

Crucial Skills™ Training Suite

Crucial Conversations® + Crucial Accountability®



Our Great Challenge: Others

One of the greatest challenges we face at work is . . . others. No matter our field of expertise, we're required to work with experts from marketing, sales, accounting, HR, and management, not to mention customers. Day

in and day out, we must "interface" with others. Lots of others. Opinionated others. Faulted others. And we're not alone in finding frustration with others. Nearly everyone can relate to the challenge of attempting to secure results while working with other human beings.

Two Crucial Moments

Our research over the past thirty years has attempted to solve this very challenge. We found that the moments that make the biggest difference in our effectiveness are situations where we have to communicate with one or more people. Specifically, the way we behave in the following two crucial moments has a profound effect on our success:

- 1) **Crucial Conversations: Communicating when the stakes are high, opinions differ, and emotions run strong.** Teach individuals how to speak their minds during a crucial conversation, aim those conversations at the variables you want to affect, and then watch as an increase in dialogue directly impacts results.

Given the importance of crucial conversations skills in affecting key performance indicators, it shouldn't be a surprise to learn that when you ask leaders who they believe their most valued employees are, individuals who can speak up and make it safe for others to do the same

routinely sit at the top of the list. In short, crucial conversations skills benefit both the organization and the individuals who demonstrate them.

- 2) **Crucial Accountability: Communicating with others who let us down, violate expectations, break promises, or behave poorly.** When a cultural norm develops that allows people to raise concerns with those beside, above, and below them on the org. chart, problems are solved routinely and quickly, and a pervasive sense of empowerment and responsibility for results prevails. Even when problems happen, the sense of personal responsibility that accompanies a culture where anyone can hold anyone else accountable drives a focus on learning rather than blame. This focus accelerates the development of collective competence, dramatically improving execution and facilitating innovation.

Leaders must often make the difficult decision to choose between improving their people's ability to succeed in just one of these crucial moments. Will a culture of dialogue or one of accountability have a greater impact on their organization?

The good news is you no longer need two different skill sets and practices to succeed in both healthy dialogue and dealing with disappointments. The same set of interpersonal tools can be applied to both the act of idea creation (where individuals talk openly and come up with the best solutions) and to execution (when others fail to deliver on their promises).

VitalSmarts has created a sure-fire approach to ensure that training graduates are equipped with just such dual-purpose skills.

Here's how it's done.



Crucial conversations skills are particularly valuable in times where healthy dialogue is needed, yet individuals appear reluctant to share their views. This reticence to speak frankly and openly usually stems from the fact that these individuals' input is different from the norm, controversial, unpleasant, counter to those in authority, or in some way, likely to elicit a negative reaction. In short, people choose to hide behind the veil of silence when they believe speaking their mind will be more harmful than beneficial.

As you might suspect, as individuals maintain their silence, harboring their opinions eventually eats at them. Unshared opinions fester,

ferment, and sour over time. Consequently, when individuals who have suppressed their feelings and opinions finally share their views, they often do so in a less-than-tactful way. Anxious to be heard and fearful that the team is now headed down the wrong path, they force their ideas into the conversation with abrupt debate tactics, harsh humor, inflammatory language, or even subtle threats. People who routinely live in the shadow of fear to speak up toggle from silence to violence and back again. This constant flipping from one unhealthy conversation to another kills creativity, problem solving, and decision-making.

Slipping into silence or violence is particularly costly in our modern day where interdependence is key. Success hinges on all members of a work team feeling able and willing to freely share their specialized views in order to provide the breadth of information necessary to achieve the best result.

That's why, when dialogue fails, disaster ensues. The cost of silence in meetings where poor decisions are made and consensus has been evaded is seen in the form of post-meeting lobbying, game playing, coalition forming, and other non-value added activities. Morale, of course, dips to precipitous lows as debates rage.

As you might imagine, when interdependent team members replace silence and violence with honest dialogue, not only do working conditions improve, but so do results. Team members make better choices based on the honest sharing and vetting of information. In addition, people take ownership of decisions because they've been involved in an open discussion—not a lecture or mandate. And finally, since everyone freely takes part in the dialogue, there's a shared understanding and commitment. Everyone now marches to the beat of the same drummer.

In summary, when you make it safe for interdependent people who hold different views and expertise to openly share their ideas, the group makes the best possible decisions and then acts on these decisions with conviction and unity.

The crucial conversations skills for engaging in healthy dialogue include:

Start with Heart: Learn to focus on what you really want—rather than shifting to unhealthy emotional reactions such as trying to win others over to your view, discrediting others, or even causing them grief.

Master My Stories: Gain control over your emotions by cutting off disappointment, anger, and fear at the source.

STATE My Path: Reduce defensiveness by starting with facts and only tentatively sharing conclusions.

Learn to Look: Spot when either you or others are slipping into either silence or violence and, as a result, putting safety at risk and starving the pool of shared meaning

Make It Safe: Learn to dispel misunderstanding and distrust by clarifying misunderstood motives and establishing mutual purpose.

