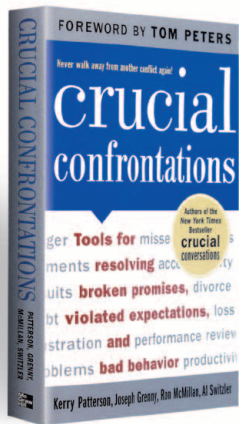


SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®

FILE: LEADERSHIP



By Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler

Tools for Resolving Broken Promises, Violated Expectations, and Bad Behavior

CRUCIAL CONFRONTATIONS

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Behind the problems that regularly plague families, teams and organizations are individuals who either can't or won't deal with failed promises. The reason is that they're afraid to talk face to face about difficult but important issues — and as their fear of confrontation prevents them from resolving these issues, simple problems grow into chronic problems.

By learning how to deal with challenging confrontations, you'll learn to avoid the typical, but unconstructive, response of slipping either into awkward silence or embarrassing violence.

Mastering crucial confrontations requires a skill set. In Crucial Confrontations, consultant Kerry Patterson and executive coach Joseph Grenny join forces with their fellow researchers and trainers Ron McMillan and Al Switzler to help others develop the skills it takes to resolve the most pressing problems, including quality violations, safety infractions, cost-cutting mistakes, and medical errors. The authors write that their research shows that most organizations are losing between 20 and 80 percent of their potential performance because they have not mastered crucial confrontations.

The skills for mastering crucial confrontations can be learned; the authors of Crucial Confrontations show you how.

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What You'll Learn In This Summary

- ✓ How to master your emotions.
- ✓ How to describe problems in ways that don't cause defensiveness.
- ✓ How to motivate others without using threats.
- ✓ How to deal with violated expectations without harming relationships.
- ✓ How to talk to your direct reports face to face when they don't live up to a commitment.
- ✓ How to help others want to take action.

CRUCIAL CONFRONTATIONS

by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler

— THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

What's a Crucial Confrontation?

Sarah, the head nurse at the Pine Valley Medical Center in northwestern Washington, stands frozen as doctors discuss the treatment of an elderly patient. Years of experience have taught Sarah two things: One, the patient probably needed an immediate and large dose of antibiotics, and two, even though the doctors were discussing a treatment that *didn't* involve antibiotics, Sarah would keep her mouth shut.

Years earlier, fresh out of college, Sarah had cheerfully disagreed with the three doctors she had been assisting. They stopped dead in their tracks and looked at her as if she were a cockroach on a wedding cake. In one poignant moment that was forever burned into her psyche, the rules had been made clear to Sarah: Don't disagree with a physician — ever. Now, nearly two decades and hundreds of confirming incidents later, she stands by wondering: Will the doctors do what I believe they should do, or will they come to the same conclusion too late? She *doesn't* wonder if she should speak up. Sarah's expectations weren't met, and in response she has resorted to silence.

Silence and Violence

Staring into the face of a possible disaster, some people are caught in agonizing silence. Rather than speak directly and frankly about the problem at hand, they drop hints, change the subject, or actually withdraw from the interaction altogether. Fear drives them to various forms of silence and their point of view is never heard — except maybe as gossip or rumor.

Others break away from their tortured inaction only to slip into violence. Frightened at the thought of not being heard, they try to force their ideas on others. They cut people off, overstate arguments, attack ideas, employ harsh debate tactics, and eventually resort to insults and threats. Fear drives them to do violence to the discussion and their ideas are often resisted.

We all face crucial confrontations. We set clear expectations, but the other person doesn't live up to them — we feel disappointed. Lawyers call these incidents breaches of contract. What do you do when someone disappoints you? You could choose violence, or you

could opt for another choice, like Sarah, and choose silence. But there is a method that falls somewhere between the polar worlds of fight and flight. Mastering crucial confrontations allows you to deal with failed promises, disappointments and other performance gaps.

Unless you step up to and master crucial confrontations, nothing will get better. It will be a skill set, not a policy, that will enable you to solve pressing problems.

