Fundamentals of Conflict Resolution

(Or: conflict resolution for people who hate conflict)

Joshua Mauldin

Topics

1. **Preparing**
2. **Having**
3. **Disaster Recovery**
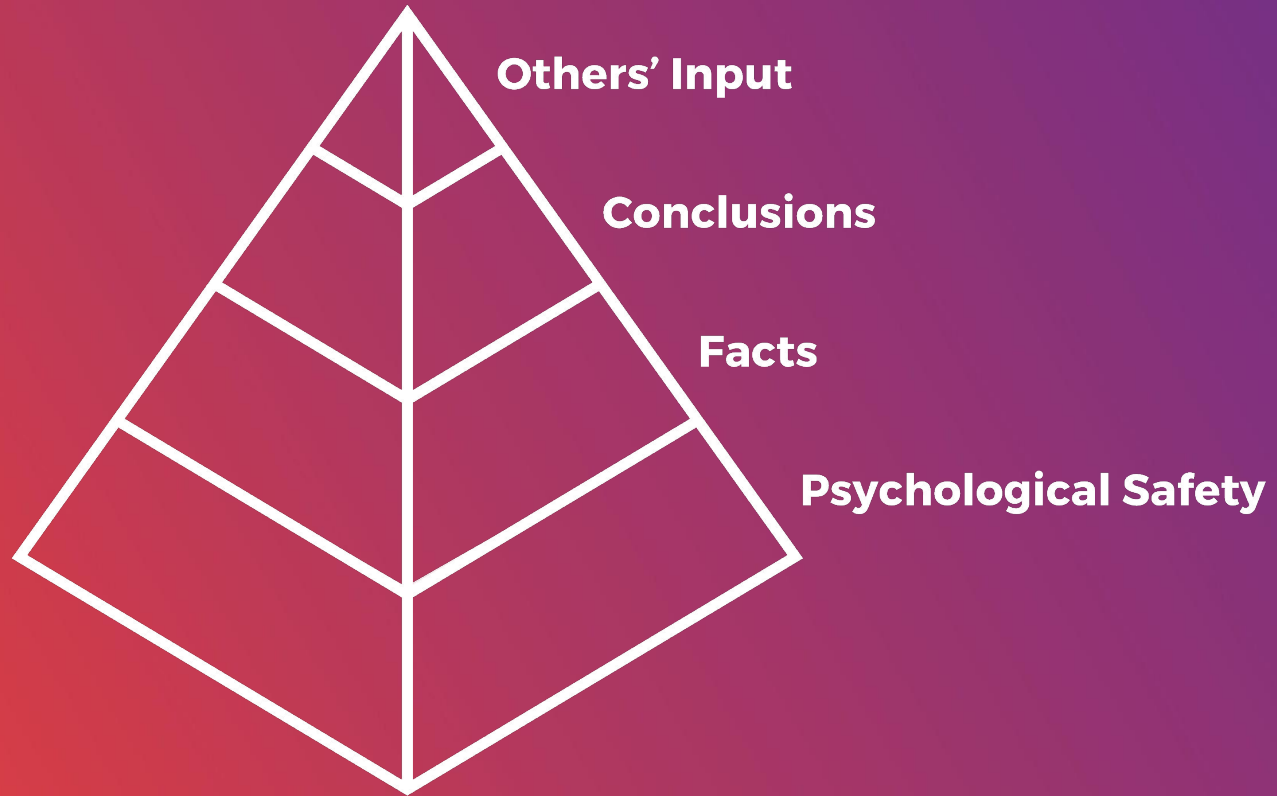4. **Tricky Situations**

What this isn't

- A script or set of instructions
- A way to manipulate others
- A way of "winning"

Hello, it's me

Always on edge.

PANICKED SCREECHING

Embracing healthy conflict strengthens you, your team, and the products you build.

How Effective Conversations are Structured

Others' Input

Conclusions

Facts

Psychological Safety

Discussion

What's one thing you want to learn about in this course?

Preparing for the Conversation

Part One

Preparing for the Conversation

1. **Check Yourself**
2. **Get the Facts**
3. **Form Conclusions**
4. **Set Goals**

Don't assume bad intentions over neglect and misunderstanding.

—

Hanlon's Razor

We must acknowledge our part in a situation and check our intentions before proceeding.

None at all   Meh   So much

—

The sliding scale of how many 🦊 you give

Preparing for the Conversation

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Get the Facts

- Write the whole situation down
- Highlight the observable and objective
- These form the basis of your conversation and show how you reached your conclusion

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One-off or pattern?

- If it is a pattern, you'll have a stronger case
- Be prepared to go into 2-3 examples of this

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You were an asshole when you talked over me three times in that meeting. When I started talking you looked away. Why don't you give me the space I need? It makes me feel like you don't respect me.

