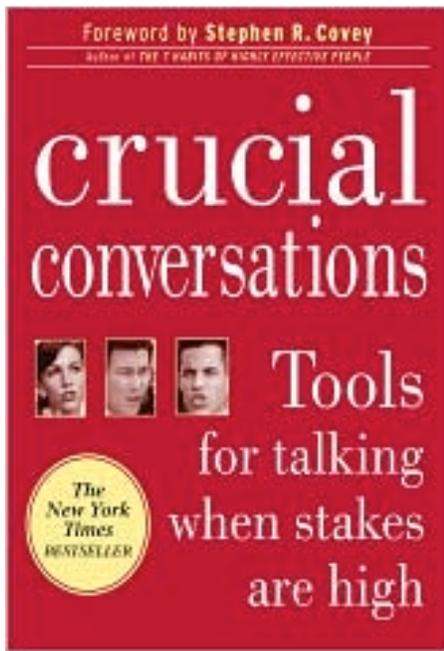




# LEADERSHIP

## BOOK OF THE MONTH



## Crucial Conversations

*Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*

By: Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler, Stephen Covey

RANDY

DON

CONTENT:



STYLE:



USEFULNESS:



Read it? Join our Shared Pool of Meaning!

### GOOD STUFF

Crucial Conversations creates a new language around communications and how they can best be handled. It approaches the issue in a very human way that stimulates our desire to relate to others while feeling good about us. You will read some real and concrete methods for getting control of yourself and staying focused through those challenging moments that pop up in everyone's life.

This topic is so universal, that everyone can learn something. This is the type of book you want to own multiple of copies of so you can give them away to others.

### NOT - SO - GOOD - STUFF

There are so many techniques that it might be overwhelming to try and use them all. You can pick up a common theme in the techniques, but it is easy to get a little lost, especially in the heat of a crucial conversation!

### BOTTOM LINE

This topic is universal! Start having deliberate conversations.

## BOOK SUMMARY

People live together and apart at the same time. We have deep relationships and share work with one another, yet we live within our own strengths, emotions, and perspective. The potential of any one individual is extremely high, yet the potential of the collective wisdom is unlimited...IF we can get it all out on the table.

Crucial Conversations exist when the stakes are high, opinions vary, and when emotions run strong...and it is in these conversations where our greatest potential lies. This book outlines ways to deliberately handle these conversations in a healthy and productive way.

# Converting Ideas Into Action

## 3 Key Concepts



Shared Pool of Meaning



Start With the Heart – What Do You Really Want?



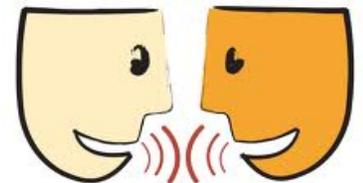
Maintain Mutual Purpose and Mutual Respect

### **Key Concept #1 – Shared Pool of Meaning**

**BOOK** Perhaps the core concept of the book is the “Shared Pool of Meaning”. Every difficult conversation has multiple perspectives, opinions, and even variations of the “facts at hand”. These combine to make our own personal “pool of meaning”. We live in our own pool. When a crucial conversation comes about, the pools of the involved parties do not intersect each other (if they did, it wouldn’t be a crucial conversation). In order to effectively communicate, participants must work together to create a *shared* pool of meaning. This shared pool contains the relevant thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of the involved parties... at least those that the parties are willing to share.

When the shared pool of meaning is too shallow, we don’t have a good basis for resolving the conflict. Knowledge and emotions go unrecognized and unspoken. While the conversation may end, the conflict does not. However, if all involved parties share their knowledge and emotions, the shared pool becomes deep giving the parties the best chance at achieving the best possible resolution to the conflict.

**DON** I recently advised a group of university students giving a leadership seminar to other students. They had found an “I” vs “You” exercise that is pretty slick. Two students are selected and given roles to play in a conflict. They are asked to act out the conflict with no further direction. This is repeated with different students and different conflicts while the facilitator quietly keeps a tally of how many times the word “I” and the word “You” are used. At the end, the facilitator reviews each conflict and asks the group which ones were resolved in a healthy manner and which ones were toxic. Then the facilitator looks for the pattern... were conflicts better resolved when the word “I” was used or the word “You” was used most often?



The truth of the matter is that success probably comes more from the word “we” than either “I” or “You”, but the point of the exercise is to get participants to acknowledge that the other person has a different perspective than you do. When a conflict arises (which is a good thing by the way as long as it is handled well), it is too easy to get lost in our own forest of thoughts. We make the unconscious universal mistake that “everyone else MUST think like I do”. We don’t spend time trying to hear to the other person’s perspective in our effort to get out our own perspective.

