



Crucial Conversations

Notes



1: what are crucial conversations?



What makes a conversation crucial?

A conversation is crucial if all the below apply:

1. Stakes are high
2. Opinions vary
3. Emotions run high



Examples

Crucial conversations apply in all areas of life: work, family, friends

- Breakups, divorces, custody disputes, interfering in-laws, parenting rebellious teens,
- Asking your roommate to move out, your friend to repay a loan
- Giving feedback to colleagues, talking to a team member who's not delivering, a boss who's hypocritical, a coworker who makes sexist remarks, a coworker with bad BO



Lag time

- The real damage of these problems is in the lag time between it first occurring and it being addressed and resolved
- When we ignore problems, they fester, generate resentment, create a toxic environment. Then when you do address it, you're so worked up you explode
- If you don't talk about the problem, you'll act out your feelings in toxic ways (snipe comments, avoiding the person, having a short temper)
- But it's hard to handle these conversations well. When we feel threatened, we behave badly, insulting and exaggerating. We stop being rational.



2: Dialogue



Dialogue

- **The Fool's Choice:** believing we have to choose between being honest and being respectful. It's possible to be both.
 - *"How do I be both 100% honest and 100% respectful"*
- **The pool of meaning:** The pool of meaning is our thoughts, opinions, ideas and feelings about the topic at hand. We have our own personal pool, but there's also a shared pool which is the thoughts and feelings the dialogue participants share
 - For dialogue to be effective, everyone must feel safe adding their meaning to the pool. Everyone must be able to share their personal pools, especially the high-stakes, sensitive or controversial parts of it
 - The size of the pool is the measure of the group's IQ



3: choosing the topic



Unbundle and focus

- Crucial conversations are topic-rich areas. Once it starts, the floodgates open for a dozen half-related repressed frustrations. If you're not careful, you'll find yourself talking about something completely different.
- Crucial conversations work best when focused on one issue, but make sure you focus on the right thing



3 types of topic (CPR)

- **Content:** if the first time the problem has come up, it's a content problem
 - E.g. this project is late; you interrupted me in that meeting; etc.
- **Pattern:** the 3rd time it happens, it's a pattern
 - E.g. your projects are consistently late; you often interrupt me
 - When does content become pattern? You need to address patterns early. The 2nd time might be coincidence, but it might already be appropriate to talk about the pattern by then
- **Relationship:** there's a problem with respect, trust, or competence
 - This can happen if a pattern is unaddressed for long enough that it starts to damage the relationship
 - Or it can happen immediately. Some actions are severe enough to immediately damage the relationship
- (Bonus: process): sometimes you need to talk about how you communicate, e.g. how should feedback be delivered, how do you make sure everyone has a chance to speak,
 - Particularly important when working across cultures where norms might be different; or when working remotely when contact is less frequent



Prioritize

- Talk about what's most important
- 2 common mistakes to watch for:
 - easy over hard (I'll just talk about this small, safe-to-address problem rather than the huge thing that I'm actually worried about)
 - recent over important (I'll just bring up the most recent example of this pattern, not the pattern itself)



Unbundle, choose and simplify

- **Unbundle:** look at all your thoughts and feelings about this conversation and pick them apart. There's probably a mix of content, pattern and relationship
- **Choose:** ask yourself what you really want, and choose the issue that stands in your way
 - In a crisis with immediate impending consequences, you probably want to focus the Content now and save the rest for later. Or if your relationship with this person is temporary and doesn't really matter, pick Content
 - Content conversations tend to be safer and easier than Pattern, which is safer than relationship. But don't hide in easier topics if the bigger topic is what's bothering you
- **Simplify:** ask yourself "what's the real issue"? The more succinct your answer, the more ready you are. Get a 1-sentence answer
 - Be honest with yourself first, then figure out how to say it to others later. Don't be vague, don't water it down. Focus on being clear and honest over being polite for this, e.g. "the real issue is he's not good at managing people"
 -



Warning signs

You might be having the wrong conversation if

- **Your emotions escalate.** The conversation is going well, but you're feeling frustrated or worried because you're not addressing the thing you really need to
- **You walk away skeptical.** The conversation ends with an agreement but you feel nothing's really going to change because the agreement doesn't solve the real problem
- **You've had this conversation before.** If you've already been over this and nothing changed, you're talking about the wrong thing



