A crucial conversation is a discussion characterized by high stakes, differing opinions, and strong emotions.

Here's an example of each of the criteria:

- Differing opinions differ: You want a promotion but your boss thinks you're not ready.
- High stakes: You and your coworkers are discussing how to change the company's failing marketing strategy.
- Strong emotions: Your spouse thinks you were flirting at a party.

Common Crucial Conversations

There are many crucial conversation topics that, if mishandled, can lead to disastrous results in your personal life or at work. They include:

- **Personal**: Ending a relationship, asking a roommate to move out, resolving a custody issue with an ex-spouse, dealing with a troubled teen, confronting a loved one about problem behavior.
- **Work**: Confronting a coworker about a problem, giving the boss critical feedback, critiquing a colleague's work, presenting a negative performance review, confronting a team member who isn't following through, confronting a coworker who has poor hygiene.

Why Crucial Conversations Fail

Despite the importance of crucial conversations, we often avoid them because we're afraid we'll make matters worse. If total avoidance isn't possible, we may send emails or leave messages instead of talking face-to-face.

When we do have crucial conversations, we handle them badly. We behave our worst at the most critical moments. We yell, withdraw, or say things we later regret. This...
Shortform Exercise: Your Crucial Conversations

A crucial conversation is a discussion characterized by high stakes, differing opinions, and strong emotions. Your skill in handling these conversations directly affects your success at work and in your personal relationships.

Think of a crucial conversation at work that you're avoiding or not handling well. How could handling it successfully boost your career?

Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 2: Dialogue is Powerful

Many people make the mistake in crucial conversations of believing they have to make unpalatable either/or choices, for instance, 1) choose between telling the truth about a problem vs. 2) staying silent to preserve a relationship with a boss, coworker, or loved one.

Believing you have only two problematic alternatives to choose from is a fool's choice. There are always more alternatives.

We've all made the fool's choice to not say anything about issues with bosses, family, and friends. The consequences can be unfortunate: In the workplace, it can lead to terrible decisions; in personal relationships, it can create misery when partners are afraid to speak up.

Here's an example of how employee silence can affect a company. The leaders of a company are planning to move its headquarters for flawed reasons. If the employees make a fool's choice and fail to point out potential downsides for fear of retribution, company leaders will make a decision with harmful future consequences and waste money.

But there's another option: A manager can speak up honestly and also preserve the relationship by using dialogue skills to be persuasive and respectful. If she succeeds the leadership may listen and revise the moving plans.

Dialogue Replaces the Fool's Choice

The key to successful conversations is getting all relevant information on the table.

When people express their opinions honestly, share their feelings, and articulate ideas — even if their ideas are controversial or unpopular — the result is dialogue, the free exchange of meaning or information.

The Pool of Meaning

Each of us brings to conversations our own feelings, ideas, and experiences. This information constitutes our personal pool of meaning, which drives our actions.

When people engage in a crucial conversation, they add their unique information to a shared pool of meaning. It's important that all opinions be reflected in the shared pool so the best quality decisions can be made. Everyone should feel comfortable contributing their information — even...

What Our Readers Say

This is the best summary of Crucial Conversations I've ever read. I learned all the main points in just 20 minutes.
Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 3: Know Your Heart

Learning dialogue skills starts with diligent self-examination because if you don't understand yourself, you can't be fully effective at dialogue.

In crucial conversations, you'll revert to tactics you grew up with (debate, silent treatment, manipulation, etc.). You need to understand your tendencies in order to counteract them and learn new skills.

You also need to be able to see how you're contributing to the problems you're experiencing. In disagreements, it's human nature to focus on what you think someone else is doing wrong. But when you focus on blaming or finding fault, you lose track of what you really want, to your detriment.

For example, two children who get into a fight over who should be first to use the bathroom forgot their objective (using the bathroom) when they became focused on winning the argument. As a result, they prolonged their misery.

It's important to begin high-risk discussions with the heart (with the right motives) and stay focused no matter what happens.

You do this by making two heart-based assumptions:

1. First, you must know what you want, and despite temptations, stick with your goals.
2. Second, don't make fool's choices (either/or choices). Rather than choosing between fight and flight, realize that dialogue is always an option.