If you can't effectively confront violated expectations, you eventually experience massive personal, social and organizational consequences. If you can't deal with performance gaps, you'll either fight or take flight. Productivity will run at half of what it should.

If you learn how to hold people accountable in a way that solves problems without causing new ones, you can look forward to significant and lasting change.

When you confront, you hold someone accountable, face to face. When confrontations are handled correctly, both parties are candid, open, honest and respectful. As a result, problems are resolved and relationships benefit. Crucial confrontation skills offer the best chance to succeed — no matter the topic, person or circumstance.

Learn how to hold crucial confrontations and you'll never have to walk away from another conflict again. ■

For Additional Information on when being polite leads to tragedy, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

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PART ONE: WHAT TO DO BEFORE A CRUCIAL CONFRONTATION

Choose What and If

Problems that require a confrontation with another person often leave us with two questions: WHAT and IF. First, WHAT violation or violations do you actually address? How do you dismantle a bundle of problems into its component parts and choose the one you want to confront? Second, you have to decide IF you're actually going to say anything. Do you speak up and run the risk of causing new problems, or do you remain silent and run the risk of never solving the problem?

When problems come in complicated bundles, it's not always easy to know which problems you should address. You have to identify and deal with the right problem or it will never go away.

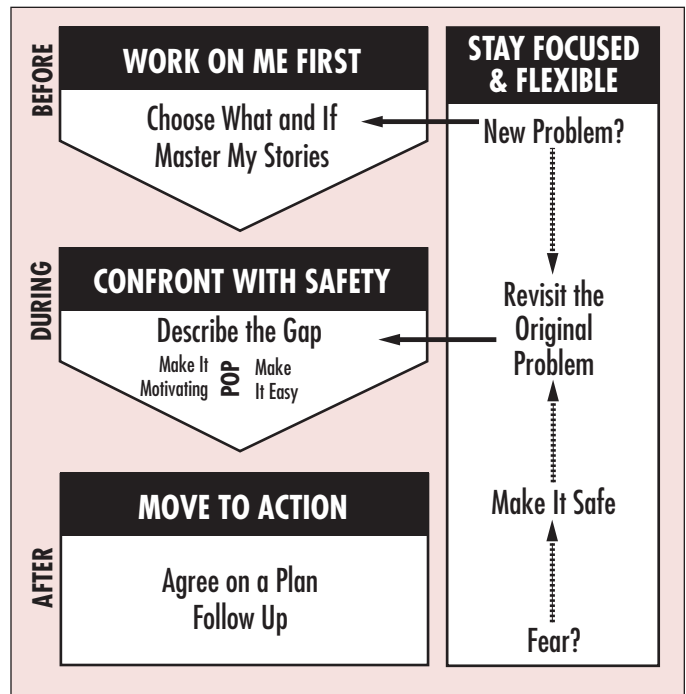
Learning how to get at the gist of an infraction requires time and practice. Feeling pressured by time constraints and hyped up by emotions, most people miss the real deal. The ability to reduce an infraction to its bare essence takes patience, a sense of proportion, and precision. First, you have to unbundle the problem. Second, you have to decide what has you bothered the most. If not, you'll either end up going after the wrong target or too many targets. Finally, you have to be concise. You have to distill the issue to a single sentence. Lengthy problem descriptions only obfuscate the real issue. If you can't reduce a violation to a clear sentence *before* you talk, the issue almost never becomes more understandable and focused as a conversation unfolds.

Think CPR

To help hit the right target, use the acronym "CPR." The first time a problem comes up, talk about the *Content*, what just happened: "You drank too much at the luncheon, became inebriated, started talking too loud, made fun of our clients, and embarrassed the company." The content of a problem typically deals with a single event.

The next time the problem occurs, talk *Pattern*, what has been happening over time. "This is the second time this has occurred. You agreed it wouldn't happen again, and I'm concerned that I can't count on you to keep a promise." Pattern issues acknowledge that problems have histories and that histories make a difference.

