Whenever you’re not getting the results you’re looking for, it’s likely a crucial conversation is keeping you stuck. Whether it’s a problem with poor quality, slow time-to-market, declining customer satisfaction, or a strained relationship—whatever the issue—if you can’t talk honestly with nearly anybody about almost anything, you can expect poor results.

What Is a Crucial Conversation?
A crucial conversation is a discussion between two or more people where the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong. These conversations—when handled poorly or ignored—lead to strained relationships and dismal results.

What Does Crucial Conversations Training Teach?
Crucial Conversations teaches participants how to:

- Speak persuasively, not abrasively
- Foster teamwork and better decision making
- Build acceptance rather than resistance
- Resolve individual and group disagreements
Who Needs Crucial Conversations Training?

Does your organization suffer from taboo topics, deference, disagreement, analysis paralysis, information hoarding, office politics, or alienation? Is your organization battling declining productivity, safety violations, low morale, reduced quality, poor customer satisfaction, or other bottom-line concerns? Then you, your team, or your organization needs Crucial Conversations Training.

Organizational Benefits of Crucial Conversations

Fortune 500 organizations around the world have turned to the award-winning Crucial Conversations Training to improve bottom-line results like quality, efficiency, satisfaction, safety, etc. Results include:

- **Productivity & Quality.** Sprint Nextel saw a 93 percent improvement in productivity and a 10 to 15 percent improvement in quality, time, and cost.
- **Teamwork.** Employees at MaineGeneral Health were 167 percent more likely to speak up and resolve problems with colleagues after being trained in Crucial Conversations.
- **Relationships.** Franklin Pierce College reduced passive-aggressive behavior by 14 percent and increased trust levels by 15 percent.
- **Performance.** STP Nuclear Power Plant went from total shut-down to generating the most electricity in the nation among two-unit plants.
- **Efficiency.** AT&T reduced billing costs by 30 percent and Sprint Nextel reduced customer care expenses by $20 million annually.

Named “Training Product of the Year”

Human Resource Executive

Don’t Take Our Word for It

More than 1.5 people and 300 of the Fortune 500 companies have used our skills to improve their organizational culture and create change for good.

What’s the Next Step?

If your organization could benefit from the skills taught in Crucial Conversations Training, contact us today to learn more. Call 1-800-449-5989 or visit us at www.vitalsmarts.com.

Join thousands of organizations around the world and use our customizable training to improve your organizational culture. Contact VitalSmarts for more information.

Want to Customize this Course?

We offer multiple options to both personalize our training to meet your specific needs, as well as measure its impact. Learn more at www.vitalsmarts.com/tailormeasure.

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How do you react when conversations suddenly move from smooth and easygoing to tense or awkward? Do you retreat into silence? Do you go on the attack? Or do you do your best to keep the conversation calm and focused on the issues at hand?

Crucial conversations take place when the stakes are high, opinions differ, and emotions run strong. Handling crucial conversations well can dramatically improve your personal relationships, your career progress, and your work team’s performance.

Take this 33-question test to explore how you typically respond when you’re in the middle of a stressful situation. Have your friends, colleagues, or family members take the test as well. The answers may surprise you.

A self-scoring version of this test is available online at www.vitalsmarts.com/styleunderstress. Information on what your score means can be found on pages 68-69 of the New York Times bestseller Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High.

Instructions
Before you start, read through the following points:

- **RELATIONSHIP**
  Think about the relationship you want to improve—
  with your boss, coworker, direct report, friend, or family member—
  and keep this relationship in mind.

- **CIRCUMSTANCE**
  Next, think of a tough situation—one you might have
  handled poorly or avoided altogether.

- **APPLY**
  Now, with that situation in mind, respond to the statements on
  the following pages as either true or false.
# Style Under Stress™ Test

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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.

26. Even when things get tense, I adapt quickly to how others are responding to me and try a new strategy.

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.

28. When things don’t go well, I’m more inclined to see the mistakes others made than notice my own role.

29. After I share strong opinions, I go out of my way to invite others to share their views, particularly opposing ones.

30. When others hesitate to share their views, I do whatever I can to make it safe for them to speak honestly.

31. Sometimes I have to discuss things I thought had been settled because I don’t keep track of what was discussed before.

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.

33. I get frustrated sometimes at how long it takes some groups to make decisions because too many people are involved.

Scoring

Fill out the following score sheets. Each domain contains two to three questions. Next to the question number is either a (T) or (F). For example, under “Masking,” question 5, you’ll find a (T). If you answered question 5 true, check the box. With question 13, on the other hand, you’ll find an (F). Only check that box if you answered the question false—and so on. Finally, add the number of checks in each column to determine your total score.

