

# THE LOST ART OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

By Greg Wiens



*Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes are High*  
By Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzer  
McGraw-Hill, 256 pp. \$16.95

Every church throughout history, beginning with the New Testament churches has had conflict. Conflict is not bad, how it is dealt with usually either makes it healthy or unhealthy. In churches today, little teaching on conflict resolution goes beyond Matthew 18. *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson, et al. clearly gives a Biblical framework for managing conflict.

Disclaimer: This book is not overtly Christian. However, the principles its authors espouse are completely in sync with Christianity. James 3:9-12, Ephesians 4:25-32, Colossians 3:8-17, 1 Peter 4:11, and Matthew 5:37 line up with principles elucidated in this book.

Many conversations occurring in and around a church are crucial by definition (see chart on pg 2). Most of us have never been trained in how to handle discussions that fall into this category, and what we have learned about dealing with difficult conversations has come from trial and error. The book provides proven steps and skills as well as examples from everyday life to guide you through this delicate process.

One of those skills is to be able to understand the personal narrative you use to justify your perspective. The authors teach you how to hear the other person's story in a way that dissolves preexisting emotional barriers. The goal here is to get all pertinent information in the "pool of shared meaning". Only after every party contributes to the pool will a common understanding be established, and that step will happen only if everyone feels safe in the conversation environment.

The authors encourage the reader to ask: Why would a rational person do what they (the other person) did? A rationale almost always exists. Sometimes our own personal narrative blinds us from seeing the other person's perspective.

Another important skill taught in this book is to be able to refuse the "suckers choice", where we assume "win" and "lose" are the only options. Too often we impose this limited choice to others, or they do so to us. *Crucial Conversations* helps you find the elusive "and", which begins by identifying your true desired outcome of the conversation.

## **REAL-LIFE IMPACT OF CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS**

Reading *Crucial Conversations* has significantly helped me deal with being completely misunderstood or unfairly judged. In the past, I would apologize just for being misunderstood and not necessarily

wrong. I learned to express myself using contrasting statements instead of shallow apologizes. I now say, "I did not intend to say (whatever they heard), but what I intended to say was (whatever I intended). I have now honed this skill for a much more effective level of communication.

The skill sets taught in *Crucial Conversations* are critical for any leader. After reading this book three years ago, I used the principles to hold a meeting with a church mired in decades of conflict. Amazingly, in that one meeting, we were able to identify and resolve the issues that had been stifling the church's growth. After much work and God's provision, the church congregation is now 280 people strong, with 82 conversions this past year. This powerful transformation began with the principles outlined in *Crucial Conversations*.

## WHEN IS A CONVERSATION "CRUCIAL"?

STAKES ARE HIGH  
OPINIONS VARY  
EMOTIONS ARE STRONG

## FIVE STEPS TO AN EFFECTIVE CRUCIAL CONVERSATION:

SHARE FACTS, NOT OPINIONS, EMOTIONS OR JUDGMENTS  
TELL YOUR STORY SO PEOPLE KNOW YOUR INTERPRETATION  
ASK OTHERS TO SHARE THEIR STORY AND INTERPRETATION  
MAINTAIN TENTATIVENESS THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION  
INVITE SOLUTIONS TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUES

## HOW TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Step out of the issue and build safety before continuing  
Seek to establish a mutual purpose  
Seek to establish mutual respect

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