



## *Managing Crucial Conversations: Talking when stakes are high*

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Based on the book Crucial Conversations by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler



Please pass the butter !

# What are Crucial Conversations?

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Discussions where *stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong*. These could be day-to-day occurrences that affect lives, and in many cases, these are pivotal conversations whose results may be extremely significant.



- **Opinions vary:** A team member is talking with you about a possible promotion. She thinks she is ready; you think she is not.
- **Stakes are high:** You're in a meeting with four coworkers and you're trying to pick a new marketing strategy. You've got to do something different, or your company isn't going to hit its annual goals.
- **Emotions run strong:** You have just completed the annual salary revision and given best possible salary raise according to your ability to pay. Your highest paid employee walks in and resigns because he feels the salary raise is poor and unjustified.

# Some Common Crucial Conversations at work

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- Giving critical feedback to a team member
- Critiquing a colleagues' work
- Talking to a team member who is not keeping commitments
- Talking to a colleague who is hoarding info or resources
- Giving an unfavorable performance review
- Letting people go
- Giving client bad news about missing commitments
- Negotiating terms of employment contract
- Negotiating terms of a vendor contract

# Why can't we handle these conversations?

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People generally choose to at least try to handle such situations as well as they can. However, most of the times they don't do very well, for the following reasons:

- Physiologically, human beings are designed to handle stressful situations with fists and feet, more than intelligence and attentiveness.
- Most of such situations spring up unexpectedly, and most of us can come up with only a knee-jerk response to them because of the *pressure*.

The consequences of either avoiding or messing up these conversations can be severe and can affect all aspects of life – personal and professional.



# What would we really like?

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- Not to make a Fool's choice: It's a mistake to think that our only options are tell the truth or keep a friend.
- When it comes to risky, controversial and emotional conversation, skilled people find a way to get all relevant information (from themselves and others) out in the open. They have a DIALOGUE.

# Dialogue

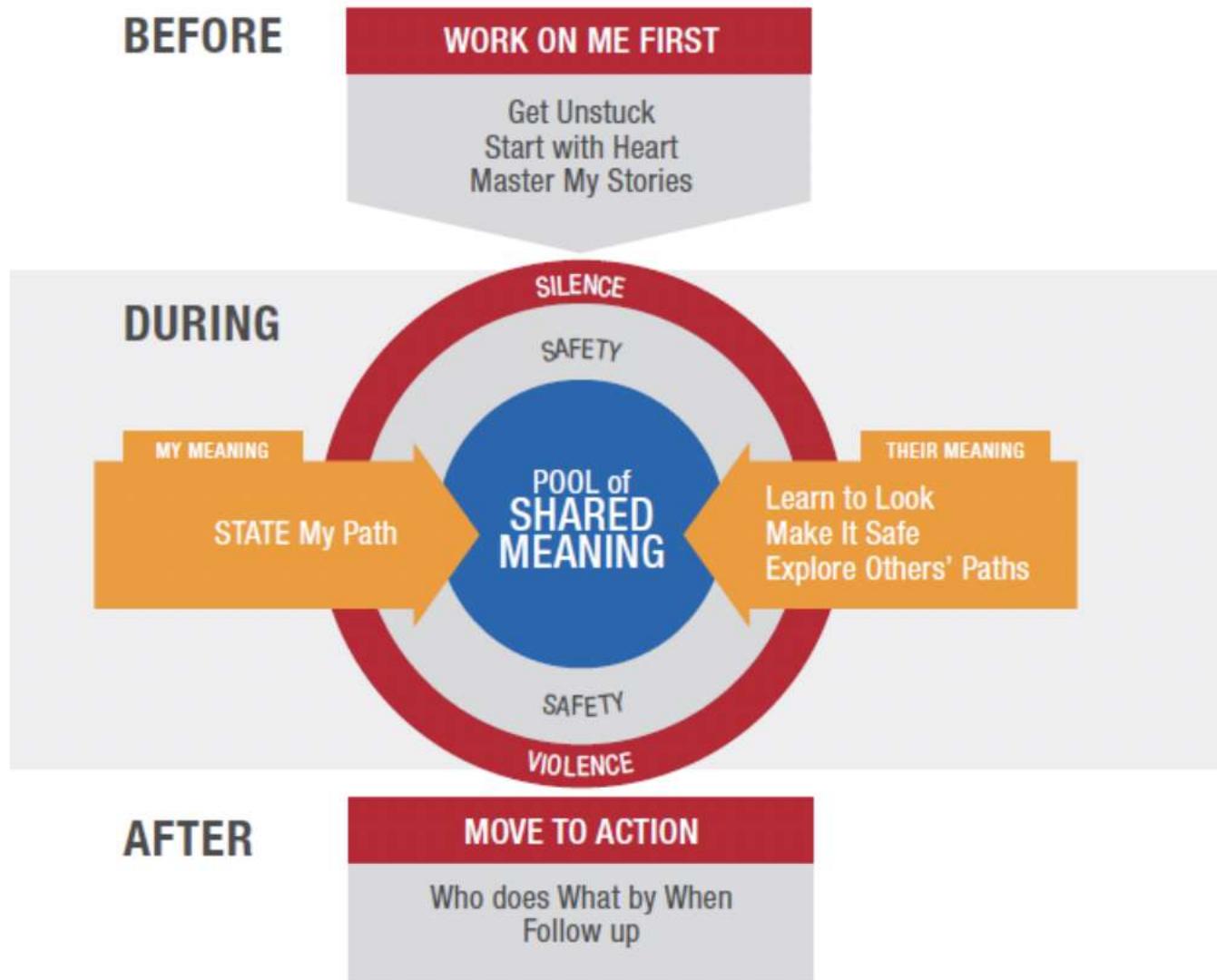
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- What is DIALOGUE?