Example: Greta the CEO

Here's an example of how switching your motives unconsciously due to emotion can affect your ability to stay in productive conversation.

Greta, a corporate CEO, has been trying for months to get her top managers to cut costs, but they've been dragging their feet. During a crucial conversation on the problem, a manager explains frankly why progress hasn't been made: Greta herself is the roadblock.

The manager explains that while Greta says she wants her team to cut expenses, everyone knows that she's spending money building and decorating a new office for herself, which comes across as hypocritical. Greta responds to the manager's honesty by tensing up, looking as if she is under attack, and starting to point a finger. Her motive has...

Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 4: Make the Conditions Safe

The first prerequisite for healthy dialogue is safety. You can't have constructive dialogue when people don't feel safe, because they start acting in unproductive ways and stop contributing their information to the shared pool.

To maintain safety in a conversation, you must consider two elements: what is being discussed and what's happening in response — both the content and the conditions of the conversation.

Most people focus on the content, but the conditions are equally important.

- If conditions are safe, you can say almost anything and people will listen.
- If you're not afraid you're being attacked, you can hear almost anything and not become defensive. People rarely become defensive because of what you're saying (content), only when they don't feel safe.
- You're receptive to potentially threatening feedback when you believe the other person has your best interests in mind and you respect their opinion. You trust their motives and don't feel a need to defend yourself. Conversely, if you don't feel safe, you can't take any feedback. You suspect even well-intentioned comments (“What do you mean by saying I look good?”).

Nonetheless, it's easy to get caught up in the content and care so much about the subject that you don't notice what's happening
to the dialogue, which can quickly become unproductive. For instance, you or someone else may be speaking too forcefully; others may feel threatened and shut down, or become increasingly forceful themselves.

You need to monitor both content (the topic) and conditions (what people are doing in response) simultaneously. Look at what and why: People are getting upset. Why is this happening?

The rest of this chapter focuses on how to monitor and maintain safe conditions for conversation, while Chapter 5 focuses on making the content safe (discussing difficult topics safely).

The steps for keeping conditions safe are:

1. Spot the turning point: Notice when the conversation becomes crucial.
2. Watch signs of a safety problem.
3. See if others are moving toward silence or...

Shortform Exercise: Monitoring Yourself

You can get so involved in the content of an intense conversation that you lose track of what you’re doing and how others are reacting (your brain disengages and your emotions predominate). For conversations to be successful you need to pay attention to both the content and the conditions, so you can adjust if a dialogue goes off track.

Think about some of your toughest conversations. What were the cues (physical, emotional, behavioral) that your brain was beginning to disengage, and your emotions were driving you away from dialogue?

Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 5: Make the Content Safe

We've all been part of conversations in which we didn't feel safe to say what was on our mind. This chapter explains what to do to fix that. The basic steps in brief are:

1. Step away from the content of the conversation.
2. Determine whether mutual purpose or mutual respect is at risk.
3. Restore safety by restoring mutual purpose or respect (Use skills: apologize, contrast, rebuild mutual purpose; or, if you don't already have a mutual purpose, create one using CRIB: Commit, Respect, Invent, Brainstorm).
4. Rejoin the conversation: Return to the issue at hand.

Here's a look at each step in detail.

1. Step Away

The best approach when you don't feel comfortable speaking your mind, is to step away from the content of the conversation until you can enhance safety.

   Example: A Couple's Argument

   A couple, Yvonne and Jotham, have a conflict over intimacy — Jotham wants to have sex more often than Yvonne does. If Yvonne declines his invitation, Jotham goes silent and sulks (then she wants intimacy even less). If she goes along with it when she doesn't want to, she feels resentful. Things keep escalating.

   Yvonne attempts to discuss the problem, but Jotham immediately resorts to silence or sarcasm (an indication that he
feels unsafe in speaking his mind): “I don’t think I’m in the mood.” Yvonne comes back with: “What’s that supposed to mean?” Jotham gets angry, and Yvonne walks away because she doesn’t feel safe expressing her thoughts.