**RANDY** One of my favorite sayings is that conflict and communication rarely coexist. Humans generally want the same thing. Conflict arises between people because one person believes that what they want, and another person wants, is somehow mutually exclusive. If you get more pie, I get less. But what if you could both make the pie bigger? Then you could both have more. If you have an on-going relationship with someone, what you want and they want is probably, instead, mutually inclusive.

In my own practice, I find that most organizations' #1 problem is communication. People don't disagree with each other. They simply fail to talk through issues and eventually start to emotionally withdraw. Left unaddressed, people retreat to their own silo's and it becomes us against them. Now the tragedy of this whole deal is that they really wanted the same thing all along, they just failed to practice healthy communication.

Think about what a difference it would make in your relationships if you started from the premise that you and the other person really did want the best for each other. Thinking that way would encourage you to indeed create a shared pool of meaning. You could then work together to create a better future together or go your own way. Either way you both win.

## **Key Concept #2 - Start With the Heart – What Do You Really Want?**

**BOOK** When entering a crucial conversation, it is extremely important to develop focus. What is it that "I" really want from this conversation? This may seem like a selfish place to start, but where else would you get clarity about what it is that you need to get out of a conversation. Besides, without this focus, your needs will change with the mood and emotion of the conversation leading you off in unimportant and misaligned directions.

**DON** Sometimes in the heat of battle, we lose our focus on what it is that we really want to accomplish. When we don't have that focus, we become easily distracted by the moods of others, our own perceptions, and by short-term and unhealthy goals. This is true in life and it is true in any conversation.

Imagine driving home from work after a long day. You are tired and not in a good mood. Suddenly, a red Camaro zips across 2 lanes of traffic narrowly missing other cars and cutting you off with only a couple of feet to spare. You immediately get upset and shake your fists in the air. The driver of the Camaro offers you a gesture in response. What do you do next?

Many drivers would accelerate in an effort to pass the Camaro and return the favor. Others would gesture back and yell. Still others would do nothing. Nothing? How can you do nothing?

In my early days of driving, I would have selected one of the first options. Then one day, I witnessed 2 cars experiencing "road rage" on each other. I didn't see who started it and it occurred to me, "why are you doing that?" What is the purpose of yelling at the other person and cutting them off? Does it really make you feel better? I used to think it did. Are you just trying to let them know? Why? Do you think they will stop cutting people off?

On that day, I had an epiphany that has made driving much more enjoyable. My goal (my focus) was to get to my destination safely and enjoyably. I listen to the radio, relax, and just focus on driving safely. After that, the first time I was cut off in traffic, I avoided an accident and then just went on with my driving. A funny thing happened. Within moments, I had completely forgotten about the incident. I wasn't upset at all. The guy who cut me off probably wasn't upset either.

We've all played BOTH roles. We've all cut people off. We've all been cut off. The point here is that our goal isn't to cut people off or to let people who do cut us off feel our wrath. The goal is to get home safely and enjoyably. Focus is power!



**RANDY** It is not anyone else's job to make me happy. Unless I am clear about what I want from a relationship, how can I ask someone else to give me what I want? Clarity starts with me. Get clear about what you really want and align your behavior towards others around that clarity. It won't always produce the relational results you want but it is a great foundation to get you started.

But remember clarity about what you want is only just a starting point. You still have to go through the communication process. Communication is a complex, inexact, two-way-process involving sending, receiving, and interpreting what the other person is saying. Interestingly, only about 7% of our communication can be attributed to words alone. The other 93% of what we communicate comes from our body language and tonality. Given the complexity of the communication process, it is easy to see that unless you know what you really want, there is little to no chance you will get it.



When I think about what I personally want in my closest relationships it is a high quality mutually supportive and beneficial relationship. Being "right" really isn't very important. In fact, my own need to be "right" usually undermines what I really want most. My wife and I have even stopped correcting technical errors in each other's speech if we know what the other person is talking about. The words don't matter. The intent does matter. Start with the heart and clarify what you really want most.

### **Key Concept #3 - Maintain Mutual Purpose and Mutual Respect**

**BOOK** If you aren't playing the same game, how can either of you expect to win? In any conflict, there must be a mutual purpose or there cannot be a productive resolution. If one party's purpose is trying to get the best possible outcome for the team and the other party's purpose is to get a promotion, the crucial conversation's outcome is bleak. Regardless of where each party enters the conversation, the purpose must be aligned before a mutual agreement can be reached.



