



A Summary and Workbook

Crucial Conversations – Summary and Workbook Questions

1. Chapter 1: What Is a Crucial Conversation and Who Cares?
 - a. Defined:
 - i. Opinions vary
 - ii. Stakes are high
 - iii. Emotions run strong
 - b. Why is it so hard to do these conversations well?
 - i. Our body is hard wired for flight or fight – these conversations trigger this stance
 - c. The Law of Crucial Conversations:
 - i. Crucial Conversations are at the heart of almost all chronic problems in our organizations, teams, and relationships. The key skill of effective leaders and successful relationships is the capacity to address emotionally and politically risky issues.
 - d. Because of this, we learn these skills, teach it to others, and find health.

Your turn – Jot some notes down on three specific crucial conversations:

Conversation 1: One that you had that went badly/not like you wanted it to in church:

Conversation 2: One that you had that went badly/not like you wanted in a personal relationship:

Conversation 3: One that you NEED to have to help the health of a relationship or church issue:

2. Chapter 2 – Mastering Crucial Conversations – the Power of Dialogue
 - a. Definition: Fool’s Choice – when I feel I only have two choices, speak up and suffer dire consequences (firing, end relationships, political repercussions, deep embarrassment) or stay silent and tolerate the intolerable.

Your Turn: Think of a conversation where you feel like you only have two choices: to speak up and face big consequences or be silent and suffer other consequences:

- b. *What is at the core of mastering crucial conversations, and ending the Fool’s choice?*
The free flow of relevant information
 - i. People openly and honestly expressing their opinions, sharing their feelings, articulating theories, even when they are unpopular or controversial.
- c. Definition: Pool of Meaning – there is always a pool of meaning in conversation, a shared understanding of information. Crucial conversations have less shared meanings. The larger we can make the pool, even if it is an agreement to disagree, the smarter the decisions, the more buy-in from participants. Smaller pools = bad decisions. So fill up the Pool of Meaning, even if only one person will ultimately decide.



3. Chapter 3 – Start with the Heart – How to stay focused on what you really want
 - a. Always begin with ME – I am the only person I can effectively change with any true success. *Work on me first, us second.*
 - b. We need to recognize our own tactics and tendencies:
 - i. Winning – saving face, being right, getting angry, cutting off discussion
 - ii. Punishing – because we are embarrassed, shamed, feel disrespected
 - iii. Keeping the Peace – staying silent or making jokes or not participating

Your Turn – Looking back over your last few crucial conversations – what tactic did you fall into? Do you have preferred tendencies, or do you sample them all? If you asked staff or people you have relationships with – what would THEY say your tendency is?

- c. How do you stop yourself from slipping into these, since we are hard-wired for much of these reactions when conversations are crucial?
 - i. Asking questions of ourselves changes our brain's processing and can, with practice, overcome these tendencies toward unhelpful tactics. Your brain and your entire body can be changed with the right question:
 - ii. *What do I really want? What is my ultimate goal for this issue/relationship? Is what I am doing right now, my current stance, going to get me to that goal?*

Your Turn – Look back at the initial conversations you jotted down – make a note of what you really wanted, and how your stance affected the outcome?

Conversation 1:

Conversation 2:

- d. Getting out of the Fool's Choice:
- i. What do I want for myself, the other person and the relationship?
 - ii. What do I NOT want? What is my fear?
 - iii. Then add an AND: *How can I have what I want AND not get what is unwanted/what I am afraid of?*
 - iv. These questions open up creativity and out of the box thinking, as opposed to triggering or encouraging our defenses

Your turn - Try this for Conversation 3, the one in the future:

What do I want for myself, the other person, and the relationship?

What do I NOT want? What am I afraid might happen?

How can I have what I want AND not get what I don't want?

4. Chapter 4 – Learn to Look – How to notice when safety is at risk
 - a. Most crucial content is already what many would deem ‘unsafe’; here we are talking about the conditions in which the conversation takes place.
 - b. Definitions:
 - i. Safe – you can say anything, both parties feel open and are able to put into the shared pool of meaning without fear
 - ii. Unsafe – a feeling that you might be attacked or led astray from your purpose, people don’t share when they don’t feel safe. Instead, they go silent, or fight back.
 - c. Two ways people act when they feel unsafe:
 - i. They go silent, they mask their feelings, avoid or deflect questions, withdraw
 - ii. They go to violence, fight, control, label, attack
 - d. “You don’t have to get angry about it!” “I’m NOT ANGRY!” + notice physical changes, like clenched fists, hand in front of mouth, etc.
 - e. It is very hard to self-monitor safety, so figuring out your style helps you work it through – take the test on pages 64-67 to find your pattern, and see where you are good or need work in developing conditions for safety.