By stepping out of the conversation, she can take time to figure out why it’s unsafe and how to create conditions where they can both speak their minds.

### 2. Is Mutual Purpose or Respect at Risk?

The first step to building safety is understanding which of two requirements — mutual purpose or mutual respect — is at risk. Each requires a different solution.

**Mutual Purpose: The Prerequisite for Dialogue**

To have a successful crucial conversation, the participants must agree on a mutual purpose for having the conversation in the first place. Members believe everyone is working toward a common...

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**Shortform Exercise: Finding a Mutual Purpose**

Sometimes we end up in a debate because we have different purposes or goals. The best approach is to stop debating, back up, and create a mutual purpose. (The CRIB steps — Commit, Recognize, Invent, Brainstorm — may help.)

Think of a crucial conversation that you need to have in your relationship. Do you have a mutual purpose - do you agree on what you want to see happen? If so, what is it?

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Shortform Exercise: Making Contrasting Statements

When someone in a crucial conversation mistrusts your motives, you can use the technique of contrasting to help reassure them and get the dialogue back on track. You do it by first stating what you don’t want or intend, followed by what you do want.

Think of a touchy conversation you’re reluctant to have because you’re concerned the other person will get the wrong impression. Write a contrasting statement that you could use to reassure the person.

Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 6: Control Your Emotions

By learning to control your emotions, you’ll be in a better position to use the tools discussed so far (dual processing, contrasting, creating mutual purpose, etc.) to have successful crucial conversations.

Getting a better understanding of how emotions work is the first step. When we lose our cool we tend to blame others for pushing our buttons or making us mad. But we’re the drivers of our emotions, which in turn drive our actions.

Emotions don’t just happen. Here are two truths about them:

- Emotions aren’t forced upon you by others. Others don’t make you mad; you make yourself mad. You create your own emotions — you make yourself angry, insulted, or frustrated.
- Once you’ve created your emotions, you can do one of two things: Rethink them or be driven by them to act in unproductive ways. To put it another way, you either control your emotions, or you’ll be controlled by them.

Here’s an example of how emotions can lead to unproductive behavior. Maria is a copywriter who worked with her boss, Louis, on a project, which they were supposed to present jointly. But Louis presented the entire project himself without giving Maria a chance to speak. She’s angry and resentful, and feels betrayed. Nonetheless, she doesn’t want to come across as oversensitive, so she erupts occasionally with sarcasm (masking) and cheap shots (avoiding), which is jeopardizing their working relationship.

Maria’s story illustrates some of the pitfalls of not controlling your emotions. If you don’t control your emotions, matters will get worse. On the other hand, if you suppress them, they’ll still surface, for instance through sarcasm or body language. Either way, you’re being held hostage or driven by your emotions, which makes conversation impossible.

You Can Change Your Emotions

When you have strong feelings, you can influence and often change them by thinking through them. Choosing different emotions makes it possible to then choose behaviors that lead to better results.

When you’re in an emotional state,...

Shortform Exercise: Master Your Story

When we see and hear something that affects us, we tell ourselves a story explaining what happened, which then drives how we feel and behave. This can be counterproductive, but we can change our stories and therefore our emotions.
Think of a time when you felt very strongly about something someone said or did. What story did you tell yourself to generate your feelings?

**Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 7: Share Your Stories**

Sharing your point of view when you have something difficult to say isn't easy, but you can learn to do it successfully. Remember, it's important that everyone's information, no matter how controversial, be included in the shared pool.

Most conversations start on autopilot with friendly small talk, but in high-stakes conversations your emotions kick in and you don't do as well.

When it comes to sharing touchy information:

- People often say nothing.
- They're too blunt.
- They say only part of what's on their mind — they understate their views for fear of hurting others, or they sugarcoat their message.

However, the best approach is to speak your mind completely, but in a way that makes it safe for others to hear and respond.

**Example: The Suspicious Affair**

A wife finds a hotel receipt and mistakenly thinks her husband is having an affair. The worst way to handle a touchy situation like this would be to plunge in with an accusation followed by a threat — that's what most people would do.

But there's a constructive way the woman can share and resolve her concerns using several dialogue steps (with the acronym STATE). More on those steps in a moment.