But what about respect? Respect is not a total, unconditional endorsement of another person. Respect is about realizing that each individual person has their own emotions, thoughts, and perspectives and that they are valid. If a person is angry about something, respect means knowing that they really do feel angry regardless of whether or not you feel that they should feel angry.

Great outcomes of crucial conversations come when all parties work together with the same purpose and in the knowledge that all parties are worthy.

**DON** I want to focus on the point of mutual purpose. Malcolm Gladwell (author of one of our past book's "Outliers") brings up the concept of "False Certainties" in his collection of essays called "What the Dog Saw". The concept is that humans like to put order to things that may not have order. Another way of looking at this, is that we like to oversimplify things, especially when we don't know any better.

When you go to the doctor, you assume everyone is there to help you. The truth is that is only partially true. Insurance companies assert pressure to health care providers to cut costs. Medical vendors constantly give away perks designed to get doctor's to utilize their products. These alternative purposes (cut costs, get more swag, make me better) all compete with each other creating a complex system that sometimes gets the job done and sometimes doesn't.

Nowhere have I seen a better example of a "false certainty" at work than during my time in a large corporation. From the outside, a corporation looks like a well-oiled and focused machine aimed at creating great products for the customer. On the inside, large corporations are complex beasts with more purposes than products. Managers are measured on a variety of performance metrics, which makes the concept of "mutual purpose" very challenging.

**(continued)** I'll use a generic example. A company wants to improve safety so it creates a metric of "near misses" (incidents that almost resulted in an accident or injury) and rewards plant managers with fewer "near misses". A new safety engineer is given the job of keeping plant employees safe. The plant manager and the safety engineer have a conversation around improving the safety program. The engineer introduces a program to collect more "near misses" from the floor so that they can address safety concerns and fix them before they turn into accidents. The plant manager sees the impact on her performance metric and rejects the policy. This leads to a crucial conversation.

The engineer's purpose is to improve safety in the plant. The plant manager's purpose is to improve the plant's performance metric to keep corporate from breathing down their back. This discussion is totally fruitless because they are both right. They both are doing the right thing within their own purpose. In order to find a "common right", they must find a common purpose. They might both agree to both improve safety and the metric and develop an internal reporting system that hides the "near misses" from corporate. They might both agree that they both want to be promoted and the safety engineer agrees to ditch the program altogether helping the plant manager get promoted and also helping the engineer's chances of getting promoted later (note: this is not an ethics discussion here). They need to reach a common purpose before any agreement can be achieved.

In order to address conflict, we must admit that "false certainties" exist, and find the common ground. We should also acknowledge that within organizations, complexities and a lack of purpose could cause unforeseen results as people develop their own purposes.

**RANDY** Don focused on mutual purpose. I would like to focus on mutual respect. It is unfortunate but most of us default to the negative. If someone does something we don't understand, we will normally attach a negative motive to it. Someone cuts us off in traffic and we assume they intentionally cut in front of us. How could they do such a thing? I am convinced that more often than not, they are simply distracted. They didn't even know we were in the picture.

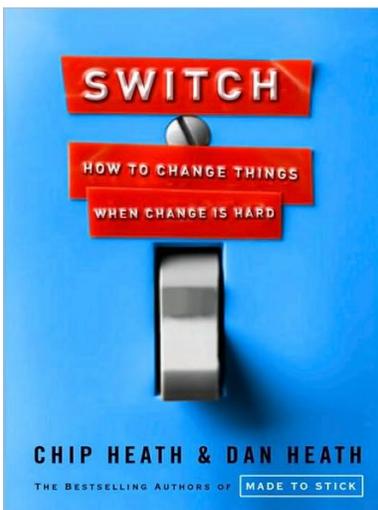
When someone does something that we don't understand, a much more beneficial posture is to become curious. Ask yourself why would a smart, intelligent person do something like that? And no it is not because they are an idiot. They have a good reason for doing what they are doing but remember it is for their reasons not necessarily yours. When we approach people with this kind of mutual respect, good things happen. At the end of the day what people want most in life is respect. Give it to them and you will give both you and them healthier and stronger relationships.



**ADD THIS TO YOUR CALENDAR!**

Call into our **Webinar on Crucial Conversations**  
**February 23, 2011**  
**12:00 C.S.T.**

## MARCH BOOK OF THE MONTH



**SWITCH:**  
***How to Change Things  
When Change Is Hard***  
**BY: CHIP HEATH & DAN HEATH**

ALSO...FOLLOW US ON TWITTER  
<http://Twitter.com/LeaderBook>