

# **CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS AND CRUCIAL CONFRONTATIONS**

**BOOKS BY: PATTERSON, GRENNY  
McMILLIAN, and SWITZLER**

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## BIBLICAL BASIS FOR USING SUCH BOOKS AND THIS PRESENTATION

James 3:9-12: Our tongues are not to produce inconsistency when we use them.

Ephesians 4: 25, 29-32: The Holy Spirit is grieved when we use our tongues improperly, including the failure to rebuke in love.

Colossians 3:8-17: All we are to do in word and deed is to honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

I Peter 4:11: All gifts, whether speaking or serving ones, are to be used for building each other up and so that our God may be praised.

Matthew 5:37: Our yes is to mean yes and our no is to mean no, anything else represents the work of the Evil One.

## THE NEED TO COME BACK TO BIBLICAL CONVERSATIONS AND CONFRONTATIONS

1. Many congregations are filled with gossip, rumor, and slander that is never confronted or dealt with by the leaders.
2. Most resistance to an outward focused ministry comes through passive aggressive behaviors that hinder the congregation's mission rather than enhancing it.
3. Many pastors and lay leaders do not and will not confront issues hoping often that by remaining silent the problems will disappear.
4. Most people today do not know how to deal with problems constructively. Yet we live in an angry culture. When key confrontations and conversations do occur they more often divide rather than providing healing and restoration.

## DESCRIBING CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS AND CONFRONTATIONS

1. A crucial conversation is a discussion between two or more people where:

Stakes are high

Opinions vary

Emotions run strong

2. Crucial conversations are about **disagreements**. (Disagreements not handled well lead to:

Strained relationships

Poor decisions

Disastrous results

3. All of us face three choices when it comes to crucial conversations. Those choices are:

We can avoid them

We can face them and handle them poorly

We can face them and handle them well

4. A crucial confrontation is holding someone accountable face to face.

5. Crucial confrontations are about **disappointments**. They consist of:

Failed promises

Missed expectations

All other bad behavior

## CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

1. The following are samples of crucial conversations:

Ending a relationship

Asking a friend to repay a loan

Giving the pastor feedback about behavior and/or speaking issues

Critiquing another staff member's ministry

Resolving issues related to children between former spouses

Talking with a key board member who is not keeping commitments

Confronting a congregational member about abuse issues

Providing an unfavorable staff evaluation

2. The **key thing** for having any crucial conversation that is effective is to get all relevant information out on the table. In crucial conversations all parties to the conversation honestly and openly share their feelings, express their opinions, and articulate their theories. Such an experience is called **dialogue**.

3. Crucial conversations occur when there is a shared pool of meaning. This pool of meaning becomes filled when everyone in the conversation feels **safe** to share their understandings and meanings about that which is being discussed. As this pool of meaning grows two things happen:

Better decisions are made since everyone has more information

People will act on the decisions that have been made

4. Any crucial conversation that I want to have must start with what happens in my being. (IN ANY CONVERSATION THE ONLY ONE I CAN CONTROL IS ME)! I must ask myself three questions:

What do I really want for myself in this conversation?

What do I really want for others in this conversation?

What do I want the relationship(s) to be when the conversation is over?

I must also refuse the “**sucker’s choice**”:

The sucker’s choice is to assume that any conversation can only have a win/lose option if I initiate it with whomever. This means I am always looking for the elusive **and** before I begin the conversation. This **and** starts to emerge when I begin clarifying what I do and do not want to happen as the result of any conversation.

5. If I want the best from any conversation I must always think about how to make the conversation safe before I begin. Safety relates to two issues: **content** and **conditions**. The content is a given (Is the subject of this conversation something that the person(s) I am talking with dread talking about)? The conditions relate to either silence or anger. This is how fear gets into any conversation.

**SILENCE**

Masking  
Avoiding  
Withdrawing

**ANGER**

Controlling  
Labeling  
Attacking

6. In crucial conversations we think about the safety issue and how to make the conversation safe.

1. You step out of the issue and build safety before continuing conversation.
2. You establish mutual purpose.
3. You establish mutual respect.

*(I have known a thousand scamps; but I never met one who considered himself so. Self knowledge isn’t so common. – Ouida)*

7. I must also take charge of my emotions before beginning any crucial conversation. That is easier said than done. However, the way it is done is by examining the **stories** in our head about the situation before talking. **Stories** are our interpretation of the facts. They explain to us what is happening, why it is happening, and how it is happening. The result of creating such stories is to make judgments about the situation and the persons involved and once those judgments are made our emotions take over.

8. There are specific steps to take in creating an effective crucial conversation. Those steps are as follows:

1. Share facts not opinions, emotions, and judgments.
2. Tell your story so people know your interpretation.
3. Ask the other person(s) to share their facts and interpretation.
4. Maintain tentativeness throughout the conversation.

5. Invite solutions to deal with the issues.

(Always work at maintaining safety throughout the entire conversation).

9. In crucial conversations related to making important decisions that involve a number of people, four key questions must be asked:

1. Who really cares about the decision?
2. Who has the best expertise to help make the decision?
3. Whose cooperation is required to implement the decision?
4. How many people need to be involved in the decision?

Once these questions are answered all these people need to be involved in the crucial conversation.

10. In crucial conversations two key levers always come into play and they are:

1. Do we want true dialogue or is there another agenda?
2. How do we make the conversation safe?

## **CRUCIAL CONFRONTATIONS**

*One of my problems is that I internalize everything. I can't express anger; I grow a tumor instead.* – Woody Allen

1. The benefits of living and working in a healthy confronting environment are:

Increased accountability

High morale

Effectiveness

2. As in crucial conversations I must start with me before I worry about dealing with the person I feel needs confronting.

1. I learn to determine that which is or is not crucial and needs confronting.

**CPR** helps me get at the right issue.

**Content:** This relates to the facts of what did or did not happen.

**Pattern:** The same issue constantly re-occurs.

**Relationship:** The issue is impacting your mutual relationship.

2. I must master my story, which is my interpretation (with emotion) of the facts.

Am I assuming that others know my perspective and values?

Am I assuming the best or the worst in the actions of others?

3. Confrontations are always about a **gap**. There is a **gap** between what we expected and what occurred. Our job in a confrontation is to describe the **gap**.

1. I must always start with safety.

State facts and describe the gap (often means stepping outside emotions)

Reflect mutual purpose

Reflect mutual respect

2. Share my path, which means:

State the facts again.

Tell my story.

Share my feelings

Tentatively state your conclusion

3. End with a question which means:

Ask for their honest response.

Hear their story.

Attempt to understand their motivations.

4. It is at this point I must begin to deal with proper motivation to help the person to want to bridge the gap between their performance and my expectations.

1. The use of power usually means I have lost.

2. Perks are often a temporary stop gap.

3. Personal charisma is usually also a temporary stop gap.

4. Instead explore natural consequences.
  5. Focus on long-term benefits.
  6. Reveal hidden victims.
5. Once the confrontation has been stated and there is mutual agreement that the gap must be closed then develop a mutually agreed upon plan that includes follow-up. The plan should include **WWW**.
1. **WHO**: Be sure and put a name to each task that is to be accomplished.
  2. **WHAT**: It is stated what will be done and how well it will be done.
  3. **WHEN**: A specific deadline is delineated for evaluation.
  4. **FOLLOW UP**: Who, when, and how it will be done and by what date.
6. **PRAISE** is a crucial solution to problem solving and should always be used between confrontations.
1. Praise more than you think you should and then double it.
  2. Praise individuals in private and groups in public.
  3. Praise both process and results.
  4. Praise in spontaneous ways.

\*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor's stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.