A free flow of meaning between two or more people

# Acing a Crucial Conversation

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# Preparing for a Crucial Conversation

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## Get Unstuck:

- Spot the conversations that are keeping you stuck
- Critical questions: What conversations am I not holding or not holding well? Am I holding the right crucial conversations?



**Nearly 4 in 10** employed U.S. workers say their manager fails to frequently engage in honest conversations about work topics.

**3 in 10** say their manager doesn't encourage a culture of open and transparent communication.

source: SHRM Culture Report, 2019.

# Find out your style under stress

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- Silence –
  - Masking ( Sugar coating, sarcasm).
  - Avoiding (not addressing the real issue),
  - Withdrawing (Pulling out of the conversation)
- Violence-
  - Controlling ( Forcing someone to think your way)

*" We tried their product, but it was an absolute disaster. Everyone knows that they are the worst"*

*Meaning: I have no facts, I just use hyperbole to get your attention.*
  - Labeling (" Your ideas are always crazy. Anyone can see that my way is better")
  - Attacking You move from making a point to making the person suffer. Belittling. Threatening. Self righteous comments.



<https://cruciallearning.com/assessments/free/style-under-stress-assessment/>

# Start with your Heart

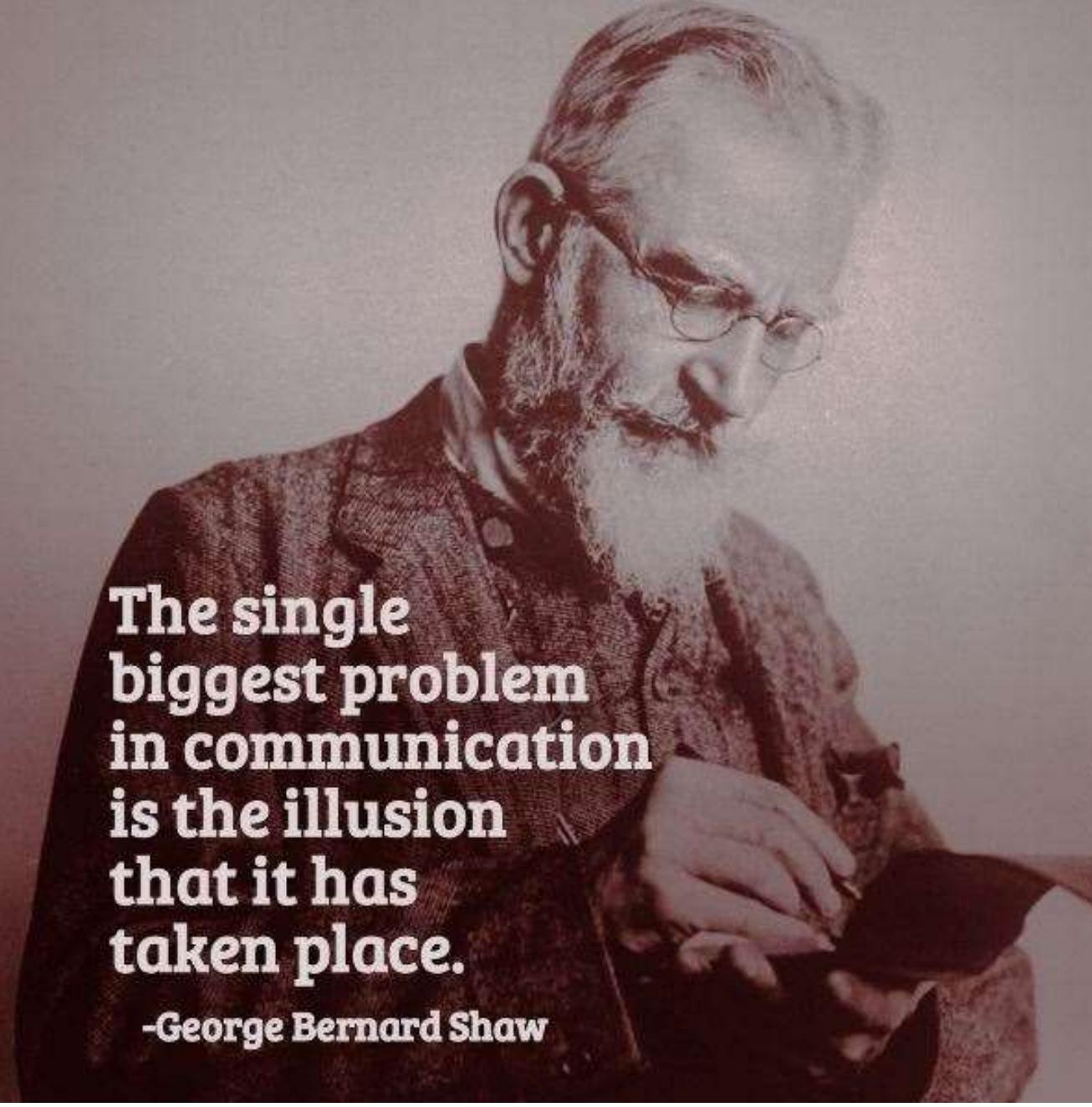


- Focus on what you really want
  - When you find yourself moving towards silence or violence, stop and pay attention to your motives
  - Ask yourself : "What are my motives? Am I looking for a solution or trying to win an argument?"
  - Then, clarify what you really want. Ask yourself" What do I want for myself? For others? For the relationship?"
  - And finally , ask : " How would I behave if this were what I really wanted?"
- Work on me first, Us second
  - Remember that the only person that you can directly control is yourself.

# Refuse the Fool's Choice

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- Watch yourself , see if you are telling yourself to choose between peace and harmony, winning and losing.
- Look for "And"
- Think clearly about what you don't want. Think of options that bring you to dialogue.

A black and white portrait of George Bernard Shaw, an elderly man with a full white beard and mustache, wearing round-rimmed glasses and a dark, patterned jacket. He is looking slightly to his left with a thoughtful expression, his hands clasped together in front of him.