Staying on topic

- People will try to change the topic to a safer Content conversation (e.g. talk about a specific occurrence rather than the pattern or relationship). When that happens bring it back on track (e.g. I know you had reasons for being late yesterday, but I'm not too interested in the specifics of that. I'm concerned with the overall pattern, and that's what I want to talk about)
- Promise to come back to a topic later
 - It's important the dialogue meets both people's needs, and the other person feels heard. If they bring up something they want to talk about, don't dismiss it. But do make a choice about what to focus on: pick one issue to discuss now, and make a promise to come back to the other one later.
 - Sometimes their topic will be more important than yours, so it's OK to switch



4: start with the heart

Focus on what you really want



What do you really want?

- Start by taking a long hard look at yourself.
 - You're the only person you can control. Make sure you're coming into the conversation with the right focus and motivation
- Sometimes we say we want X, but we behave as if we want Y (e.g. I say I want the project to succeed, but I behave as if I want to be right)
 - Examples: anger or upset makes us want to punish other people; fear makes us want to keep the peace; ego makes us want to save face -- but these aren't what we want deep down. They're distractions that we get caught up, particularly when we feel threatened
- Start the conversation with the right motives *and stay focused on those motives*
 - Before you say something you regret, pause, take a breath, and ask yourself what you really want: what do you want for yourself? For others? For the relationship?
 - Take your time to answer these, dig down deep with your answers, and also look at the long term: what kind of person do I want to be?
- Once you're clear on your motive, you can stay focused on how to achieve it
- It's a hard, abstract question on purpose, because it re-engages your rational brain
 - Kicks your problem-solving mode into gear and makes you realize these are complex social questions, not physical fight-or-flight threats.
- Don't accept an either-or
 - what you want for yourself, the other person, and the relationship might seem at odds. But search for a solution that satisfies all of them. Really think about it and ask yourself this, and you'll start to see more productive and creative options
- Clarify what you don't want
 - What are you afraid will happen if you back down from your current course?



5: Mastering Stories

Changing your emotions by changing the stories you tell yourself
(aka CBT for Business People)



Why control your emotions?

- When we get emotional, we become the often worst versions of ourselves. We stop being able to engage in rational, healthy dialogue and act on emotions
 - Examples: lashing out with sarcasm, withdrawing in anxiety



Understanding where emotions come from

~~See/hear → Feel → Act wrong!~~

See/hear -> *Tell a story* -> Feel -> Act

- Misconception: stimulus directly produces emotions
 - Example: I'm angry because he laughed at me
 - The emotion is a direct result of the facts -- it's the only valid, justified way to feel. Anyone would feel the same
- Truth: we subconscious tell ourselves stories about what we experience (assuming others motivations, applying value judgements)
 - Example: he laughed at me because he's an asshole, he thinks I'm stupid
 - We tell stories so quickly we don't even notice we're doing it
 - The story is what generates the emotions. The facts are neither good nor bad, it's the judgements we apply to them that makes them so.
 - This is why different people react with different emotions to the same situation -- they're telling themselves different stories
- The key to controlling how you act is controlling your emotions. And the key to controlling your emotion is controlling the story you tell yourself
 - If you just try to ignore and bottle up your emotions, they'll come out anyway in ways you don't want them too (e.g. passive aggression)
 - There are always multiple stories that fit the facts



How to control the story

- Notice when things are going wrong
 - If you're not happy with the results you're getting, or you're feeling strong negative emotions, it's time to examine your stories
 - It's important to notice when you're slipping into emotion-driven behaviour so you can correct it
 - How would others view your behaviour?
- Retrace your steps
 - Reflect: Are you acting based on emotion right now? If so, what emotions are you feeling? What story is generating these emotions? What are the facts that support your story, and contradict it?
- Precisely articulate what you're feeling
 - This is harder than it sounds, and we're often wrong about what we're feeling (example: we say we're angry, but we're actually embarrassed).
 - Avoid using vague words for your feels (frustrated, bummed, upset) and be honest with yourself and others (emotional honesty, even with yourself, is vulnerable)
 - Examining your feelings precisely gives you distance from them, you become an observer rather than swept up in it
- Separate fact from story
 - Stories can feel like reality, but they're not. When something emotional feels like reality, ask yourself if you can see/hear it -- if you can't, it's a story. Facts are specific, objective and verifiable
 - Example: he's selfish isn't a fact. He didn't give me a cookie is a fact, and he's selfish is the story we tell ourselves to explain the fact.
- Watch out for "hot terms"
 - A hot term is a word or phrase that's loaded with emotion. It's a judgement pretending to be a description, e.g. "she scowled at me", scowled is a hot term
 - It can take a few iterations to strip out all the hot terms from your set of facts
- Look for the missing facts
 - When we tell a story, we start to see the evidence selectively: we notice the facts that support our story, and disregard those that don't. What facts did you miss? What are the facts that contradict your story?