Your Style Under Stress score will show you which forms of silence or violence you turn to most often. Your Crucial Conversations Skills score is organized by concept and chapter from the book Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High so that you can decide which chapters will benefit you the most. Again, a self-scoring version of this test is available at www.vitalsmarts.com/styleunderstress. This test is also duplicated on pages 63-69 of Crucial Conversations.

Style Under Stress

Your silence and violence scores give you a measure of how frequently you fall into these less-than-perfect strategies. It’s actually possible to score high in both. A high score (one or two checked boxes per domain) means you use this technique fairly often. If you score high, you’re human. Most people toggle between holding back and becoming too forceful.

### Scoring Table

**Masking**
- 5 (T)
- 6 (T)

**Controlling**
- 7 (T)
- 8 (T)

**Avoiding**
- 3 (T)
- 4 (T)

**Labeling**
- 9 (T)
- 10 (T)

**Withdrawing**
- 1 (T)
- 2 (T)

**Attacking**
- 11 (T)
- 12 (T)

**Silence Total**

**Violence Total**
**Crucial Conversations Skills**

The seven domains below reflect your skills in each of the corresponding seven skill chapters found in *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. If you score high (two or three boxes) in one of these domains, you’re already quite skilled in this area. If you score low (zero or one), you may want to pay special attention to these chapters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start with Heart</td>
<td>(chap 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>STATE My Path</td>
<td>(chap 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn to Look</td>
<td>(chap 4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explore Others’ Paths</td>
<td>(chap 8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make It Safe</td>
<td>(chap 5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Move to Action</td>
<td>(chap 9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Master My Stories</td>
<td>(chap 6)</td>
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**Conclusion**

Since these scores represent how you typically behave during stressful or crucial conversations, they can change. Your score doesn’t represent an inalterable character trait or a genetic propensity. It’s merely a measure of your behavior—and you can change that.

Here are two ways to improve your skills:

- **ATTEND TRAINING**
  Crucial Conversations is an award-winning, two-day course that teaches skills for fostering open dialogue around high-stakes, emotional, or risky topics.
  [www.vitalsmarts.com/crucialconversationtraining](http://www.vitalsmarts.com/crucialconversationtraining)

- **FREE NEWSLETTER**
  One of our best learning resources is our free, weekly e-newsletter. Subscribers of the *Crucial Skills Newsletter* receive expert instruction from our bestselling authors on handling real-life crucial conversations.
  [www.crucialskills.com](http://www.crucialskills.com)
Use the following worksheet to plan your next crucial conversation.

Get Unstuck

1. Where do you feel stuck (personally or professionally)?

2. Unbundle with CPR. Identify:
   - Content Issues:
   - Pattern Issues:
   - Relationship Issues:

Which issue do you need to address, and with whom, in order to get unstuck?

Start with Heart

1. What do you really want:
   - For yourself?
   - For the other person?
   - For the relationship?
   - For the organization (if applicable)?

Master My Stories

1. What stories are you telling yourself about the situation or the person (Victim, Villain, Helpless)?
2. Tell the rest of the story. Ask:
   a. What am I pretending not to notice about my role in the problem?
   b. Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person do this?
   c. What should I do right now to move toward what I really want?

STATE My Path
1. Create a script for how you will begin the conversation. Start with facts, then tell your story, and be sure to end with a question that invites the other person into dialogue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE FACTS</th>
<th>MY STORY</th>
<th>THE QUESTION I’LL ASK</th>
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Make It Safe
1. What’s the worst possible response you could get with your crucial conversation?

2. What safety skills would you use to address it (apology, contrast, create mutual purpose)?

3. If the other person misunderstands your intent, what is a contrasting statement you could use?
   Don’t: ______________________________________________________
   Do: ______________________________________________________

Explore Others’ Paths
1. How could you use the “AMPP” (Ask, Mirror, Paraphrase, Prime) skills to help the other person come out of silence or violence?

Move to Action
1. How will you establish a way to follow up after the crucial conversation?
   Who: ______________________________________________________
   Will do what: ______________________________________________
   By when: _________________________________________________
   How we’ll follow up: _______________________________________

Who: ______________________________________________________
Will do what: ______________________________________________
By when: _________________________________________________
How we’ll follow up: _______________________________________
Tip One: Get Unstuck
Anytime you find yourself stuck, there are crucial conversations you're either not holding or holding well.

Tip Two: Start with Heart
The first step toward better results is a change in heart—which begins when you admit that you may be part of the problem. Mike Miller, Director of Business Billing, AT&T

Tip Three: Learn to Look
Watch for the signs that a conversation is turning crucial. Remember, the sooner you catch problems, the sooner you can return to dialogue.

Call 1-800-449-5989 for more information.