**Setting the Stage**

To speak honestly when it could offend others, you have to maintain safety by blending confidence and humility.

**Confidence**: You must have the confidence to say what needs to be said to the appropriate person (and not complain to someone else), and confidence that you can speak honestly without attacking the other person.

**Humility**: You must be humble enough to realize that you don't know everything, and you don't always have to get your way. Your opinion is a starting point for discussion. With new information you might change your mind — so you express your opinion and also encourage others to express theirs.

**STATE Your Path**

To have a healthy conversation about a tough topic, you must take care not to violate respect or safety with threats and accusations, despite your worst fears. To create conditions conducive to dialogue:

**Start with...**

**Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 8: Explore Others’ Paths**

When others shut down or blow up (resort to silence/violence), it's important to get them to rejoin the dialogue. You can't work through your differences until all parties add their input to the pool of information.
While you can't force others to participate, you can take steps to make it more comfortable for them to do so. The key to encouraging participation is letting them know it's OK to share their path to action (their facts and stories), regardless of how controversial it might be. Here's how to do this.

**Start with Heart — Listen**

- **Be sincere**: When you ask people to share what's on their minds, make sure you mean it and be prepared to listen. People instantly recognize insincerity.
- **Be curious**: When others express intense emotions, you should become curious. Wonder what's behind the emotion — getting to the source is the only way to get back to dialogue.
- **Remain curious**: When people begin to share their emotionally charged or unflattering stories, it's natural to start judging them. To avoid overreacting, maintain your curiosity. As yourself why a reasonable person would react this way. When you retrace the other person's path, you generally understand their conclusion.
- **Be patient**: After others have shared their feelings and opinions, give them time to wind down before moving on with the conversation. Adrenaline stays in the bloodstream and emotions take time to dissipate.

**Encourage Others to Rethink Their Path**

Others need help to retrace their path to action, but most of us fail to do this.

We typically enter the conversation at the end of their path, when they're starting to act out their story (with silence or violence). Start where they are and help them work backward to the source — from feelings, to what they concluded, to what they observed.

- **Break the cycle**: The typical response to nonconstructive behavior is to match it. But you need to stop the cycle by stepping away from the interaction and making it safe for the other person to talk about their path to action. Help them...

**Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 9: From Conversation to Results**

Once everyone contributes this or her information to a crucial conversation, the final step is action. All the conversational effort is moot unless there's an action plan and follow-through to achieve results. This is a critical turning point at which new challenges can come up.

Groups often fail to convert the ideas into action and results for two reasons:

- They aren't clear on how decisions will be made.
- They fail to act on the decisions they do make.

This chapter focuses on what it takes to move from ideas to action.

**Transitioning from Dialogue to Decision-Making**

If you don't clarify the conclusions and decisions emerging from the discussion, you can run into unmet expectations later on.

Problems develop in two ways:

- **People don’t understand how decisions will be made.** You may have agreed to something in principle, but not to any specific actions (yet people may act and be surprised when others object).
- **Sometimes no decision gets made.** Ideas fade or people can't get a handle on implementing them — or everyone is waiting for someone else to decide.

**Decide How You’ll Decide**

To avoid these two problems, you need to decide how you'll decide.
Dialogue isn’t decision-making. It’s a process for gathering all relevant information, which involves everyone. But the fact that someone has shared their input doesn’t mean they’ll get to participate in all decisions.

To prevent misunderstanding, it’s important to separate talking from decision-making: Make clear how decisions will be made, who will make them, and why.

Here are the typical starting points.

**Situation 1: When the line of authority is clear**

When you’re in a position of authority you decide which method of decision making you’ll use.

For example, managers and parents decide how to decide; it’s part of their responsibility as leaders. Vice presidents don’t ask hourly employees to decide pricing changes or product lines. Parents don’t ask kids to set their own curfew or make household decisions.

Leaders can turn decision...

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**Shortform Exercise: Decision-Making**

Four common ways of making decisions are: command, consult, vote, and consensus. Which method to use depends on the circumstances. You choose based on four questions: Who has a stake, who has the knowledge, who needs to be on board, and how many people need to be involved.

