



A book summary provided for the members and friends of Atonement Lutheran Church as a resource for learning about, cultivating, and applying the skill of Courageous Conversations.

It is important to note that the Courageous Conversations Task Force was established in response to significant congregational input provided to the Transition Report. Members stated that, while we are a strong and collaborative congregation, we often find it difficult to address disagreement when the topic may be viewed as uncomfortable or controversial. We may avoid having a discussion with the appropriate person(s), or avoid the topic altogether. These occasions are much more the exception than the rule, but by definition, they concern topics of substantial importance to those involved. As such, they are the topics we most need to resolve. As you read through this resource, please keep in mind that this is not a blueprint for every conversation or disagreement. The great majority of conversations and disagreements are handled simply, respectfully, and directly between the affected parties. But topics and occasions do arise wherein we may feel uncomfortable or unsure of how to proceed. This is where a courageous conversation may be useful.

Crucial Conversations was used as the primary resource material by Penny Archuleta (a Leadership Training professional) in the training sessions she conducted for a number of Atonement staff and leaders. It is our intent to offer more sessions for those interested beginning in early 2018. The concepts and language contained in this summary are taken directly from this book. If some of this seems too abstract or undefined, we do encourage you to read the book. It contains many stories and example dialogues which help explain the ideas. Copies of the book may be found in the church library. If they are all in use, please see a member of the Courageous Conversation Task Force and we will try to locate a copy for your use. Other questions about the concepts, training or application of these methods may also be directed to any Task Force member. (Listed on the last page of this summary.)

Book Summary of Crucial Conversations

by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler

Introduction

For many, the word “conflict” is associated solely with negative experiences: battles, fights, and quarrels which pit one person or group against another. This type of conflict typically has only one outcome, with a winner and a loser. Feelings are hurt. Relationships are damaged. Connections are weakened.

But conflict can have very positive outcomes, *if it is managed properly*. Voicing disagreements respectfully, and listening to other points of view with the goal of understanding rather than “winning” can help us make stronger connections with each other. When we speak of our desire to be inclusive, we are really talking about being open to the diversity of thought that exists—whether this may be rooted in differences of age, gender, culture, sexuality, ethnicity, and the myriad other factors which make each of us an individual.

Why Crucial Conversations?

Most conversations are congenial and constructive, and most disagreements are minor and handled in a healthy way. But, when stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions start to run strong, casual conversations can quickly transform into crucial ones. Ironically, the more crucial the conversation, the less likely we are to handle it well. The consequences of either avoiding or mishandling crucial conversations can be severe. When we fail a crucial conversation, every aspect of our lives can be affected – from our careers, to our communities, to our relationships, to our personal health.

And now for the good news. As we learn how to step up to crucial conversations – and handle them well – with one set of high-leverage skills we can influence virtually every domain of our lives.

The Skill Set: *Start with* *Heart*

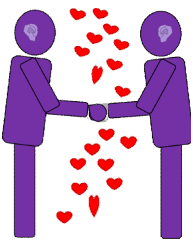
What is this all-important skill set? What do people who sail through crucial conversations actually do? More important, can we do it too?

- ☐ *Work on Me First, Us Second* – Remember that the only person you can directly control is yourself
- ☐ *Focus on What you REALLY Want and What you DON'T Want*– Stop and pay attention to your motives. Ask what you want for yourself, for others, and for the relationship. We can be clear and direct without damaging a relationship, but it may take some deliberate forethought to avoid just being inflammatory.
- ☐ *Break free of “the Fool’s Choice”* – We may think that our only options are to do battle or suffer in silence, but you don’t have to choose between peace and honesty or between winning and losing. Search for more options, because there always are more options.
- ☐ *Learn to Look* – When a conversation becomes stressful, it is difficult to see what’s happening and why. Look to see if others are moving towards silence (masking, avoiding, withdrawing) or violence. (In the context of this book and our interactions, “violence” does not reference physical threats, but behaviors such as controlling,

labeling, and verbal attacks such as name-calling). Become a vigilant self-monitor by watching to see if you have a good or bad impact on safety. Safe conversations show mutual purpose and mutual respect. (“Safety” and “safe” conversations again are not references to one’s physical safety in this context. They refer to feeling “safe” to express one’s thoughts and opinions without fear of ridicule or ostracism; “safe” in the knowledge that one will be heard with respect and without judgment.)

