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Patterson, Kerry, Grenny, Joseph, McMillan, Ron, & Switzler, Al. (2012). Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Use your library card to request *Crucial Conversations* from your local Nioga Member Library! See: <u>https://tinyurl.com/NiogaCrucialConvo</u>

Chapter 5: Make it Safe

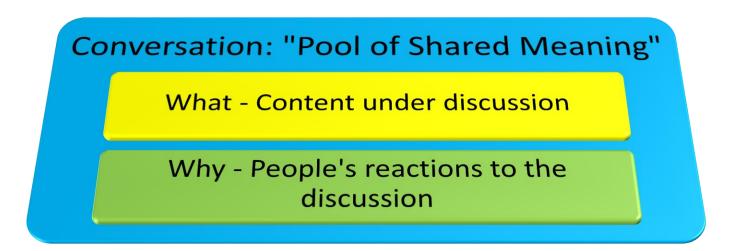
The authors start each chapter with a quote, and in chapter five, it's this: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver. Proverbs 25:11



Images from: https://theamericaneagleservice.wordpress.com/2020/02/27/a-word-fitly-spoken/



"The last chapter contained a promise: If you spot safety risks as they happen, you can step out of the conversation, *build safety*, and then find a way to talk about just about anything. In this chapter, we'll fulfill that promise by teaching what it takes to restore safety" (p. 73).



There's a lot of bouncing between Content and Reactions, and *it's quite the balancing act*. I would mention here exactly what I have said previously: If you are initiating a crucial conversation, make sure you have as much control of yourself as possible. Make sure you have taken care of basic physical aspects: Eat, drink, and rest. Watch the other person and try to pick a reasonably mutual time to talk. If you're a morning person and the other is a night owl, even at work, try to pick an agreeable time. However, no matter how well you might try to plan things, your plan probably won't survive the first sentence, so know that, too.

When a conversation starts, be sure to address what the authors mention in chapter three: *Start with the Heart.* "The first question is: 'What do I really want?' If you really want a healthy conversation about a topic that [could] make or break a relationship" (p. 75) *you* must be willing to start the balancing act. If you're discussing a difficult topic and the person responds with a potshot at you, or responds sarcastically, you need to be willing to deflect from the Reaction and redirect to the Content.

You must start by being willing to maintain focus on the content and control your own reactions.

The authors talk about two main conditions in creating a safe pool of shared meaning where real dialogue can happen:

Mutual Purpose	Mutual Respect
We have no reason to enter a conversation	We have no reason to continue a conversation
without this	without this
Meaning: "that others perceive that you're	Know this: "[Any] disrespect you carry in your
working toward a common outcome in the	head and are trying to keep hidden creeps out in
conversation, that you care [Reaction] about	[nonverbal ways]" (p. 79). Remember "Reaction"
their goals, interests, and values [Content]. And	
vice versa" (p. 77)	
"Mutual Purpose is not a technique. To succeed	"As people perceive that others don't respect
in crucial conversations, we must really care	them [Reaction], the conversation immediately
[Reaction] about the interests of others – not just	becomes unsafe and dialogue comes to a
our own If our goal is to get our way or	screeching halt [Content]. Why? Because
manipulate others, it will quickly become	respect is like air. As long as it's present,
apparent [and] safety will be destroyed"	nobody thinks about it. But if you take it away,
[Content] (p. 78).	it's all that people can think about" (p. 79).
CAN WE SEE HOW DIFFICULT THIS BALANCING ACT REALLY IS? I'm tired just talking about	

talking!

To sum this up: The authors talk about what I have called a balancing act as "step out and step back in" to the pool of shared meaning. If you sense the conversation derailing, they advise the following: apologize, contrast, and re-create a mutual purpose (p. 82).

Apologize when appropriate, and do it sincerely. Follow it with a change of heart, which will show in your actions the next time a sticky situation comes up.

Contrast to fix a misunderstanding with a "don't/do statement."

Statement "Don't" Part	Statement "Do" Part
"Address others' concerns that you don't respect them or that you have a malicious purpose" (p 85).	"Confirm your respect or clarify your real purpose" (p. 85).

"*Contrasting is not apologizing.* It's important to understand [that]. It is not a way of taking back something we've said that hurt others' feelings. Rather, it is a way of ensuring that what we said didn't hurt more than it should have. *Contrasting provides context and proportion.* When you're in the middle of a touchy conversation, sometimes others experience your words as bigger or worse that you intend" (p. 87). To be clear, this is a quote from the book and the emphasis is in the original.

Sometimes our words are taken in a way we find to be completely unreasonably ("You always say this crap!" or, "You never listen to me! Why should I start listening to you?)

We even do this to others.

Remember, the only person you can control in the conversation is yourself. BREATHE. Stop, maybe even acknowledge the person is *right*, and this is not the best time to talk.

Be willing to end with a positive note that you are open to begin the conversation again at another time, one that might be better. I have found that some people undergo an amazing transformation here – it's really magical. If you have established that they *believe that you respect them*, when you say, "You're right," the other person quickly figures out that it isn't some manipulative ploy you're using, they can become amazingly receptive to the dialogue again.

Doing this MIGHT re-establish your mutual purpose and allow the conversation to continue. If so, great. If not, well, it's not personal.

You may not experience this reaction, but hey, what do you have to lose?

Good luck!

Funding for computer training is provided by the Nioga Library System