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

**-George Bernard Shaw**

## Exercise

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### Awkward Performance Review

Within your working group, please arrive at answer to the following questions

- What do you think went wrong in the first Performance Review that Melanie & Matt are referring to?
- If you were Melanie, how would you have prepared for the first review?
- What can Melanie do now?

Share your conclusion with everyone



## Explore other's view

# Explore other's view

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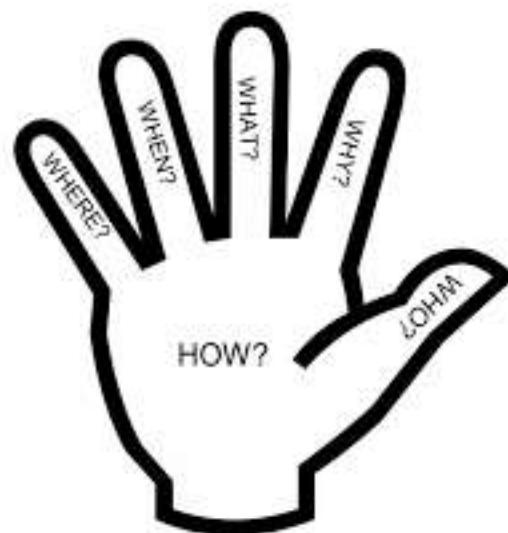
- Be Sincere
- Every sentence has a history
- Be Curious & Stay Curious
- Be Patient
- Break the cycle



# Asking the right questions

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- Ask – When? How? What?
  - “What’s going on?”
  - “I’d really like to hear your opinion on this”
  - “Please let me know if you see it differently”
  - “Don’t worry about hurting my feelings, I really want to hear your thoughts”



# Some great questions

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- "How might we...?"
- "What if...?"
- "10/10/10"
- Phoenix Checklist

# Mirroring

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- Mirroring : Mirroring is short and simple. This reflective listening exercises shows the speaker you're trying to understand their thoughts and feelings to the tee. Eventually, it will prompt the speaker to clarify their perspective and continue the conversation. However, avoid over-mirroring. Using the speaker's exact words too much may come off distracting.
- When someone goes silent. " You say you are ok, but you seem upset from your tone. "



# Suspend Judgment

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- Withhold judgment or advice. Suspending judgment is a personal discipline that requires conscious practice. By applying this skill, we are choosing to delay forming an opinion or response to what the speaker is saying.
- When disagreeing with the speaker, write down the objections rather than tuning out the presenter.
- Prepare to learn something new



# Paraphrase

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"Let's see if I have got this right. You are upset because I have voiced my concern about your punctuality. And this seem controlling and hierarchical to you". Remain calm, collected, use an even tone.

Paraphrasing helps the speaker feel they are being listened to and understood, and it helps the listener confirm their understanding is accurate.

**When paraphrasing try to:**

Listen for key thoughts, feelings, and statements of facts.

- Use your own words to let the other person know what you think they meant.
- Be brief – you are trying to give a summary of key things said not a word for word account.
- Avoid interpreting or jumping too far ahead of what the person has said.

**Remember to:**

- Let the speaker correct you if you have misunderstood something
- Avoid thinking of/constructing your own response while the person is talking
- Clarify information if you are unsure

# Exercise – Train of thought

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## Objectives:

- To try the skill of attentive listening and linking one's own thoughts to the flow of ideas.
- To try the skill of summarising & paraphrasing effectively.
  
- The Facilitator will pick a topic on which everyone has to speak by taking turns.
- The first person speaks for 2 minutes. After this, the next person picked by the facilitator will paraphrases what was said before them and add his/her own thoughts regarding the topic of discussion.
- This chain continues in the group, where each person has to first summarize what has been told before them, and then add their thoughts.

