

# Crucial Conversations:

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## **Chapter 3: Start with Heart: How to stay focused on what you really want.**

The first principle of dialogue: *Start with your own heart*. “If you can’t get yourself right, you’ll have a hard time getting dialogue right. (p27)

People who are best at dialogue “*work on me first*” because they understand that rarely are we merely bystanders; we usually do something that worsens the situation or conflict we experience. And those with greatest insight and skill are also those who work hardest at getting relationships right.

They do two important things:

1. They focus on what they want
2. They avoid the ‘sucker’s choice’ (either/or; win/lose)

*What do I really want for myself?*

*What do I really want for others?*

*What do I really want for the relationship?*

Find your bearings (set your goal), and take charge of your body (manage your physiological responses)

Asking these questions does two things:

1. Reminds us of our goal
2. Empowers our brain to keep us going forward

We get sidetracked by:

1. Wanting to win
2. Seeking revenge
3. Hoping to remain safe

Searching for **AND**

1. Clarify what you really want
2. Clarify what you really don’t want
3. Present your brain with a more complex problem – how can I do this AND that?

### **When you find yourself moving toward silence or violence, stop and pay attention to your motives.**

1. Ask yourself: “What does my behavior tell me about what my motives are?”
2. Then, clarify what you really want. Ask yourself: “What do I want for myself? For others? For the relationship?”
3. And finally, ask: “How would I behave if this were what I really wanted?” Refuse the Fool’s Choice

### **As you consider what you want, notice when you start talking yourself into a Fool’s Choice.**

1. Watch to see if you’re telling yourself that you must choose between peace and honesty, between winning and losing, and so on.
2. Break free of these Fool’s Choices by searching for the and.
3. Clarify what you don’t want, add it to what you do want, and ask your brain to start searching for healthy options to bring you to dialogue.

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## **Chapter 4 – Learning to Look: How to notice when safety is at risk**

“It’s a form of social first aid. By watching for the moment a conversation starts turning unhealthy, you can respond quickly. The sooner you notice you’re not in dialogue, the easier it is to get back and the lower the costs.”

### **What do you look for?**

1. The moment a conversation turns crucial – physical, emotional, verbal, behavioral signs
2. Signs that people don’t feel safe (silence or violence) – “people rarely become defensive simply because of what you’re saying. They only become defensive when they no longer feel safe. The problem is not the content of your message, but the condition of the conversation.” When people don’t feel safe, they retreat or attack. That is when we should ask ourselves, ***“How can I increase the experience of safety in this conversation?”***  
Examples of Silence... withholding information, blocking, covering, avoiding  
Examples of violence... name-calling, monologuing, threats...
3. What is your own Style Under Stress – become a vigilant self-monitor. Understand how you react/respond and why.

### **Learning to Self-Monitor**

In Family Systems Theory we say, “Think systems, watch process.” In the present conversation, this means that we focus not only on the content of the conversation, but on the way the conversation is progressing, how each participant is behaving, and the broader environmental context. “What is really going on?” We need to learn to recognize our own feelings and thoughts about the discussion and the conversation partners, not just the topic of conversation.

Between every stimulus and response, there is a space. Our goal is to widen that space to provide sufficient time for this self-monitoring. When your mother said, “If you get angry, count to ten,” she was teaching you to create space between the stimulus and your response – between what someone said or did and how you choose to respond rather than impulsively reacting.

The distinction between react and respond can be helpful. Reactions are impulsive, instinctual, immediate. Responses are thoughtful, reflective, considered. Reactions are more likely driven by emotions, while responses incorporate understanding about higher goals and needs.

One way to approach this from a faith perspective is to remember to “pray the pause.” That is, rather than filling that space by counting from 1-10 (or 100!) focus mind and heart in a prayerful posture of open receptivity, asking for wisdom, guidance and peace, or extending grace, mercy and blessing to others.

Also, ask a few trusted friends or colleagues to help you self-monitor. Give them permission to point out to you what they see and hear from you in crucial conversations. Perhaps you have some patters of thought, speech or action of which you are unaware.

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Next, we will learn to create safe space, and to master our stories – the explanations we tell ourselves that guide our words and actions.

## **STYLE UNDER STRESS**

This 33-question assessment allows you to see how you respond in crucial conversations in a specific relationship. The results indicate your natural tendencies to move toward silence or violence as well as the dialogue skills or tools you use well or need improvement in.

The following questions explore how you typically respond when you're in the middle of a stressful situation.

Instructions:

- **Relationship.** Before you get started, think about the relationship you want to explore—with your boss, a coworker, a direct report, a friend, or family member—keep this relationship in mind.
- **Circumstance.** Next, think of a tough circumstance—one where you might slip into either silence or violence.
- **Apply.** Now, with that relationship and circumstance in mind, respond to the following statements as either true or false.