As the problem continues, talk about *Relationship*, what's happening to *us*. Relationship concerns are far bigger than either the content or the pattern. The issue is *not* that others have disappointed you repeatedly; it's that the string of disappointments has caused you to lose trust in them. You doubt their competency, you don't respect or trust their promises, and it's affecting how you treat one another. "This is starting to put a strain on how we work together. I feel like I have to nag you to keep



you in line, and I don't like doing that. I guess my fear is that I can't trust you to keep the agreements you make."

If your real concern is around the *relationship* and you discuss only the pattern of behavior, you're likely to be dissatisfied with the outcome, and you'll have the same conversation again later.

To understand the various kinds of content, pattern and relationship issues that can pop up during crucial confrontations, consider these three dimensions: consequences, intents and wants. Each provides a distinct method for first unbundling and then prioritizing complex problems.

Unbundling

- **Consequences.** Problems are almost never contained in the behavior of the offender. They're much more likely to be contained in what happens afterward. The problem lies in the consequences. When you want to clarify the issue you need to confront, stop and ask yourself, What are the consequences of this problem to me? To our relationship? To the task? To the stakeholder? Analyzing the consequences helps you determine what is most important to discuss.

- **Intentions.** A fellow you work with cheerfully agreed to format a report you created, and then, instead of giving it to you, he handed it directly to your boss. You believe that his intentions were selfish (he was trying to take credit). You've drawn this conclusion as the result of mounting evidence. You've examined the problem, weighed the particulars, and are starting to believe the person's intentions

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Choose What and If

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are indeed bad. When this happens, the behavior isn't the problem, at least not the big one. What came before the person acted is the problem, at least in your mind. Intentions are the issue you ought to discuss.

● **Wants.** As you begin to unravel a bundle of problems, the list of component parts can grow so large you may not know where to begin. The best tool for choosing from the host of possible problems is to ask what you really want and don't want. And since you're talking to another person, you ought to ask what you want for *yourself*, for the *other person*, and for the *relationship*. If you don't think about all three of these essential aspects, one may take a back seat and you won't solve your most important problem.

The 'If' Question

Just because you've identified the problem you'd like to discuss doesn't mean you should actually discuss it. Sometimes it's better to consider the consequences before deciding whether to bring the issue up.

In organizations, there are reports, goals, performance indicators, quality scorecards, budget variances, and other metrics that clearly show a difference between what was expected and what was delivered. These failed promises represent clear opportunities to have crucial confrontations.

But what if the problems are ambiguous or discussing them could get you into trouble? How do you know if you're *not* speaking up when you *should*? More often than not, going to silence is the prominent issue in most families and companies. Ask the following four questions to diagnose whether you're clamming up when you should be speaking up:

● **Am I acting out my concerns?** You can't hide your real emotions. When you've gone silent, but your body keeps sending out hostile signals or you're dropping hints or relying on sarcasm, you probably ought to speak up.

● **Is my conscience nagging me?** Pay attention to a nagging conscience — it may be indicating a confrontation that you need to step up to.

● **Am I choosing the certainty of silence over the risk of speaking up?** Don't confuse the question of whether the confrontation will be difficult with the question of whether you should deal with it.

● **Am I telling myself that I am helpless?** The problem is less often that others are *impossible* to approach than that we aren't sure *how* to approach them. Know what to say and how to say it.

Speaking Up When You Shouldn't

How do you know when you are speaking up when you *shouldn't*? There are times when it's better not to bring

up a problem or at least not to do so until you've done some preparatory work. If you are going to speak up when others remain silent, if you are going to hold people to a standard that differs from that of the masses, send out a warning. Differentiate yourself from others. If you are going to differentiate yourself from your co-workers by holding people to a more rigid standard, don't be smug about it. Set expectations in a way that shows respect for people with different views. ■

Master My Stories

A person's behavior during the first few seconds of a crucial confrontation sets the tone for everything that follows. You have no more than a sentence or two to establish the climate. If you set the wrong tone or mood, it's hard to turn things around.

Imagine that you are part of an overworked, stressed-out management team that is having a meeting when it gets a call from final assembly telling you that the new software IT has just created is not working.

