

NOTES FROM: *Crucial Conversations*, by Joseph Grenny, et al.

SUMMARY: Back when I was a nightclub bouncer, I used what I've learned in this book almost literally every night at work. And in other situations when I'm *not* at work. These conversation principles and ideas are effective – and, well, crucial – *everywhere*. We can *all* become better listeners and conversationalists, but we can't go into it thinking that we have nothing to learn or improve upon.

For one, listening is like a superpower. You become good at listening, and I *guarantee you* that a lot of things are going to start going very right in your life. You can literally *see* the changes come over a person's face once they realize that you're *actually listening to them*, you're willing to give them your undivided attention, and you respect them for saying whatever it is they have to say. Like I said, and especially since most people are so bad at listening, this is like a *superpower*.

Crucial Conversations is a classic book on resolving group and interpersonal conflict and it's got a stellar reputation for being an excellent resource to help with handling emotions, making sure people feel safe to speak their mind, and coming to agreement on the things that matter. The ideal mix, I believe, is to forthrightly assert what you believe, and to allow others the same chance. The worst is refusing to hold a conversation at all, or being under the delusion that one has taken place.

“People who are skilled at dialogue do their best to make it safe for everyone to add their meaning to the shared pool - even ideas that at first glance appear controversial, wrong, or at odds with their own beliefs. Now, obviously they don't agree with every idea; they simply do their best to ensure that all ideas find their way into the open.”

“The mistake most of us make in our crucial conversations is we believe that we have to choose between telling the truth and keeping a friend.”

“It's the most talented, not the least talented, who are continually trying to improve their dialogue skills. As is often the case, the rich get richer.”

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

“You can predict with stunning accuracy the likelihood of a project being late or over budget by the inability of employees to hold crucial conversations.”

“Seek to get all relevant information out in the open in a respectful way.”

“At the core of every successful conversation lies the free flow of relevant information.”

“Remember, to know and not to do is really not to know.”

“You know what? We need to talk about this. I’m glad you asked the question. Thank you for taking that risk. I appreciate the trust it shows in me.”

Martin Luther King Jr: “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

“Involving everyone makes each person committed to the final decision. Anyone who complies against his will is of his own opinion still.”

“Maintain focus on the goal of the conversation, without getting distracted by flaring emotions or irrelevant digressions.”

“Ask yourself what you really want to have happen. Then piece together for yourself and the group what exactly would have to take place in order for the desired outcome to arise.”

Ambrose Bierce: “Speak when you are angry, and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.”

“Openly commit to achieving a mutual purpose. You have to spell it out for people. Let everyone involved in the conversation know in no uncertain terms that you are committed to achieving the aforementioned mutual purpose.”

“Respect is like air. As long as it's present, nobody thinks about it. But if you take it away, it's all that people can think about. The instant people perceive disrespect in a conversation, the interaction is no longer about the original purpose - it is now about defending dignity.”

“Extrapolate from ‘angry’ or ‘sad’ to how you are *really* feeling. Your real emotions and motivations will be far more complicated and nuanced than just a general one-word answer.”

“Try not to share too many unflattering conclusions all at once.”

“Do not apologize for your legitimate views.”

“Strongly put forth your opinion, but equally strongly ask people to challenge it.”

“Give your brain a problem to stay focused on.”

“Start with an area of agreement and then work outwards to the places where agreement starts to fall apart, which is where you can begin the work of reconciling the divergent opinions and desires of the group.”

“Most people agree on most things, but their arguments tend to be over the 5-10% of things that they disagree on.”

“Decide together who will make the final decision and assign a name to every responsibility.”

“Write down the results of the crucial conversations, instead of just trusting your memory. That way, weeks later you don’t have all the participants of the conversation remembering different things. You’ll have a written record to show what’s been agreed upon and what’s been said.”