- True  False      1. At times I avoid situations that might bring me into contact with people I'm having problems with.
- True  False      2. I have put off returning phone calls or e-mails because I simply didn't want to deal with the person who sent them.
- True  False      3. Sometimes when people bring up a touchy or awkward issue I try to change the subject.
- True  False      4. When it comes to dealing with awkward or stressful subjects, sometimes I hold back rather than give my full and candid opinion.
- True  False      5. Rather than tell people exactly what I think, sometimes I rely on jokes, sarcasm, or snide remarks to let them know I'm frustrated.
- True  False      6. When I've got something tough to bring up, sometimes I offer weak or insincere compliments to soften the blow.
- True  False      7. In order to get my point across, I sometimes exaggerate my side of the argument.
- True  False      8. If I seem to be losing control of a conversation, I might cut people off or change the subject in order to bring it back to where I think it should be.
- True  False      9. When others make points that seem stupid to me, I sometimes let them know it without holding back at all.
- True  False      10. When I'm stunned by a comment, sometimes I say things that others might take as forceful or attacking—terms such as "Give me a break!" or "That's ridiculous!"
- True  False      11. Sometimes when things get a bit heated I move from arguing against others' points to saying things that might hurt them personally.
- True  False      12. If I really get into a heated discussion, I've been known to be tough on the other person. In fact, they might even feel a bit insulted or hurt.
- True  False      13. When I'm discussing an important topic with others, sometimes I move from trying to make my point to trying to win the battle.
- True  False      14. In the middle of a tough conversation, I often get so caught up in arguments that I don't see how I'm coming across to others.
- True  False      15. When talking gets tough and I do something hurtful, I'm quick to apologize for my mistakes.

- True  False 16. When I think about a conversation that took a bad turn, I tend to focus first on what I did that was wrong rather than focus on others' mistakes.
- True  False 17. When I've got something to say that others might not want to hear, I avoid starting out with tough conclusions, and instead start with facts that help them understand where I'm coming from.
- True  False 18. I can tell very quickly when others are holding back or feeling defensive in a conversation.
- True  False 19. Sometimes I decide that it's better not to give harsh feedback because I know that it's bound to cause real problems.
- True  False 20. When conversations aren't working, I step back from the fray, think about what's happening, and take steps to make it better.
- True  False 21. When others get defensive because they misunderstand me, I immediately get us back on track by clarifying what I do and don't mean.
- True  False 22. There are some people I'm rough on because, to be honest, they need or deserve what I give them.
- True  False 23. I sometimes make absolute statements like "The fact is..." or "It's obvious that..." to be sure my point gets across.
- True  False 24. If others hesitate to share their views, I sincerely invite them to say what's on their mind, no matter what it is.
- True  False 25. At times I argue hard for my view hoping to keep others from bringing up opinions that would be a waste of energy to discuss anyway.
- True  False 26. Even when things get tense, I adapt quickly to how others are responding to me and try a new strategy.
- True  False 27. When I find that I'm at cross purposes with someone, I often keep trying to win my way rather than looking for common ground.
- True  False 28. When things don't go well, I'm more inclined to see the mistakes others made than notice my own role.
- True  False 29. After I share strong opinions, I go out of my way to invite others to share their views, particularly opposing ones.
- True  False 30. When others hesitate to share their views, I do whatever I can to make it safe for them to speak honestly.
- True  False 31. Sometimes I have to discuss things I thought had been settled because I don't keep track of what was discussed before.
- True  False 32. I find myself in situations where people get their feelings hurt because they thought they would have more of a say in final decisions than they end up having.
- True  False 33. I get frustrated sometimes at how long it takes some groups to make decisions because too many people are involved.

## Style Under Stress And Dialogue Skills

Use with the "Style Under Stress" 33 question assessment.

<b>Silence</b>	<b>Violence</b>
<b>Masking</b> ___ 5 (T) ___ 6 (T)	<b>Controlling</b> ___ 7 (T) ___ 8 (T)
<b>Avoiding</b> ___ 3 (T) ___ 4 (T)	<b>Labeling</b> ___ 9 (T) ___ 10 (10)
<b>Withdrawing</b> ___ 1 (T) ___ 2 (T)	<b>Attacking</b> ___ 11 (T) ___ 12 (T)

Figure 4.1. Score Sheet for Style under Stress Assessment. A high score means you may use this technique fairly often.

<b>Ch 3: Start with Heart</b> ___ 13 (F) ___ 19 (F) ___ 25 (F)	<b>Ch 7: STATE my Path</b> ___ 17 (T) ___ 23 (F) ___ 29 (T)
<b>Ch 4: Learn to Look</b> ___ 14 (F) ___ 20 (T) ___ 26 (T)	<b>Ch 8: Explore Others' Paths</b> ___ 18 (T) ___ 24 (T) ___ 30 (T)
<b>Ch 5: Make it Safe</b> ___ 15 (T) ___ 21 (T) ___ 27 (F)	<b>Ch 9: Move to Action</b> ___ 31 (F) ___ 32 (F) ___ 33 (F)
<b>Ch 6: Master my Stories</b> ___ 16 (T) ___ 22 (F) ___ 28 (F)	

Figure 4.2. Score Sheet for Dialogue Skills Assessment. Reflects your skills in each of the corresponding seven skill chapters. A high score suggests you may be skilled in this area. A low score points to an area for improvement.