Within seconds, the entire management team is complaining about the unorthodox, selfish, weird software

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Fundamental Attribution Error

People aren't all that good at accurately attributing causality. We quickly jump to unflattering conclusions. The chief error we make is a simple one: We assume that people do what they do because of personality factors (mostly motivational) *alone*. Why did that woman steal from a co-worker? She's dishonest.

Human beings often employ what is known as a dispositional rather than a situational view of others. We argue that people act the way they do because of uncontrollable personality factors (their disposition) as opposed to doing what they do because of forces in their environment (the situation). We make this attribution error because when we look at others, we see their actions far more readily than we see the forces behind them.

People often enact behaviors they take no joy in because of social pressure, lack of other options, or any of a variety of forces beyond personal pleasure. For example, the woman stole because she needed money to buy medicine for her children.

Assuming that others do contrary things because it's in their makeup or they actually enjoy doing them and then ignoring any other potential motivational forces is a mistake. Psychologists classify this mistake as an attribution error. And because it happens so consistently across people, times and places, it is called the Fundamental Attribution Error.

Master My Stories

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testers. Then they arise as one and march toward the testing department. As the team hustles down the hallway, you learn that the software is supposed to be tested and retested before it is sent to final assembly. The managers are feeling morally superior and are about to create a nasty scene.

The managers rush in and catch the programmers checking out a “cool new Web site with a free game download” and then they snarl at the guilty testers, call them names, threaten them with discipline, and throw a group hissy fit. It takes days for the incident to settle down, and everyone ends up with egg on his or her face.

The Path to Action

As you step up to a crucial confrontation, take care that you don't establish a horrible climate by charging in half-informed and half-cocked. It is never good to abuse, insult or threaten others. To avoid these costly mistakes, you need to work on your own thoughts, feelings and stories.

Understanding the path to action (see illustration above right) will help.

When we see or hear someone do something, we immediately tell ourselves a story about what we saw and heard. The fundamental attribution error (see sidebar on previous page) will often lead us to tell a negative story — in other words, assign a negative motivation to

The Path to Action Model



what we saw or heard. This negative story leads to negative feelings, which in turn guide the way we act in response to the original action.

Effective problem solvers observe an infraction and then tell themselves a more complete and accurate story. Instead of asking, “What’s the matter with that person?” they ask, “Why would a reasonable, rational and decent person do that?” By doing this, they ensure that they are confronting a human and not a villain. Humanizing questions help you adopt a situational as well as a dispositional view of humans, thus avoiding the fundamental attribution error.

We must work on our first thought, our first look, and the tone that follows. We must learn to fight the natural tendency to assume the worst of others and engender genuine curiosity to ensure that our first words and deeds create a healthy climate for ourselves and others. When we *tell the rest of the story*, we do just that. ■

For Additional Information on the Six Sources of Influence, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

PART TWO: WHAT TO DO DURING A CRUCIAL CONFRONTATION

Describe the Gap

You've picked out a problem, decided to say something, and considered the possible influences behind it; now you are about to take action. Remember: Almost nobody should believe that he or she has been groomed to solve touchy and complicated interpersonal problems.

A gap is the difference between what you expected and what actually happened. Gaps include missed commitments, disappointed expectations, and bad behavior. A gap is something that is hard or even risky to discuss.

One bad way to begin is sandwiching. To soften a violent blow, you first say something complimentary, next you bring up the problem, and then you close off with something complimentary. “Hey Bob, good-looking briefcase. By the way, do you know anything about the ten grand missing from our retirement fund? Love the haircut.”

Don't 'Sandwich'

Most people despise this type of indirectness. It is dishonest, manipulative and insulting. Don't sandwich, play charades, pass the buck, or play “read my mind.” Skilled problem solvers carefully describe the gap. They:

- **Start With Safety.** When others feel unsafe, you

can't talk about anything. If you can create safety, you can talk with almost anyone about almost anything — even failed promises. If you maintain a safe climate, others will hear and consider what you are saying. Maintain mutual respect and mutual purpose.

If you anticipate how others might assume the worst about what you have to say, use *contrasting*. Predict their erroneous conclusion, explain that their assumption is what you *don't* mean, then explain what you *do* mean. Discuss problems in private, one on one, face to face.