Look out for the 3 clever stories

- These are stories that justify our bad behaviour. Worse: they let us feel good about acting badly and achieving terrible results
 - These stories excuse you from being responsible for your actions
 - You don't start telling these stories until after you've acted badly. Before the bad action, you have a clear perception, your conscience knows what you should do. But you don't do it. So to justify your actions, you make up a story about why you were right to do wrong -- if you feel like you're the victim and someone else is the villain, check for your own guilty conscience
 - Sometimes these stories are accurate. Sometimes you really are a helpless victim being mugged at knifepoint. But usually, these stories are wrong
- Victim stories
 - You're the innocent victim who played no part in the outcome of the situation. You did nothing wrong.
 - You ignore the part you played in the outcome and over-exaggerate your noble intentions
 - *Ask: what am I pretending not to notice about my role in this problem?* Own up to your mistakes
- Villain stories
 - You dehumanize someone else and turn them into the villain of the story. You assume the worst motivations or the grossest incompetence. Sometimes you put them in a group and villainize the whole group
 - This justifies you acting badly towards them
 - There's a double standard: when you make a mistake, you tell a victim story. When someone else makes a mistake, you tell a villain story
 - *Ask: why would a reasonable, rational, decent person do what this person is doing?* Look for alternative explanations
- Helpless stories
 - You're powerless to do anything to change the situation. You don't bother giving feedback, because nothing would change even if you did.
 - This justifies your inaction
 - *Ask: what do I really want? For me? For others? For the relation?* Focus on your real goal. *Ask: what should I do right now to move towards what I really want?*



6: learning to look

How to spot when safety is at risk



Safety is crucial

- **What is Safety?**
 - Safety is how freely meaning can flow between dialogue participants
 - Safety requires all parties to speak and listen honestly and respectfully
 - Safety is not the same as comfort
- When people feel threatened, meaning stops flowing. People react in one of two ways:
 - Silence: withdrawing, avoiding, not saying what they think
 - Violence: forcing their opinions on others by controlling, domination, and aggression
- How to spot when safety is at risk
 - Pay attention to 2 things: What's being said & How it's being said.
 - This is hard, you need split focus.
 - Takes knowledge & patience to learn to spot the signs
- The sooner you spot that safety is at risk, the easier it is to fix it



Noticing signs in yourself

- Learn what your own early warning signs are, so you can spot them when they happen in future
- Signs can be:
 - Physical, e.g. tight stomach, dry eyes
 - Emotional, e.g. scared, hurt, angry
 - Behavioural, e.g. raising your voice, becoming quiet
 - Different people notice different signs first: you might notice your voice raise before you notice your emotions
- When you notice these:
 - Take a step back
 - Slow down
 - Start with the heart: ask yourself what you really want



Silence & Violence

- Silence is withholding meaning to avoid problems, e.g.
 - **Masking** (selectively showing your feelings) using sarcasm, sugar-coating and couching
 - **Avoiding** talking about the real issue, by changing the subject, playing verbal games to *appear* like you're talking about it (not answering the question that was asked)
 - **Withdrawing** by exiting the conversation entirely (gotta go, I'm late)
- Violence means forcing others into agreement, e.g.
 - **Controlling** the conversation, e.g. interrupting, changing subjects, leading questions, overstating the facts
 - **Labelling** the opposition as a category, and dismissing that category
 - **Attacking** the other person with threatening and bittling. If you can't win with reason, you'll make them suffer until they give in
- Take a quiz to find your style:
<https://cruciallearning.com/style-under-stress-assessment/>