Explore Others' Paths: Turn attacking into dialogue by identifying and responding to others' unhealthy conclusions.



One wise healthcare executive discovered that rampant hospital-acquired infections (infections patients contract from healthcare workers!) were not a fact of life in a complex healthcare system. Rather, they were largely a consequence of silence. Many of her

employees knew how to avoid spreading infections but were afraid to hold others accountable to following the simple best practices of washing hands or wearing masks and gowns. For example, we once watched a doctor working with tiny, critically ill, premature babies enter the intensive care unit without donning the required protective clothing. We were stunned not only that he did that, but that the dozen or so nurses and doctors who saw him said nothing.

If team members can't hold each other accountable, then an organization's capacity to carry out unified action on complex interdependent tasks plummets. And nearly all significant results, whether they are related to innovation or to execution, require unified action across multiple teams and functions.

In cultures where accountability is weak, those who see problems say nothing because they assume they don't have the power or authority to raise a concern. Time, resources and morale are wasted through an unwritten rule that "accountability is someone else's job." In so doing, they unwittingly collude in undermining results. Then when it comes time to debrief the disaster, the focus is more on blame than on learning since there is no widely shared sense of accountability. Because mistakes threaten power, the immediate motivation in a power-focused culture is to deflect blame.

Organizations that want to pivot rapidly and execute flawlessly can't afford to wait for accountability to happen top down. Successful organizations depend on creating a culture where anyone can hold

anyone else accountable—managers to employees, employees to managers, and peers to peers

So how do you hold others accountable in a manner that not only solves the problem at hand and produces better results, but also improves relationships?

The skills for enhancing accountability, improving performance, and ensuring execution include:

Describe the Gap: Share what was expected versus what was observed and ask helpful questions that invite others to communicate his or her perspective.

Make It Safe: Learn how to take steps to rebuild safety and return to dialogue, and to talk about almost anything—without silence and violence.

Diagnose the Underlying Cause: Understand what barriers are causing the gap in expectations. Is it motivation, ability, or both? Once you understand the barriers, use the Six Sources of Influence™ to see what's driving the gap.

Make It Easy: Learn to clearly understand and communicate obstacles, explore new ideas, and help others brainstorm ways to overcome ability barriers. Consider personal, social, and structural solutions that could improve one's ability.

Make it Motivating: Motivate others by identifying natural consequences and making invisible consequences more visible. Explore all three sources of motivation—personal, social, and structural.

The Crucial Skills Suite

On their own, each of these skill sets can lead to profound results including improvements to productivity, quality, efficiency, and bottom-line performance. Organizations that train their workforces in these skills also report better teamwork, improved relationships, and transformed cultures. However, the real impact of these skills is realized when they are taught together.

Imagine the impact on results if people trained in crucial conversations knew how to apply their skills when facing an accountability challenge —when others broke a promise, violated an expectation, or when they

encountered chronic bad behavior? Conversely, how much more effective would an organization become if those trained in accountability skills could also engage in candid and respectful dialogue with anyone at any time?

To quickly and easily teach the accountability skills that require more than a simple conversation, and the conversations skills that lead to effective dialogue, VitalSmarts created one-day versions of both Crucial Conversations and Crucial Accountability. Now, graduates of either Crucial Conversations or Crucial Accountability can build on the skills they learned in the two-day course and learn a powerful new set of skills with just one additional day of training.

The one-day *Crucial Accountability* and *Crucial Conversations* courses offer several additional benefits for ensuring skill transference, including:

Continued Practice. The skills taught in the two-day courses are repeatedly practiced throughout the one-day course—constantly fine-tuning participants' knowledge and skills.

Content Refresher. To ensure the course continues to build on the principles and skills from the two-day courses, the third day starts with a review of the skills participants learned in the prerequisite course. Revisiting the skills serves as a helpful refocusing and refining process.

Enhanced Mastery and Confidence. As participants combine the core skills with the additional skills they learn in the one-day courses, their ability to deal with complex disappointments or engage in candid dialogue increases and their confidence skyrockets.

Our last thirty years of research, combined with impressive training results experienced by virtually hundreds of companies across the world, continually demonstrate that learning the skills of creating healthy dialogue and holding others accountable is truly a winning combination. When you teach employees the skills of both Crucial Conversations and Crucial Accountability, you can immediately improve your key performance indicators. Learn the skills, focus them on the results you're trying to improve (from safety, to on-time delivery, to quality—you name it), and watch as your results soar.

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About VitalSmarts— An innovator in corporate training and leadership development, VitalSmarts combines three decades of original research with 50 years of the best social science thinking to help leaders and organizations change human behavior and achieve new levels of performance. VitalSmarts has identified four high-leverage skill sets that, when used in combination, create healthy corporate cultures. These skills are taught in the Company's award-winning training programs and *New York Times* bestselling books of the same titles: *Crucial Conversations*, *Crucial Accountability*, *Influencer*, and *Change Anything*. VitalSmarts has consulted with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies and trained more than one million people worldwide.
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