- **Share Your Path.** Gather the facts. Describe what the person did and the result. Share your story, too. Trade “You said” for “I thought we agreed.” Swap “It's clear” for “I was wondering if.” If you start to share your story and the other person becomes defensive — take away his or her fear. Step out of the content and restore safety.

- **End With a Question.** To close your opening paragraph, end with a simple diagnostic question: What happened? Make this an honest inquiry, not a veiled threat or an accusation such as: “What's *wrong* with you!” Your goal should be to hear the other person's point of view. Listen carefully as the other person answers the question.

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Describe the Gap

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Your direct report fails to show up at an important meeting and you don't think he missed it on purpose. You have no story. You invite him into your office, safely describe the gap, and end with a question.

"Chris, I noticed that you missed the meeting you had agreed to attend. I was wondering what happened. Did you run into a problem of some kind?"

You take the other person to a private setting, describe the facts (what was expected versus what was observed), and end with a question. And now you are listening to diagnose the underlying cause. By describing the gap, you have started on the right foot and are now ready to diagnose what's causing the problem. ■

Make It Motivating

Myra, an employee who works for you, failed to complete an important quality check. You observed the gap, decided to deal with it, and tried to determine the right problem to discuss. Since this was the first infraction, you've decided to talk about the content: She didn't complete the quality check. You admire Myra, and so it is easy to impute good motive. Now you describe the gap. After your brief and effective problem description, Myra responds.

How Myra responds to your description of the gap will determine what you do next. She determines your path, not you. You'll learn where you're going by diagnosing the underlying cause of the problem. Is it a matter of motivation, ability or both?

Knowing how to bring to the surface and resolve underlying causes requires a great deal of skill. If you miss a single ability barrier, the other person won't be able to cooperate. If you misinterpret the underlying motivational block, you'll be pushing the wrong buttons.

When the other person isn't motivated, we must make it motivating. Here are four things to keep in mind:

- **Consequences motivate.** Motivation isn't something you do to someone. People already want to do things. They're motivated by the consequences they anticipate. And since any action leads to a variety of consequences, people act on the basis of the overall consequence bundle.

- **Explore natural consequences.** Begin by explaining natural consequences. Within a business context, this typically includes what's happening to stakeholders. Stakeholders include other employees, customers, share owners, communities, and regulatory agencies.

- **Match methods to circumstances.** How you choose to talk about consequences depends on the circumstances you're facing. When people simply want to know, explain both what needs to be done and why.

When dealing with someone who is pushing back, resist the temptation to jump to power. Search for consequences that matter to the other person.

- **Finish well.** Finally, wrap up the conversation by determining who does what and by when. Then set a follow-up time. ■

Make It Easy

Kyle, a political analyst who works for you, was supposed to write a position paper for an upcoming debate and get it to you by noon, but he didn't. You call him in for a private discussion and describe the gap. He lets you know that he really wanted to do what he promised and says it wasn't his fault that he didn't. The specialist who conducts the statistical analysis was hospitalized with a burst appendix, and she's the only one who understands the data.

In any case, Kyle was prevented from doing what he agreed to do. And then he did exactly the right thing. He immediately called to let you know about the problem, but you were in a meeting across town. He left a message on your voice mail and then tried to track you down. In short, he wasn't *able* to meet his commitment and did his best to let you know. This was definitely not a motivation problem. Kyle needs help removing the barriers he's facing, not a kick in the pants.

You have carefully described the gap and are listening to see if the problem is due to motivation or ability. If the other person is facing ability barriers, it is your job to make it easy. Do this by making impossible tasks possible and nasty tasks less nasty.

Jointly Explore Root Causes

Resourceful problem solvers don't remove barriers all by themselves. They involve others and jointly explore root causes. You should do the same. Take care to avoid jumping in with your own solutions. Empower others by allowing them to take part in diagnosing the real causes and coming up with workable solutions. Ask others for their ideas. Remember the all-important question: "What do you think it'll take to fix this?"