**"Is it better for an entrepreneur to focus on a single business idea or diversify into multiple ventures? Any other approach that could work?"**



**Why did the** Mars Climate Orbiter by NASA blow up 90kms away from the orbit of Mars in 1999?

**Why did the** Berlin Wall fall?

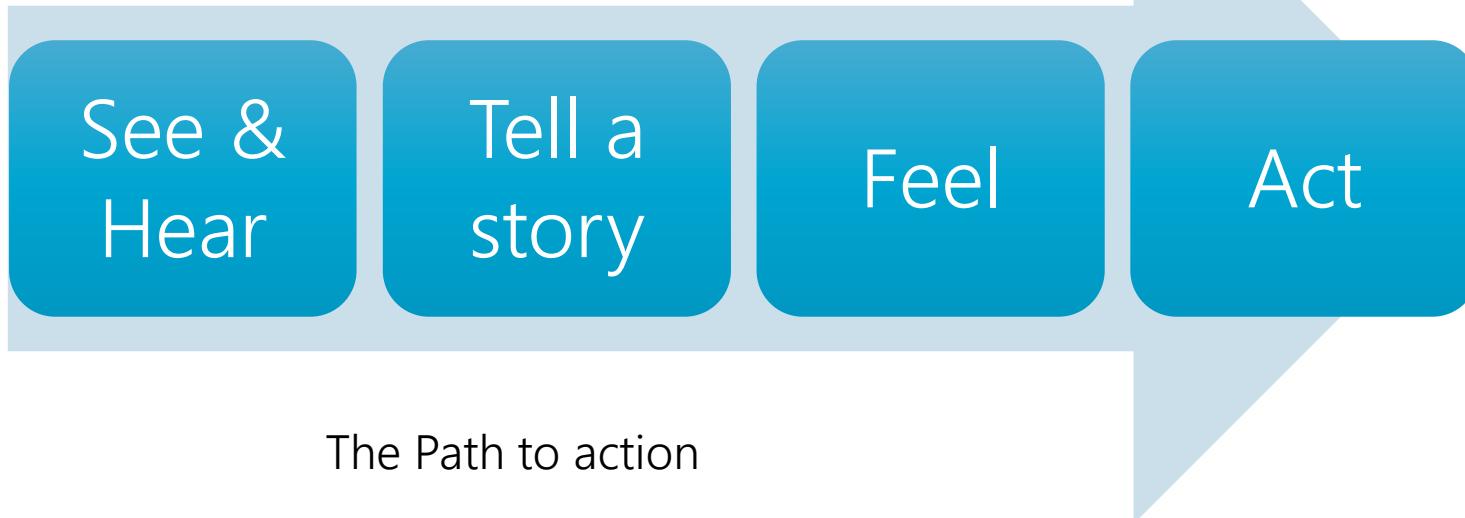
**Why did the** British lose 600 men in the Battle of Imjin during the Korean war?

Someone or the other failed to have a crucial conversation!



## **Master Your Stories: How to stay in Dialogue when you are angry, scared or hurt.**

# Path to Action



Stories provide our rationale for what's going on - Why? Judging! What?. We do it without realizing it.

Watch for these 3 clever stories – “Victim- Its not my fault”, “Villain- Its all your fault”, “Helpless- there is nothing else that I can do”

# Master your stories

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- Retrace your path
  - Notice your behavior- are you moving away from dialogue?
  - Am I in some form of Silence or Violence? What am I feeling?
  - Analyze your stories
  - Get back to the facts. Abandon your absolutely certainty by distinguishing between hard facts and your invented story.
- Tell the rest of your story- Create a useful story
  - Am I adding to the problem?
  - Why would a rational person do what he/she is doing? Humanize other.
  - What do I really want?
  - What should I do or say to achieve this result?