Choosing the conversation medium

- It's easier to spot signs that people aren't feeling safe when you're conversing in a data-rich medium
 - IRL, you have body language, tone of voice, facial expressions
 - Video calls you have those, but with more lag and lower res and a smaller frame
 - Voice calls you have tone of voice but nothing visual
 - Email and instant messaging you only have the content of what's being said to rely on
- When you know you need to have a crucial conversation, chose the richest medium you can
 - This can be hard to do, the natural tendency can be to avoid by conversing over async text instead
- Written communication has one advantage: you get a second chance
 - First, write out what you mean
 - Then, read it slowly and imagine how the other person will react
 - Then rewrite it, making your intention clear



Make it safe

How to talk about anything safely



Safety is about intent, not content

- The content of what's being said isn't what makes people defensive
 - People are bad at crucial conversations, so growing up we simply learn there are things that we can't talk honestly and respectfully about. But that's wrong, and leads us to handle conversations even more badly
 - The problem isn't what we're saying, it's that we're failing to make others feel safe in having that conversation
- Instead, safety is all about intent: when people think you don't respect them (whether that's true or not), or don't care about what they care about, they get defensive
- Think of a time you received feedback and didn't feel defensive, and took it onboard as good advice
 - Probably: you believed the other person had your best interest at heart, and you respected their opinion. You trusted their motives and their capabilities
 - Conversely, if a bully compliments you, you feel suspicious and threatened. You assume it's sarcastic or an insult you don't understand



Safety is all about perceived intentions

- If someone becomes defensive, it's because either:
 - You have bad intent towards them, and they're picking up on that correctly (e.g. you're pursuing a goal of yours that will harm them; you don't respect them)
 - You have good intent, but they've misread it
- First, check yourself. Start with the heart. Ask yourself: what am I acting like I want? If your motives have degraded, refocus
- Second, make sure the other person knows you have good intent.
 - If you're not explicit, people will assume bad intent [sometimes]
- If safety is at risk, step away from the content. *Literally stop talking about what you're talking about*, and make the intent of the conversation clear.



2 core needs for safety

- **Mutual respect:** do you care about me?
- **Mutual purpose:** do you care about what I care about?
 - Others must feel like you're working towards a common goal, and you care about their goals, interests and values. And you must believe the same of them.



Finding mutual respect

- The instant someone senses disrespect, dialogue is over. The whole conversation becomes about respect.
- If you don't respect someone, it will leak out in your behaviour, body language, etc, no matter what you say
 - If someone's getting defense, ask yourself: do others believe I respect them?
- What if you actually don't respect them?
 - Basic human dignity is worth of respect
 - Look for ways to respect others by looking for similarities, not differences. Particularly shared flaws.
 - Acknowledge your own flaws, and it becomes easier to forgive them in others
 - Can be hard to do and take time to get good at. We're often not raised to respect those we disagree with.



Finding a mutual purpose

- Sometimes it's obvious, once you look for it.
 - e.g. we both want this project to be successful
- If it's not obvious, a good starting mutual purpose is *mutual understanding* (I want to fully understand your point of view)
 - Being heard is a deep human need, and once the other person feels heard, they're more likely to listen, so this goal benefits everyone
- Try to see things from the other person's point of view to see how what you want is mutually beneficial
 - e.g. you've got hard feedback for a colleague, but if they listen it will help their own career growth
- If you can't find a mutual purpose, don't fake it. Create it.
 - Mutual purpose has to be *mutual*. If the other person doesn't value your needs, don't fake mutual purpose just to create the illusion of safety for them.
 - In this situation, making finding a mutual purpose your mutual purpose. E.g. you both want a productive working relationship so you both *want* to have a common goal, even if you don't currently



CRIB: creating mutual purpose

1. **Commit** to finding mutual purpose. Commit to staying in the conversation until you do.
2. **Recognize the purpose behind the strategy.** Often we conflate one way of achieving something with the goal itself. Ask yourself, and the other person, what you're trying to achieve by the thing you want, and be open minded about how to achieve it
 - E.g. one person wants to go out for date night, the other wants to stay in. That seems incompatible. But dig deeper, it turns out one wants to relax with peace and quiet and the other is bored and wants variety. Now you know that, many options open up.
3. **Invent mutual purpose:** if you can't discover it, invent it. Appeal to higher, longer-term goals and ideals.
 - e.g. you both want the relationship to work
4. **Brainstorm** together, new strategies to achieve your mutual purpose