Stimulate the Brainstorming Process

Sometimes the other person won't be able to identify all of the causes of the ability barriers. Jointly explore the underlying forces — include self (they don't have the skills or knowledge), others (friends, family or co-workers are withholding information or material) and things (the world around them is structured poorly). When necessary, stimulate the brainstorming process by offering your own view of what some of the barriers might be.

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Make It Easy

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Once you have finished identifying and removing ability barriers, “*pop* the question.” Check to see if the other person is willing to do what’s required once you’ve taken steps to enable them. Just because they *can* do something, doesn’t mean they are willing. ■

Stay Focused and Flexible

You are talking to an employee about missing a deadline and he becomes insubordinate. Your head accountant clams up when you ask her why the end-of-month reports aren’t ready. Then she gets angry. What do you do when the person you are confronting strays from the point, screams or sulks?

When new problems emerge, remain flexible enough to deal with them — without getting sidetracked. Each time you step up to a new problem, it should be by choice not by accident. Choose, don’t meander.

Example: People Feel Unsafe

When people feel unsafe, honest dialogue comes to a screeching halt. Fear and the resulting silence or violence are the emergent problems. Step out of the conversation, create safety, and then return. Point to your shared purpose. Assure the other person that you care about what he or she cares about. Apologize when necessary.

When people don’t deliver on a promise because “something came up,” deal with it. Companies that continually allow things to come up without dealing with the

breach of promise don’t survive very long. Things do come up. You have to be strong and flexible. You have to be able to bend but not break. At the heart of every workable accountability system is the sentence: “If something comes up, let me know as soon as you can.” If mistrust becomes a new problem, there must be consequences.

Sometimes a worse problem comes up in the middle of a crucial confrontation. For instance, you’re the only female member of a team and you are talking to a co-worker about the fact that he is not performing agreed-upon tasks. During the conversation, he leans too close to you and leers at your body. You try to address the issue with a casual remark, but he says, “Forceful women are a bit of a turn-on.”

To deal with this tricky problem, start by announcing the change in topic. “I’d like to talk about what just happened.” Next, pick the problem you want to discuss, take charge of your feelings, tell a more accurate story, then describe the gap. “You just made reference to your ‘turn-ons,’ you moved so close to me that I felt uncomfortable, and your eyes were moving up and down my body. What’s going on here?”

When a worse problem emerges, step out of the original problem, leave a bookmark so you’ll know where to return, and then start over with the new problem. Once you’ve dealt with the emergent problem, return to the original issue.

When others become upset, retrace their Path to Action to the original source. Talking about the facts helps dissipate the emotions and takes you to the place where you can resolve the problem. ■

PART THREE: WHAT TO DO AFTER A CRUCIAL CONFRONTATION

Agree on a Plan and Follow Up

During a formal review discussion, Barb said to Johnson, her direct report, “During the next quarter I want you to use more creativity. You know, come up with more ideas on your own.”

In an effort to be more creative, Johnson did indeed come up with more ideas on his own, just as he was asked to. He also implemented many of his ideas without involving Barb or anyone else. He interpreted the request to be more creative as permission to do pretty much whatever he pleased.

When Barb eventually learned that Johnson had changed the company’s entire inventory system and hadn’t given her so much as a heads-up, she blew a gasket and told him that he had gone well beyond his authority. He responded by arguing that he was just trying to be more creative and now she was taking him to task for doing what she had asked him to do all along.

The assignment included who was going to do what by when, but the details about the *what* were not clear.

She told him to be creative, but that term is far too subjective — an accident waiting to happen.

We create these problems all the time. We finish a perfectly good crucial confrontation and then make sketchy plans that are peppered with vague, unspoken and unshared assumptions.

A complete plan, in contrast, assumes nothing. It leaves no detail to chance. It sets clear and measurable expectations. It builds commitment and increases the likelihood that we’ll achieve the desired results. It also enables both parties better to have the next discussion — for accountability, for problem solving, or for praise.

The Solution

The key to making a complete and clear plan, free from all assumptions (and thus improving accountability), is to make sure to include four key components:

- **Who.** Someone’s name must be attached to each

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Agree on a Plan and Follow Up

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task. If a task requires many hands, each person needs to know what his or her part of the assignment is.