Think of an important decision you recently took part in or were affected by. How was the decision made?

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**Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 10: Tough Cases**

People often think their situations are unique and that dialogue skills outlined in this book don’t apply, or won’t work. According to the authors, the skills do in fact apply to virtually any issue, although some problems are more challenging than others.

This chapter looks at some tough (but not uncommon) challenges and how to handle them.

**Harassment**

You’re uncomfortable with the way you’re being treated, although you don’t view it as blatant harassment.

**Challenge**

You find the behavior offensive, but it’s so subtle or sporadic that you’re hesitant to go to your boss or HR for fear of looking like you’re overreacting. Getting caught up in a villain story could drive you to respond in ways that end up hurting you.

**Solution**

Tell the full story. Admit it if you’ve put up with the behavior for a while without saying anything. Then discuss it with the other person. Try to treat the person as reasonable — even if the behavior isn’t.

After establishing a mutual purpose for the conversation, STATE your path. If you can be respectful but firm, the individual usually will stop the objectionable behavior. If the behavior ever crosses the line, contact HR to ensure your rights are protected.

**Overly Sensitive Spouse**

What can you do when your spouse is highly sensitive to criticism? When you try to give constructive feedback they overreact.
Challenge

When one or both partners in a marriage have short fuses, they may tacitly agree to not say anything about most problems to prevent blow ups. Issues have to be huge before they're discussed.

Solution

To start with, STATE your path: Share your facts, Tell your story, Ask for others' paths, Talk tentatively, Encourage testing.

Also:

- When something bothers you, address it right away.
- Use contrasting statements (what you don't/do want).
- Ensure the conversation is safe for both parties.
- If the other person still becomes defensive, don't give up — rethink your approach, increase safety, and try again.

Having a confidante and coach to give...

 Crucial Conversations Summary Chapter 11: Tying It All Together

When you're involved in a fast-moving crucial conversation, it can be hard to remember and apply the dialogue skills and principles. This chapter offers a simple suggestion for getting started, as well as a quick review of the principles and skills.

Focus On These Two Things

First, the suggestion: One way people have succeeded in improving their handling of crucial conversations is by focusing on just two key principles: Pay attention to what's happening, and ensure safety.

1. Pay attention to what's happening: Constantly ask yourself whether you're in or out of dialogue. This makes a huge difference.

Even if you can't remember the acronyms or steps you can help maintain dialogue by noticing whether you or others are falling into silence or violence. Even if you don't know exactly how to fix the problem when you see it, it's worth trying something to restore the dialogue.

You can use the statement, "I think we've moved away from dialogue," to get back on track.

2. Ensure safety: When you notice that you and others have moved away from dialogue, do something to make it safer — for instance, asking a question and showing interest in others' views.

Just do something to make others comfortable: smile, apologize if you've moved to silence or violence, or request a brief timeout. Although the book suggests specific skills (such as contrasting, mirroring, priming), there are many other things you can do to increase safety.

Prepare for a Crucial Conversation

The next step is applying the book's seven dialogue principles. To help you coach yourself or someone else through a crucial conversation, here's quick reference guide.

Quick Reference: The Seven Dialogue Principles

1. Know your heart

Skills: Focus on what you want; refuse the fool's choice

Crucial questions: What do I really want? How should I be behaving to achieve what I want? What do I not want?

2. Make the conditions safe

Skills: Be alert to the point when the conversation turns crucial. Look for safety threats. Beware of reverting to your style under...
In an Afterword published in 2012, the four authors reflect on what they learned in 10 years of teaching their dialogue principles and getting feedback from people who used the principles in crucial conversations. Their insights included:

- A crucial conversation can pop up at any time and you need to be alert to the signs.
- Your position or title in your company doesn't matter. Guiding a crucial conversation is the responsibility of the first person to recognize the key moment.
- Be suspicious of your convictions during moments of strong emotion.
- When you're driven by a desperate need to be right, you don't see others as they really are — they become threats.
- Your emotions are incredibly fluid. In crucial moments they're almost always wrong. You can learn to change them. And as you change your emotions you learn to change how you see those around you and change you own life as well.
- When the other person...