Making conversations safe

- ☐ When others move to silence or violence, step out of the conversation and restore safety. (Commit to come back to the conversation when ready to do so safely.)
- ☐ Apologize when appropriate to re-establish respect
- ☐ Contrast to fix misunderstanding. Start with what you do not intend or mean. Then explain what you do intend or mean



Create mutual purpose through CRIB

- ☐ **C**ommit to seek mutual purpose (look for commonality; don’t dwell on divisiveness.)
- ☐ **R**ecognize the purpose behind the strategy
- ☐ **I**vent a mutual purpose
- ☐ **B**rainstorm new strategies

Master My Story – ways to avoid strong emotions keeping you stuck in silence or violence

Stories create feelings: Talk about what’s real rather than hypothetical

- ☐ We see and hear
- ☐ Tell a story about what is going on based on what we see and hear
- ☐ Feel – Respond with feelings based on the story
- ☐ Act – Our actions are driven by our feelings
- ☐ Clever stories get us off the hook and keep us from acknowledging our role
 - Victim stories – It’s not my fault
 - Villain stories – It’s all your fault
 - Helpless stories – There’s nothing else I can do

Retrace Your Path – Reflect on your behavior and the underlying emotions. Question your conclusions and look for other explanations. Compare the hard facts to the story that you are telling yourself. Do they align?

Tell the rest of your story – Evaluate **your** role in the problem. Ask yourself why a reasonable and decent person would do this. Ask yourself what you really want and what you would do to get those results.

Sharing a tough message and STATE your path

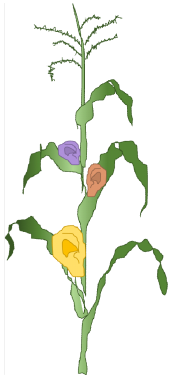
- ☐ Share your facts – Start with the least controversial and most persuasive facts
- ☐ Tell your story – Explain what you are beginning to conclude
- ☐ Ask for others’ parts – Encourage other to share their facts and stories
- ☐ Talk tentatively – Tell your story as a story; don’t tell it as facts

- Encourage testing – Make it safe for others to express opinions

Explore Others' Paths

To encourage the free flow of meaning and help others leave silence or violence behind, explore their Paths to Action. Start with an attitude of curiosity and patience. This helps restore safety. Be open to the other person's story.

Use listening skills to retrace the other person's path.



"Grow your ears"

Ask – Express interest in the other person's views

Mirror – Respectfully acknowledge the emotions other people are feeling

Paraphrase – Restate what you have heard to show not just that you understand, but that it is safe to share

Prime – If others hold back, take your best guess at what they may be thinking or feeling

As you share views, remember to:

- *Agree* – Acknowledge agreement when you share views
- *Build* – If something is left out, agree where you share views, then build
- *Compare* – When you do not agree, phrase it as a comparison and not an error



Move to Action

Decide how to decide

- 1) Command – decisions are made without involving others
- 2) Consult – Input is gathered from the group and then a subset decides
- 3) Vote – An agreed upon percentage swings the decision
- 4) Consensus – Everyone comes to an agreement and then supports the final decision

Finish clearly

- 1) Determine who does what by when
- 2) Make the deliverables clear
- 3) Follow up. Hold people accountable to their promises (starting with yourself!)



A Reminder

As this is a brief overview of the main concepts in the book Crucial Conversations, some of the content may seem too abstract or undefined. If you wish for elaboration on any of the subject matter, we encourage you to read the book. It contains many stories and example dialogues which more fully illustrate the ideas. Copies of the book may be found in the church library. If they are all in use, please see a member of the Courageous Conversation Task Force and we will try to locate a copy for your use. Other questions

about the concepts, training or application of these methods may also be directed to any Task Force member. (See bottom of this page for names.)

Another Tool

Conflict and disagreement are not necessarily bad. Conflict and disagreement are a natural part of being a group. When addressed properly, conflict can lead to growth and development. A terrific resource for learning about different methods of handling conflict is the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. The model breaks out five different methods of handling conflict. Each method is different in terms of assertiveness (the individual attempting to satisfy their needs) and cooperativeness (the individual attempting to satisfy the other person's needs). The different methods also involve different levels of time and commitment. No single method is appropriate for all situations. It depends on the concerns and efforts of the individuals involved.



- 1) Avoidance – unassertive and uncooperative, low time commitment
- 2) Accommodation – unassertive and cooperative, low time commitment
- 3) Competition – Assertive and uncooperative, high time commitment
- 4) Compromise – Somewhat assertive and somewhat cooperative, moderate time commitment
- 5) Collaboration – Assertive and cooperative, highest level of time commitment

For more information, please see the handout “Enhancing Communication and Conflict Management Skills”. [Where is this handout available?]

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