● **What.** Barb needed to provide a detailed description of the exact behaviors she was looking for. When you are deciding exactly what to do, don't take the *what* for granted. Ask if everyone has the same characteristics in mind. Clarify details in advance.

● **By When.** Be specific. If you need it before 5 p.m. on Friday, say so.

● **Follow-Up.** Decide when and how you will follow up on what is supposed to happen. When choosing the frequency and type of follow-up, ask these questions: How risky or crucial is the project or needed result? How well has this person performed in the past? How experienced is this person in this area? The two most common methods for checking on progress include scheduled and critical event follow-up times.

Do a *checkup* when you are giving the assignment and are nervous or have questions. You are in charge of the checkup. Use a *checkback* when the task is routine and has been assigned to someone who is experienced and productive. That person checks back. ■

The 'Yeah-Buts'

Many people say, "Yeah, but my situation is *really* tough. These skills will never work for me." These are not belligerent naysayers. They raise the "yeah buts" because they are trying to imagine how the skills of crucial confrontations apply to their world. Here are some of the "yeah buts" of highly reflective people:

1. "Yeah, but I'm nervous about stepping up to my boss and openly confronting her. I could pay dearly."

Solution: If the boss is authoritarian to the core, you need to choose between coping and cutting out. Ninety percent of your boss' defensiveness is avoidable. Help the boss feel safe. Don't become self-absorbed in reaction to his or her selfishness. Use more empathy. Step away from yourself and consider how the problem behavior is affecting *the other person* as well as how it's affecting *you*.

2. "Yeah, but the people I work with are perfectly comfortable violating standards. I don't want to say anything because I don't want to be the odd person out."

Solution: Acknowledge competing motivations. Humanize those who might be leaning in the wrong direction. Say, "I know it's inconvenient to suit up for quick and unobtrusive exams." Then eliminate a possible misunderstanding with a contrasting statement: "I don't want this to come off as an accusation; it's an honest question. Aren't we supposed to (fill in the blank), or are there circumstances I'm unaware of?"

3. "Yeah, but my spouse never wants to talk about anything. He tells me not to worry or not now."

Solution: This pattern is killing the relationship. Talk about the pattern. Acknowledge any complaints the other person may have about what you may be doing to drive him or her to silence. Frame the conversation as an opportunity to solve problems *the other person* cares about. Acknowledge some of the things you've done that might be contributing to the problem. This creates safety. Let the other person pick when you will talk. Try to resolve the issue. Don't try to "fix" the other person.

4. "Yeah, but what do you do when you don't actually see the problem? How do you handle hearsay?"

Solution: Master your own story. Refuse to accept other people's gossip as fact until you gather firsthand information. Observe the problem on your own. Then you can describe the problem in detail.

5. "Yeah, but what if the feedback you want to give could crush the other person?"

Solution: Begin having crucial confrontations about single areas that could use some improvement. Praise the person's willingness, then explain that there is one thing you'd like to see improve. Provide clear, direct and detailed feedback in that area alone. Once the person has improved in that area, pick another problem and work on it. Over time, if the person hasn't been able to improve, you will have earned the right to have the large relationship conversation.

6. Yeah, but what if a person is totally out of line most of the time but threatens to file a grievance if you confront her, and she could win?"

Solution: Resolve to hold the employee accountable. Meet with human resources and jointly develop a plan. Inform the employee that the action he or she has selected isn't acceptable and will no longer be tolerated. Assure the person that your goal is for him or her to succeed. Describe the relevant natural consequences of the employee's current behavior. Document the discussion. Confront the first infraction immediately and then start down the path of discipline. Don't be held hostage.

7. Yeah, but we're making a break with the past. How do you change the rules in the middle of the game?"

Solution: Confront the past. Without singling anyone out, outline for people the natural consequences of how things have been. Illuminate your general vision of how things are going to be in the future with specific, identifiable and replicable actions. Clarify do's and don'ts. Only after you've clarified your new expectation do you have the right (and responsibility) to begin having crucial confrontations with those who violate the new standards. ■

For Additional Information on the "yeah buts," go to: <http://my.summary.com>