

# How to Have a Crucial Conversation

A crucial conversation is any conversation where the stakes are high, opinions differ, and emotions run strong. We often fear them because our past experience has taught us that if we're both emotional and honest, bad things are

likely to happen. However, if we have the skills to speak up both candidly and honestly, we can actually strengthen relationships while solving problems. Follow these steps to help you succeed in your next crucial conversation.



## BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

1. **Start with Heart:** Before you begin, examine your motives. Ask yourself what you really want for you, for the other person, and for the relationship? This question activates your brain and diffuses your strong emotions.
2. **Prepare to STATE Your Path**—STATE stands for Share your facts, Tell your story, Ask for others' paths, Talk tentatively, and Encourage testing. Make sure you identify only the facts of the situation and the story you have drawn as a result of those facts.
3. **Identify a Mutual Purpose and Desired Outcome:** Identify goals both you and the other person care about. Clearly outline the actions or outcomes you'd like to see. If you can't identify these beforehand, ask the other person how you can solve the issue together.
4. **Practice:** Practice these skills ahead of time to prepare for your meeting.



## AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CONVERSATION

1. **Get Buy-In:** Begin by getting agreement from the other person to have the conversation. If he or she wants to discuss something else or isn't prepared, schedule another time to meet.
2. **Clarify and Agree:** Reach agreement with the other person that there is an issue, identify what the issue is, and clearly articulate what a successful resolution would look like for both parties.



## DURING THE CONVERSATION

1. **Make It Safe:** The antidote to defensiveness in crucial conversations is to make it safe. To create safety, help others understand that you respect them and care about their interests as much as you care about your own. When they believe this, they open up to your views. When they don't, they shut down. After you create a safe environment, confidently share your facts and your story.
2. **Invite Dialogue & Listen:** Once you've safely stated your path, invite differing opinions. Encourage the other person to disagree with you and then listen. Those who are best at crucial conversations want to learn. If your goal is just to dump on others, they'll resist you. If you are open to hearing others' points of view, they'll be more open to yours.



## AT THE END OF THE MEETING

1. **Move to Action:** It's easy to let assignments fall through the cracks. When ending a crucial conversation, document WHO does WHAT by WHEN, and how you will FOLLOW UP. This will help you turn a conversation into real action and results.

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