

Integrating the Communication Model in the workplace*

I recently came across a great book written by four US researchers entitled "Crucial Conversations." The book has made the New York Times Best Seller list and I highly recommend it, especially if someone intends to practice these principles in a workplace setting. In addition to explaining the principles of a communications model similar to the one used at The Haven, this book sets out dozens of examples of opportunities for genuine dialogue and coaches the reader on how to deal with them. The main values promoted are honesty, transparency and integrity in relationship. The research, which includes case studies of actual breakthrough discussions in a variety of settings, is solid and it matches my experiences over a couple of decades of personal growth work as both a participant and facilitator. All the reader need do is practice." Rick Jackson

Where are you stuck in your personal or professional life? That's where a crucial conversation is waiting. We have all been there. In fact many of us are there right now. You know you need to talk to someone about an important issue, but you haven't stepped up to the conversation. You may have danced around the issue or sugar coated your message. Or maybe you relied on hints, sarcasm, the silent treatment, or not so subtle humour, but the person missed the message completely. Or maybe she did get it so you backed off before the discussion spun out of control.

Our ability to handle controversial discussions deeply affects how influential and successful we are. If you carefully watch people who maintain loving relationships as well as those who are admired and listened to by their co-workers, as they talk about potentially explosive issues you'll notice that they are considerate and contained and consistently speak up in ways that make it safe for themselves and others to talk, no matter what the topic. When others either go mum or ballistic, these leaders shine. Mastery of crucial conversations requires observable and learnable skills.

Tips for Success:

- 1.** Once you've decided to say something, talk about the real issues. For instance, if your boss or colleague is repeatedly diverting important projects away from you, you need a different conversation than the one about the workload in the office. For example you may think that you are not trusted. It may be more difficult to talk about trust than projects, but if you don't talk about trust, the real issue will remain unresolved.
- 2.** Often if you dive into the heart of an issue the other person will immediately become defensive. So start with your perceptions or context. Others normally don't become defensive because of your context, no matter how sensitive. But if they think you're out to get them you're in for difficulties.
- 3.** Initiate a delicate discussion by clarifying your positive intention. Multiple intentions are normal, share the positive ones and contain the rest for later. Don't proceed with the conversation until you're confident that the other person believes your positive intention.
- 4.** Share your story or interpretations but don't pile it on. Sometimes we let a problem simmer for a long time and generate a whole arsenal of unflattering conclusions. Be succinct and contain the extra stuff.
- 5.** Check out and sincerely try to understand other's point of view. Make your goal to learn rather than to be right, be curious and encourage them to express their facts, stories, and feelings. Then carefully listen to what they have to say. By being open to learning you're demonstrating humility at its best.

6. When appropriate, share your feelings and deeper judgments, now that you're working on a foundation of established trust and dialogue. Skilled communicators don't contain their emotions in order to let themselves or others off the hook; they do so to prepare themselves for a healthy dialogue. Our feelings are based on our individual filters and interpretations that unfortunately can sometimes be based on inaccurate judgments.

7. How you end a crucial conversation is as important as how you start it. Too often we can work through a tough issue only to leave the details unresolved. End by clarifying what action will be taken by whom. If you don't, you can count on rehashing the same issue over and over.

8. Dialogue is a team sport and you can't get better sitting alone in your home or office. Partner with someone else who wants to work at his or her crucial conversation skills. Any time you're stuck, there's a crucial conversation keeping you there — improve the quality of these conversations and you will break free.