# STATE your Path: Be persuasive not abrasive



- Share your facts. Facts are least controversial. Safe beginning, most persuasive. Least insulting
- Tell your story. Share your conclusion and judgment. Ensure its is rational, reasonable and decent. Don't wait too late for the conclusions to pile on. Look for safety problems. Use contrasting.
- Talk tentatively but don't be a wimp. Soften the message but don't dilute it.
  - Too soft: " This is probably stupid but..."
  - Too Hard: "How come you have no respect for anyone's time?"
  - Just Right : " Its starting to look as if you expect others to always pitch in for your work. Is that right?"
- Ask for others path. Blend confidence with humility. Ask for their fact and stories. Be open to learn something new. Be willing to expand or reshape your opinions
- Encourage testing. Invite opposing views by making is safe, Mean it. Play devils' advocate. Do it till your motive is obvious.

# Example of Effective Active Listening

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- Example of Effective Active Listening

# Role Play

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**Talker** has to describe what they want from a dream job but without mentioning a role/organization/location.

**Listener** has to practice active listening skills – listening attentively to what is being said and what is not quite being said and demonstrating their listening to the talker by their behaviour. After 4 mins the listener has to summarise the three main criteria that they have heard the talker express and then suggest a suitable role/organization/location.

Together, talker & listener will take 2 minute to review how close the listener was to what the talker said and needed.

Then swap roles and repeat.

**Observer** : Will review the exchange and brief the main group on how well the talker and listener demonstrated active listening skills.

# Example – the debate

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[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzn9bGHQI\\_g&list=PL4Z1KReRYNgclFGxmR6u9ceceGMrv1HYL&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzn9bGHQI_g&list=PL4Z1KReRYNgclFGxmR6u9ceceGMrv1HYL&index=6)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R\\_SeQQTpVeE&list=PL4Z1KReRYNgclFGxmR6u9ceceGMrv1HYL&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_SeQQTpVeE&list=PL4Z1KReRYNgclFGxmR6u9ceceGMrv1HYL&index=7)

# Mutual Purpose & Respect

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- Establish Mutual purpose.
  - Don't ignore safety risk. Look for safety violations. Don't let them lead you astray.
  - Don't fix safety risk the wrong way ( watering down the message, making excuses, dressing up the content)
  - Don't play games. Change gears. Step out, take a break. Establish Mutual Purpose. Start again.
- Mutual Respect: Do others believe that I respect them?

*If you recognize that either mutual purpose or mutual respect are at risk, step out of the content of the conversation and re-establish safety.*

# Make it Safe

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- Building Safety
  - When it's safe, you can say anything. Nothing kills meaningful dialogue like fear
  - People rarely become defensive because of what you are saying. They become defensive when they no longer feel safe. The problem is not always content of the conversation but the condition of the conversation.
  - When others feel unsafe, they can get aggressive, or attack you or withdraw completely.
- Apologize when appropriate.
  - Suspend your belief that your choice is the best and only one and that you won't be happy until you get what you want.
  - Say you are sorry for sounding rude or hurtful. Apologize for when you messed up.



# Contrasting

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- Contrast to fix any misunderstanding. Tell them what you don't mean. Then explain what you do.
  - Provide context, manage proportion
  - When you are in the middle of a conversation, sometimes your words appear bigger or worse than you intend.
  - " I don't want you to think....."
  - " I do want ....."

*"The last thing I want is for you to think I'm unhappy with your overall performance. What I do want to speak about is the quality of your work on the Marketing project."*

*"I'm not trying to say that things are perfect within the team, or that you are the only one involved. I do have some concerns about your behaviour yesterday, which is what I'd like to discuss."*

Tailor your **DON'T** statement based on what the other person might be thinking / feeling

Avoid the word "but" or "however" between statements - briefly **pause** instead

Both statements **have** to be genuine!

# Move to Action

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- Dialogue is not decision making.
- But you need decisions on next steps to conclude a meaningful crucial conversation
- Finish Clearly
- Determine who does what by when. Make the deliverables crystal clear. Set a follow up time. Record the commitments and the follow up. Finally hold people accountable to their promises.



## Exercise

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- Can you identify any CC techniques in this video?

Up in the air