5. Chapter 5 – Make it Safe to talk about almost anything
 - a. Start with the Heart – What do I really want?
 - b. Find a Mutual Purpose – safety happens when it is perceived you are both working toward a common outcome –
 - i. Questions– Do they believe I care about their goals? Do they trust my motives?
 - ii. You must really care in order to be effective at finding a mutual purpose!
 - c. Find Mutual Respect – a perception of disrespect will often trigger the violence/silence triggers.
 - i. Question – Do others believe I respect them?
 - ii. Prayer: *Lord, help me to forgive those who sin differently than I*
 - d. Skills to get to Mutual Respect:
 - i. Apologize when appropriate – sincerely! Check your motives – you have to give up being right/winning to get to what you really want.

- ii. Contrasts to help with a misunderstanding – if you spoke and unintentionally caused them to feel disrespected, try a contrasting statement
 1. “I don’t disrespect you/not like you/not care AND I do care about, respect, like this purpose”
 2. I do not mean any disrespect of your housekeeping skills, AND I do care about dividing up our chores so we both feel we are sharing equally.
 3. These can be dropped into a pool of meaning early on, to help avoid misunderstandings, like at the beginning of a critical conversation – “I don’t think you are a bad accountant, and I do intend to get to the bottom of the financial issues that remain unanswered.
- e. Getting to Mutual Purpose – when there is a difference of opinion, and there doesn’t seem to be a place of overlap of purpose, try these skills:
 - i. Make a commitment statement to get to a common purpose: “I hope we can both agree to look for a place of agreement” or “I commit to staying in this discussion until we find a solution we both can work with”
 - ii. Look for a purpose behind the strategic issues – ask ‘Why do you want that’, and listen to the answer. What are their real purposes? What are your real purposes? Often – they are the same! Separate strategic (how we get to the purpose) from the purpose itself, and find agreement on the purpose. “We both agree that we want the church to have a great worship service”; “We both want a happy and healthy teenager”
 - iii. Invent a mutual purpose – if you can’t find one – invent a new one! Take the issue a step further away – instead of “I want contemporary music and you want traditional music”, go to “We both want excellent music in our worship service”. Go deeper and wider in searching for a mutual purpose than the contents of this particular issue.
 - iv. Brainstorm new strategies – Once you’ve found a mutual purpose, you can usually now have safety enough to share pools of meaning, even where you don’t agree. You are now both on the same side – seeking the mutual purpose- and can look for solutions that meet the purpose.

Your Turn – Look at one of your conversations that didn't go well – where are there issues of safety? Did one party move to silence or violence?

What kind of mutual respect and/or finding of mutual purpose might you try if you had this conversation again?

6. Chapter 6 – Master My Stories – How to stay in Dialogue when you are angry, scared or hurt
 - a. Key understanding: Emotions are from you – no one GIVES you emotions, nor can they cause them. You choose – to act or be acted on by emotions. It is that space (sometimes a very tiny space!) to choose that is key to mastering your stories.
 - b. See & Hear Facts/events → Tell Yourself a Story → Feelings → Actions



- c. You can change the story; reinterpret the facts/events - thus changing the feelings and actions.
 - d. Sometimes, it helps to look at the reverse to figure out why you are acting in a way that is counter to your own purposes:
 - i. Why am I in silence or violence (Act) → What am I feeling (feeling) → What story am I telling myself (story) → What evidence do I have for this story (Fact/Event)

Your Turn – Take one of your 2 already-happened conversations, and work backwards to figure out why you did what you did in the conversation –

what were you feeling

what story did you tell yourself

what evidence did you have for the story

- e. Three clever stories that trip us up to watch for:
- i. It's not my fault, I'm the VICTIM here
 - ii. It's all their fault, they are the VILLAIN
 - iii. I am HELPLESS in this situation
 - iv. Check your heart if your feelings/stories come down to these answers – is this completely true? What evidence do you have? Have you checked all the evidence, or just those facts that build up these clever stories? How are you protecting yourself from your own issues/stories/feelings? What new stories, based on evidence could help:
 1. Victims become Actors, able to take action
 2. Villains become Humans, who are as sinful and loving as any human
 3. Helpless become Able, capable of taking action

Your Turn – Find a partner, share the outlines of a crucial conversation you want to have with someone but it makes you fearful, hurt or angry. Take turns:

See & Hear Facts/events → What are your facts/events?