Building safety

- Share your intent
 - if people aren't sure they'll assume the worst
 - Use contrasting, explicitly say what you *don't mean*, and then what you *do*. E.g. I don't want to criticize you, that's not my intent, I'm grateful for all the work you do. But I do want to be able to share our concerns with one another
 - If you criticize one aspect of someone, they'll assume you think poorly of them overall and mean a lot more than you're saying, so reassure them what you actually mean
 - Use contrasting pre-emptively if you think someone will misinterpret what you mean. Or use it as first aid to put your remarks in context
- Apologize when appropriate
 - Express sincere sorrow at your role in someone else's pain
 - Give up saving face and being right and ego to focus on what you really want (a healthy dialogue and better results)
 - Be the one to break the cycle, and apologize for your role, even if the other person is being aggressive
 - Only apologize when it's appropriate, don't be disingenuous



8: STATE my path

How to state what you think without offending



Saying the hard thing honestly and respectfully

- Sometimes what you want to say is controversial or offensive. You still need to say it without watering down your message it. But how can you do that respectfully?
- You need:
 - Confidence to say what needs to be said to the person who needs to hear it. Confidence that what you want to say deserves to be heard
 - Humility to recognize that others see things differently and their input is valuable. Be genuinely curious to hear the other side, and open to being wrong
 - Skill: it takes practice to do it well



What to say

- Worst way to bring someone to your side is to start by stating a controversial/heated conclusion (e.g. "you're stealing").
- You need to lay the groundwork with the facts that lead to you to there first, so they can understand how you got to a place they disagree with
- First do your homework
 - Start from the heart, Master your story, gather facts. Think about other conclusions long enough to get yourself into dialog
- Share your facts
 - Facts are less controversial, more likely to be accepted. A safe starting point. (e.g. you arrived at 9.20 rather than you were 20 minutes late rather than you can't be trusted)
 - Remember (and state out loud) that these are *your* facts, not *all the facts*. Make space for other facts
- Tell your story
 - Sometimes laying out the facts is enough for others to see the conclusion, other times it'll be met with a "so what?" and you need to state your conclusion
 - Again, tell it as one possible story, not the only one
 - It can be hard, but if you've done your homework you should know that this is something a conclusion reasonable, rational person would draw based on these facts. And it deserves to be heard
 - Don't pile it on. If something's been festing, you might have a whole lot of unpleasant-to-hear conclusions. Pick the most important
- Ask for input
 - Open-ended questions, like "What's your perspective?"
 - Be genuinely interested, listen, take on board what they say, be open to changing your position



How to say it

- Use tentative, humble language
 - Even if you're certain of X, then say "I am certain of X", not "X is true"
 - Don't water down what you're trying to say, don't neg yourself (e.g. not "this is probably wrong but")
 - Doing this is honest because all you don't have exclusive, objective access to Truth. Making it clear these are your opinions and beliefs isn't being dishonest, it's being honest. If it feels like you're faking tentative language, then *you're not ready for dialog* -- go get yourself in order first
- Encourage testing
 - Make it clear, through words and tone and action, that you do want to hear facts that contradict yours, conclusions you disagree with, etc
 - Some people really need encouragement and a lot of safety before they will share. They might think you secretly just want agreement or are setting a trap. Particularly if you're an authority figure, or they're prone to silence
 - Model disagreement with yourself, e.g. playing your own devils advocate, to encourage others
- The harder you're finding it to use these techniques, the more likely your goal is to win than to learn



The paradox of argument

- The stronger you argue your position, the more resistant others are.
 - If you try and disguise your opinions as facts, then others will refuse them. If you acknowledge they're just opinions, then you're just asking others to acknowledge that this is what you believe, which is easier for them to do.
 - Strong arguments create silence and violence



9: Explore others paths

How to listen safely and effectively



Listening sincerely is hard

- Listening is hard, when the other person is saying something wrong, offensive, upsetting or attacking. Our defense mechanisms kick in, and our natural instinct is to respond in kind
- You need to stay genuinely curious and listen sincerely
- Ask yourself: what would lead a rational, reasonable, decent person to say this?
 - Treating it as a puzzle re-engages your brain
- To understand their view, you need to understand their path
 - You're coming in at the end, where they're acting out their emotions.
 - If you hear their emotional conclusions without understanding their path to get there, you'll make unflattering stories (victim, villain, helpless) to explain why they think these things
 - Invite them to share their path, their facts, so you can understand



