Speaking Truth

Engaging in difficult conversations with **candor**, **curiosity,** and **compassion**

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Which squirrel captures how you're feeling right now?

On this squirrel scale, how do you feel today?

Story: My first college teaching experience...

Goal for today: Share ideas for addressing challenging <u>behavior</u> and <u>opinions</u> with **candor**, **curiosity** and **compassion**

What types of conversations can be *awkward, sensitive, uncomfortable, or emotionally charged*?

1 in 4 people have been putting off an uncomfortable conversation for at least six months.

Source: VitalSmarts, 2019

Which of the following mental hurdles do you face in having courageous conversations?

- *I often worry that my emotions will get the better of me.*
- *I don't feel confident in my communication tools – I'll probably say something I regret.*
- *I often worry that the person won't respond well to what I have to say.*
- *I often worry about the relationship being impacted by if I address the issue.*
- *I'm not perfect, so I feel judgmental raising things to others.*
- *I often worry about the repercussions of approaching someone.*

But what's at risk if we **don't** have those conversations?

"Twenty years of research involving more than 10,000 people reveals that the key skill of effective leaders, team members, parents and loved ones is **the capacity to skillfully address emotionally and politically risky issues**." – *Crucial Conversations*, p. 10

Let's start with behavior: GIVING FEEDBACK

Prepare for the conversation

- What's going on for **me**?
- What's going on for **them**? (ex. Life circumstances, other circumstances like gender, culture, etc)
- What's going to help us **hear each other**?
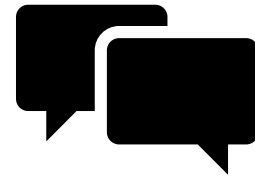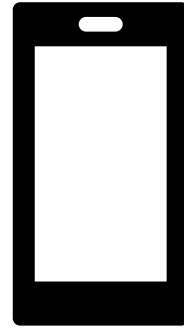
A helpful guide for an initial conversation addressing behavior

- ENSURE PRIVACY
- PERMISSION: "Do you have a few minutes to talk?"
- OBSERVATION: "I noticed_____"
- CURIOSITY: "Can you tell me about what was going on?"
- LISTEN
- EXAMPLE: "For example, when you said _____"
- IMPACT: "The story I told myself was_____"
- INTENTION: "I'm bringing this up because ____"
- REQUEST: "Going forward, would it be possible to_____?"
- THEIR THOUGHTS: "What do you think?"
- GRATITUDE: "Thank you for listening!"

'Lori' and the phone

Phrases that open the conversation

- "How are you doing?"
- "I may have misunderstood ____. Can you tell me your side of it?"
- "The story I told myself was…"
- "The way it landed on me was…"
- "And" instead of "but"
- "I'm sorry."

(What else?)

Phrases that close the conversation

- "You always…"
- "You never…"
- "You need to…"
- "You shouldn't…"
- "No, I/you didn't."
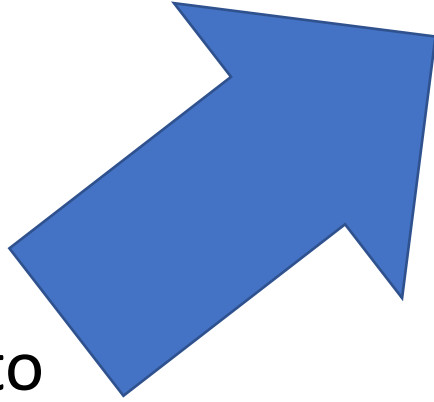- "I'm sorry that you took it that way."
- "Calm down."

If the conversation gets tense:

- Listen without interrupting

- If emotional, suggest a break.

- Clarify your actions and intentions.

- Apologize when appropriate.

- Humor can break up tension.

If others are operating here...

- Leaning on email, text, etc to address difficult issues.
- Gossiping.
- Unwilling to bring up something that's clearly bothering them.
- Treating others poorly.
- Etc.

Disrupt the pattern:

- Suggest a direct conversation.
- Call or visit them.
- Intervene in the email thread.
- Schedule a meeting.

Whenever possible, try to create a <u>path to a conversation</u>:

- *Hey, do you have a minute for a quick phone call?*
- *Hi____. I got your email and I'd like to check my understanding on a couple of things. Do you have a few minutes for a phone call?*
- *It sounds like this email thread is raising some concerns. I'm going to add this to the agenda for our next meeting.*

Scenario practice:

You're the chair of your neighborhood council. In meetings, an active member tends to veer off-topic and focus on their key priority (which others do not seem to be interested in). When you interject to remind the member of the topic at-hand, they complain that they are being silenced. What should you do?

How might we discuss differences of opinion?
(*How might we open hearts and minds, <u>including our own</u>*?

Curiosity

- New perspectives
- Deeper understanding
- Empathy
- Opportunities for mutual solutions

- Assumptions go unchecked
- Divisions grow
- No new learning
- No mutual solutions

- Assumptions persist
- Defenses go up
- Divisions grow
- No new learning
- No mutual solutions

Guiding 'Cs'

Be CURIOUS

"Can you tell me more about that?"

CLARIFY

Paraphrase, summarize
Ask for example

CONNECT

Empathize
Find commonality
Tell story
Be vulnerable

Tip: SET FACTS ASIDE.

"It's not so much that facts don't matter. It's that facts and talking points do not change minds."

– George Goehl, Director of People's Action

Example from a conversation with two hunters….

Growth and learning language:

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "I want to understand that better – can you tell me what you mean when you say…?"
- "I get the sense that you feel _____, is that right?"
- "So, if I'm understanding you right, you're saying___.Is that correct?"
- "I can understand why you see it that way."
- "I think I started to have a different opinion after __(incident/story)_"
- "Thanks for sharing your side of things with me."

Scenario practice:
You're at a community event and you meet someone who just moved to the neighborhood. When you ask them how they like the place, they remark, "I don't know, this place is nothing but druggies and criminals. I wish I never moved here." You feel differently. Practice a conversation with this person.

Debrief

Key takeaways for today

- Have a verbal conversation to address sensitive issues.

- Start with curiosity.

- Set facts aside when discussing controversial issues.

- Use stories to build bridges.

What is one key tool that you'd like to focus on using in your community work or other area of your life?