

Crucial Conversations Chapter 6: Master Your Stories:

How to stay in dialogue when you're angry, scared, or hurt

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“He made me mad”

Who pushed your buttons? You have an experience where someone in your life does or says something. You decide you “know” what she is thinking and you feel judged, manipulated, excluded, insulted, ignored, taken for granted, (you add to the list...) You decide, and perhaps say to others, that this person has ‘pushed your buttons’ – but did she? Why do various people react differently to the same stimulus, and why do each of us react so differently in different situations?

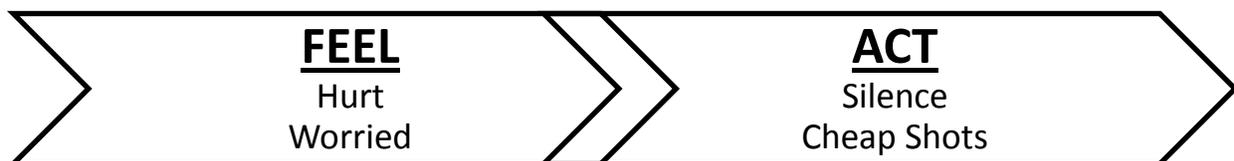
Emotions don't just happen

- **Claim one:** “You and only you create your emotions”
- **Claim two:** “Once you've created your upset emotions you have only two options:... You either find a way to master them or fall hostage to them.”

Maria's Story – She's reacting and doesn't even know it

Maria is working on a project with a colleague. Throughout, she experiences things that she interprets as demeaning and discounting. She doesn't want to whine, so she says nothing, or uses sarcasm. Her colleague Louis has no idea why she is behaving this way. There are three options for Maria in this situation:

1. The **Worst** at dialogue do not even know they are being reactive. Their thoughts and behaviors seem to be the only logical ones “under the circumstances.”
2. The **Good** at dialogue realize they may be overly emotional, but don't know what to do, so they stuff their feelings until something comes out sideways.
3. The **Best** at dialogue think about their emotional responses, realize that there could be various explanations for any given situation, and find a way to manage their own feelings by telling themselves a different story



HOW FEELINGS DRIVE ACTIONS

Stories Create Feelings

The story we tell ourselves about our experience is actually what drives our feelings. If we feel angry, then we have told ourselves a story in which our anger is justified. If we feel scared or hurt, then we've told ourselves a story in which we have been injured or threatened. These stories are not inevitable. We can choose what story to tell ourselves, and when a particular story drives us in an undesirable direction, we can choose to tell a different story.

Between **STIMULUS** and **RESPONSE** there is a **SPACE**
That space is where we tell a story and feel.



Stories provide the explanation for our experience – they are the *why, how and what*.

“Why is this happening?” “How do I make sense of it?” “What do I do now?”

Any set of facts can be used to tell an infinite number of stories.

SKILLS FOR MASTERING OUR STORIES

Retrace your path:

- [Act] Notice your behavior. Ask: Am I in some form of silence or violence?
- [Feel] Get in touch with your feelings. What emotions are encouraging me to act this way?
- [Tell story] Analyze your stories. What story is creating these emotions?
- [See/hear] Get back to the facts. What evidence do I have to support this story?

Separate fact from story by focusing on behavior, not on interpretation. Watch for words that convey emotion or judgment in telling the story.

Watch for three “clever” stories:

- Victim stories: “It’s not my fault.”
- Villain Stories: “It’s *all* your fault.”
- Helpless Stories: “There’s nothing else I can do.”

Why we tell them? They fit with what we see, they get us off the hook, and they protect us from acknowledging our own sellouts – times when we think we should act one way, but don’t.

Final Step – Tell a useful story:

A useful story “creates emotions that lead to healthy action – like dialogue”.

Turn victims into actors. Turn villains into humans. Turn the helpless into the able.

“Why would a reasonable, rational and decent person be doing what X is doing?”

“What do I really want – for myself, the other person, and the relationship?”

“What would I do right now if I really wanted these results?”