4 listening skills

- Ask: sometimes inviting someone to express themselves is enough. Start by simply asking open-ended questions (e.g. what do you think? How do you see it?)
 - But often, people don't want to share
- Mirror: acknowledge someone's feelings by describing how them back to them (e.g. you seem angry, you sound upset).
 - If someone denies there's a problem ("It's fine!"), this can help them open up
 - Builds safety by showing that we're paying attention and we're genuinely interested
 - Can lessen the intensity of the emotion (e.g. nervous, angry) to have it acknowledged
 - Tone is important: we need to show *it's OK to feel this way*, we won't be offended, we want to explore it.
- Paraphrase: once someone starts to share, keep building safety by summarizing what they've said in the your own words
 - Tone is important, we need to show we're hearing them, paying attention, and that it's OK for them to be expressing these things
- Prime: only once the above 3 have failed, if you have a good guess at what they're thinking or feeling, try suggesting this ("are you worried that...?", "are you thinking...?")



When you disagree

- If the other person has shared their path, there's probably something we disagree with
 - Keep your calm, don't start attacking, don't start with disagreement. Even if they're dangerously, grossly, offensively wrong
- Agree when you agree.
 - A lot of arguments are about disagreements on minor details, when there's actually agreement all the important things. We're drawn to focus on the 5% we disagree with
- Build if you agree but thing there's something missing (e.g. I agree with all of that, but I also noticed that...)
 - Start with agreement, and go from there
- Contrast if you disagree about something they've said
 - Don't say they're wrong, say you differ (e.g. I see things differently, let me explain)



Listen, but also be heard

- By agreeing to listen, we're not agreeing to accept their point of view. We're only agreeing to listen
- It's just as important that they're willing to listen to us
 - If you listen first, then share after, most people will be willing to reciprocate and listen to you
 - Sometimes, it's useful to set the expectation up front: I want to listen and understand your point of view, if you will listen to me afterwards. You might need to remind them a few times that they agreed to listen



Retake your pen

How to hear hard feedback



Who defines your self-worth?

- Feedback hurts if it threatens 1 of 2 essential psychological needs: safety and self-worth
 - It's normal to feel these are threatened when receiving feedback, but if you have serious issues with either of these, therapy can be a huge help.
- For some people, their sense of self-worth is intrinsic to themselves. For others, they rely on other people for validation
 - If you rely on others for your self-worth then even well-delivered, mildly negative feedback can rock your psychological wellbeing. And not all feedback is well-delivered and mild. Feedback can cause scars that we carry for years. Decades later, you may still recall some painful feedback word for word
 - If you don't rely on others for your sense of self-worth, then feedback becomes useful, neutral information
- Generally, the more positive external validation we receive, the more reliant on it we become.
 - It feels good, so we seek out more of it. We crave it. And when we do that, we let others define our self-worth
 - "If you live by the compliment, you die by the criticism"
 - People "fear truth and crave approval" but they should do the opposite. Learn to keep approval at a healthy distance, regard as neutral information that doesn't impact your sense of your own value



Is your safety at risk?

- When we were children, safety depends on external approval (for some people, this is much more true than for others). You learn to feel your safety is always at risk is someone disapproves of you.
- As an adult, we become far more able to take care of our own safety, less dependant on others for it. But we fail to update our beliefs and continue to feel our safety is at risk
- Sometimes as an adult, safety is genuinely at risk when someone criticizes you (e.g. being fired, getting divorced, getting into a violent situation). But this is usually not true for most of us most of the time.
- Most of the time, we underestimate our ability to protect ourselves. "You don't get angry when you're confident"



Listen non-defensively

- When hearing feedback, remember:
 - Learning the truth is an absolute good. The more true your beliefs, the better you're able to navigate the world
 - Feedback is either pure truth, pure falsehood, or somewhere in between. Usually, it's somewhere in between
- Don't try to rationally process it right away. Listen without reacting. Pack all that feedback in a bag, and later when you've got time and space, sort through it and decide what is worth listening to and what's a bunch of crap.
- 4 steps to listening (CURE)
 - **Collect yourself:** breath deeply. Identify your feelings, look at your stories. Try affirmations
 - **Understand:** get curious about what the other person has to say, ask for examples and clarification. Treat it as a puzzle (why would a rational, reasonable, decent person say what they're saying?) to engage your rational brain. Try viewing it as if you're talking about a third person
 - **Recover:** take time out to recover your emotions. Give yourself permission to feel your feelings, and don't try to evaluate what's been said yet. Explain you want to take time to reflect. Re-establish feelings of Safety and Worth
 - **Engage:** when you feel ready, start to look at what's been said. What's true in there (there's usually something)? Taking the time to recover means you should be able to view this more rationally, rather than defensively poking holes in it. If appropriate, share the results of this reflection with the feedback giver