Tell Yourself a Story → What is the story you are telling yourself

Feelings → What feelings does this raise up for you?

Actions → What is the action you want to take?

The listener in each case should provide feedback on what they are hearing; are there any clever stories, piling on of facts, physical signs that might shut down sharing meaning?

7. Chapter 7 – State my Path – How to speak persuasively, not abrasively
 - a. Share your Facts – start with the least controversial, most persuasive elements from your own path
 - b. Tell your Story – explain what you are beginning to conclude
 - c. Ask for other’s paths – Encourage others to share their facts and their stories – Here is the SHARED POOL OF MEANING!
 - d. Talk tentatively – your story is your story, not a fact – remember confidence AND humility. The Goldilocks standard – not too hard, not too soft – just right!
 - e. Encourage Testing – make it safe for others to express differing or opposing viewpoints. If everyone is quiet and not answering – try devil’s advocate. Watch out for your reactions!! A scowl or grunt or face palm all tell a story contrary to the safe space for shared pools of meaning.
 - f. What if I have a STRONG belief that I am right – not delicate feedback or possible theories of how to do something, but I’m convinced I’m right.
 - i. Question: How would I behave if I really wanted a goal of buy-in from the other party/parties?
 - ii. CHECK for resistance from others – going silent, telling jokes, avoiding issues
 - iii. If you find resistance – tone it down, go back to your question about meeting your goals



8. Chapter 8 – Explore Other’s Paths – How to listen when others blow up or clam up
 - a. If someone is blowing up or clamming up – they don’t feel safe.
 - b. Start with your heart – get really ready to listen. Be curious, stay curious, be patient. Ask more questions and make less statements
 - c. Encourage and help others to retrace THEIR paths –
 - i. What makes them blow up or clam up (Act) → What are they feeling? (feeling) → What story are they telling themselves (story) → What evidence do they have for this story (Fact/Event)?
 - d. Listening tools to try:
 - i. Ask questions
 - ii. Mirror – confirm feelings behind “I’m fine”
 - iii. Paraphrase – to acknowledge the story they have

- iv. Prime the pump when things get stuck – “Are you thinking I’m going to fire you? Because I’m not”
- e. What if the story/facts you get are just plain wrong?
 - i. Find a place of agreement – “we can both agree we need better music”
 - ii. Build on what you can agree on – So from there, where could we improve quality?
 - iii. Compare – I see this a little differently – we agree on this, and I see this strategy versus your strategy. How can we make this work better for both of us?

Your Turn: Go back to the partner you had for the last conversation, and talk role play the following: One of you is a church organist, the other is a pastor new to the church. The conversation is to be held around who is going to pick the music for each week’s worship. New pastor – you’d like more contemporary music to appeal to new generations, and not even have organ music some weeks. Organist – you would like to keep your job and share lots of beautiful organ music with everyone, especially young people.

Practice telling your story as you did in the last exercise

Practice listening to each other using the Listening Tools.

Practice asking the other person to walk back their feelings, stories, events as outlined above

Give feedback to each other.

- 9. Chapter 9 – Move to Action – Turning Crucial Conversations into Action and Results
 - a. You put all that work into building a pool of meaning, making it safe, brainstorming strategies – but we often become unclear what comes next for action. MANY churches get stuck here!! Dialogue is not decision making.
 - b. Need clarity on - Who makes the decision here – and How will it be made:
 - i. Command – someone decides
 - ii. Consult – I’m gathering ideas, evaluating options, making a choice and communicating the choice and facts/stories that go with it
 - iii. Vote- efficient when there are several good options – watch for people who are shut out of the process or clam up
 - iv. Consensus – use on big important decisions that need high quality – because this takes time! Don’t use for simpler things

- c. Finish Clearly –
 - i. Who does
 - ii. What
 - iii. By when
 - iv. What is the checkup/followup/accountability date?
 - v. Record this all
 - vi. Hold people accountable

10. Resources for the book:

- a. www.CrucialConversations.com/exclusive
- b. **Attached: Model, Conversation Planner, Talking Politics, Life-Changing Crucial Conversations**