

Crucial conversations: four tips for open dialogue

Whether at home, social gathering or work, we all have crucial conversation moment. It is how we handle these moments that will determine the success of the conversation. According to Helene Vermaak, director at The Human Edge, recent research found that only 6% of people feel extremely confident in voicing their concerns in a crucial conversation situation.



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A crucial conversation is defined as a situation that has high stakes, opposing opinions and strong emotions and more often than not in these instances we take an avoidance approach. The adrenaline pumping through our bodies dictates a fight or flight response. For many, silence is the approach taken - withholding their views from the conversation - or they choose a violent approach of coercion, threats, and intimidation. Vermaak cautions that the more time spent in silence or violence, the worse the end result will be.

She provides the following four tips for open dialogue:

- **Get your heart right** – work on you first and make sure your heart is in the right place. Remember, people never become defensive about what you are saying. People become defensive because of why they think you are saying it. Know what you really want for yourself, others, the relationship, and organisation.
- **Get unstuck and unbundle with CPR** (content, pattern, and relationship) – identify the real issue and make sure that you are holding the right conversation. If during the conversation you are becoming increasingly frustrated, you may be holding the wrong conversation and if you ever have the same conversation twice, you are having the wrong conversation. If you are stuck at one level you need to move a level deeper and discover the root of the problem.

- **Get your head right and master your stories** – our stories create our emotions and we tend to believe that the stories we tell are the facts. We create victim, villain and helpless stories. To change this we need to change the path to action by asking ourselves “What is my role in this?”, “Why would a reasonable, rational and decent person do this?” followed by, “What should I do right now to move me towards what I really want?”

- **Describe the gap** – the hazardous half-minute. The first few seconds will set the tone for the rest of the conversation. The health of any relationship, team or organisation is a function of the average time lag between identifying and discussing problems. Vermaak warns that if you don't talk it out, you will act it out. In conclusion, she says that not holding or not holding conversations well, will always impact results and relationships.

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