Moving to action

How to end discussions productively



Moving to action is important

- Really easy to get this wrong or forget about it, or leave important things unsaid
- Ideas and momentum from the conversation will slip away if you don't agree to action



Deciding how to decide

- How the decision will be made needs to be stated aloud, ideally before the dialogue
 - If someone assumes they'll get a say in the final decision, and then they don't, they'll feel hurt and betrayed
- Dialogue (the process of building up shared meaning) should involve everyone. But the final decision might not
- Who decides how we decide?
 - Sometimes authority lines are clear, e.g. boss, parent. It's their job as a leader to decide and everyone respects that
 - Sometimes there's no clear authority, in which case, use your dialogue skills to jointly decide how you'll decide. If you fail to agree on how to make decisions, the last resort is a court of law, and nobody wants that



4 Decision Making Strategies

- Generally, there's a tradeoff between [efficiency] and [decision quality and level of commitment]
 - An effective leader knows when to slow down decision making to increase buy-in or make better decisions, and when to just decide on something
- **Command: one person decides alone**
 - **Super efficient.** Most decisions in life are like this. Imagine how slow life would be if you sought approval or opinions on every decision you made
 - Suitable for **low stakes** decisions, or when you have **complete trust** in the decision-makers abilities.
 - When on the receiving end on this, it's not your job to decide, it's your job to execute the decision that's already been made
- **Consult: one person gathers input, then decides alone**
 - Input is gathered from experts who have relevant information/opinions to add, to increase the quality of decisions.
 - Input is gathered from people who will be affected by the decision, to increase their level of support for and commitment to the end decision.
 - Still pretty efficient, because only one person decides. Consulting can be effective but quick.
 - e.g. sending an office-use survey, then using that to inform a decision about moving offices; gathering feedback on a technical proposal
- **Vote: everyone involved has a say, and majority rules**
 - Higher levels of support than the above options
 - Good when you're selecting from a number of good options
 - Don't use it if not everyone agrees to commit to whatever the vote result is
 - Relatively efficient because the vote only needs to happen once
- **Consensus: talk until everyone agrees**
 - If used appropriately, can generate very high unity and very high quality decisions
 - If used badly, can be a huge waste of time.
 - Only use for high-stakes/complex issues, or where everyone must support the final choice



Who gets to be involved?

- When consulting, voting or using consensus, involve people who:
 - Care about the issue
 - Have relevant expertise
 - Who's cooperation you'll need once the decisions been made
- Don't involve more people than you have to
- Avoid involving people who
 - Don't care
 - Don't add any new information to the conversation
 - You don't need support/authority/influence from afterwards



Revisit current decisions

- If you're in a situation where there's a lot of frustration over how decisions are being made then try this exercise together:
 - Make a list of decisions being made currently
 - For each, how is that decision being made?
 - For each, how should that decision be made going forward?



Make concrete plans

- Once you have a decision, then get the following explicitly decided
- **Who** will be responsible for doing it?
 - Don't allow a "we", don't allow a list on names. Responsibility gets lost when it's assigned to a group. Pick one person
- **What** will they be responsible for?
 - Spend time really fleshing this out. Don't let desires go unstated or assumed, or you risk being unhappy with the final result
 - Use contrasting to explain what you don't want, as well as what you do.
- **When** will it be done by?
 - If there's no date, it will go to the bottom of the to-do pile and eventually get forgotten
 - "Assignments without deadlines are far better at producing guilt than stimulating action"
- **Follow-up plan**
 - How will you check in? E.g. "send me an email when you've done that", "send me a report"
 - If you're agreeing actions with a person in authority, think of it as a "check up" rather than a "check in"
- **Write it down**
 - Don't rely on your memory. Memory is a bastard. Give the bastard a break and just write it down.



Yeah, but

Advice for tough cases