



By Eric J. Soltis, MBA

department: leadership & communication

Training and Techniques to Handle Crucial Conversations

How important is communication? Many would agree that the value of thorough and consistent dialogue is imperative for successful relationships. However, what about crucial conversations? What exactly is a crucial conversation? Why do they matter? Oftentimes, as school business officials, we are faced with tremendously challenging circumstances—and individuals—and we must act accordingly. In order to do so effectively, we must equip ourselves with the proper communication skills.

What is a Crucial Conversation?

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High is a widely successful book (over two million copies sold) written by multiple New York Times best-selling authors that provides research, case studies, and resources on the topic of communication. When first thinking of a crucial conversation, many may think of presidents, executives, or other key leaders huddled around a table debating a key issue. In this context, a crucial conversation is considered a day-to-day conversation that affects your life. What makes a conversation crucial? There are three components: opinions vary; stakes are high; and emotions run strong.¹ As you can see below, these three factors elevate a seemingly routine conversation to a crucial one.

Opinions Vary

You're ready for a promotion and a raise, but your boss feels differently.

Stakes Are High

Your school district's facilities are aging with many complicated issues and you've already failed multiple bond issue attempts. The education of the next generation of students depends on the decisions you make about what steps to take next.

Emotions Run Strong

You and your neighbor are having small talk. The conversation takes a turn for the worse as the two of you argue about the specific location of a new fence you're building. He threatens with a lawsuit and you insult his intelligence.

The Opportunity for Growth

With an understanding of how conversations can quickly transition from a normal, day-to-day dialogue to a crucial conversation, it is very interesting to realize that many people become masters at avoiding such tough conversations altogether. This is often because of fear of making matters worse. E-mails and voicemails are sent in lieu of face-to-face interaction and subjects are changed to skirt sensitive matters. Unfortunately, as a result, a true conversation has never actually occurred in many occasions.

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." – George Bernard Shaw

In handling crucial conversations, we can respond in one of three ways. We can avoid them, we can face them and handle them poorly, or we can face them and handle them well. Of the three choices, it is obvious that we would want to handle them well. Do we, though? Many times, we do not. Maybe we choose to withdraw or say things we might later regret, all because we are under pressure or are stumped. This is where we must learn more about ourselves and others: why we act the way we do, and how this information affects the outcomes of crucial conversations.

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This workshop was very practical. You left with tools you could implement right away.

There have been many good trainings at OASBO but this one has been the most impactful on my career so far.

Absolutely a must for CFO's.

Quotes from past participants

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Expand Your Skillset

In continuing with its goal to offer invaluable professional development opportunities for members, OASBO offers a chance to learn about effective communication via its Crucial Conversations seminar. When school boards or school business officials are looking to fill key positions, one of the consistently sought-after traits is the ability to communicate effectively. This includes having tough conversations that affect the organization's output, trust, effectiveness, and more.

The training provided by OASBO is an in-depth study of the *Crucial Conversations* book, coupled with a toolkit that teaches and guides participants through the key skills of navigating the complexities of crucial conversations. The approach is hands-on, the format allows for discussion of practical and real-life examples, and the opportunity to network with other school business officials who may have experienced similar tough issues is invaluable. Consider expanding your communication skillset by attending OASBO's Crucial Conversations seminar. 🍷

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Join us at This OASBO & BASA Event



Crucial Conversations Workshop

March 7-8

OASBO Administrators Board Room,
Columbus, Ohio

Learn more and register at
oasbo-ohio.org

¹ Patterson, Kerry. (Eds.) (2012) *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*, New York: McGraw-Hill



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