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Exercise

Get the Facts

Preparing for the Conversation

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Form Conclusions

- How did it made you feel?
- How did it impact your team?
- How did it impact the product?

When you _____,

I feel _____.

Cranky Conclusions

- Good for more serious conversations
- Lists all the negative things someone could say
- Helps take the sting out of a potentially sticky situation

Form Your Own Conclusion

When you _____, I feel _____

Preparing for the Conversation

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Set Goals

- Make these your guiding principles
- Focus on what you need
- Write it down, take it with you
- Consider trying the User Story Method
  - "I want _____ so that _____"

Set Goals: How to Make a Clear Request

1. I want you to hear me when I speak.
2. I want you to stop being late.
3. I want you to be honest with me.
4. I want you to show respect for my agency.
5. I want you to contribute to the team more.

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3. Be more specific: "I want you to tell me how you feel about what I did in that meeting and what you'd like me to differently."

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4. "Respect my agency" isn't a clear request, try "I need you to agree to consult me before you make a decision that affects the project."
5. "Contribute" and "more" aren't specific. Try "I want you to write and deliver one article each Monday."
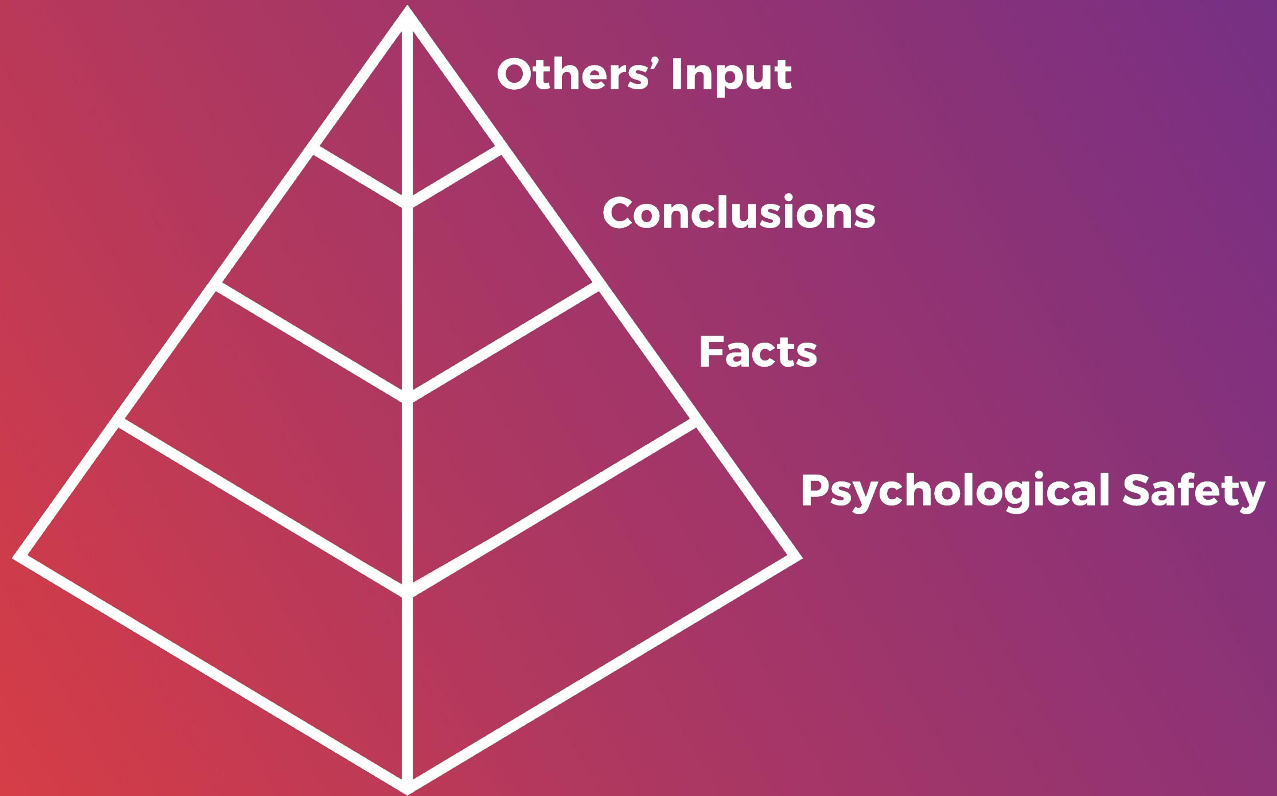
Exercise

Make a Clear Request

Part One

Q&A

Having the Conversation

Part Two

How Effective Conversations are Structured

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Having the Conversation
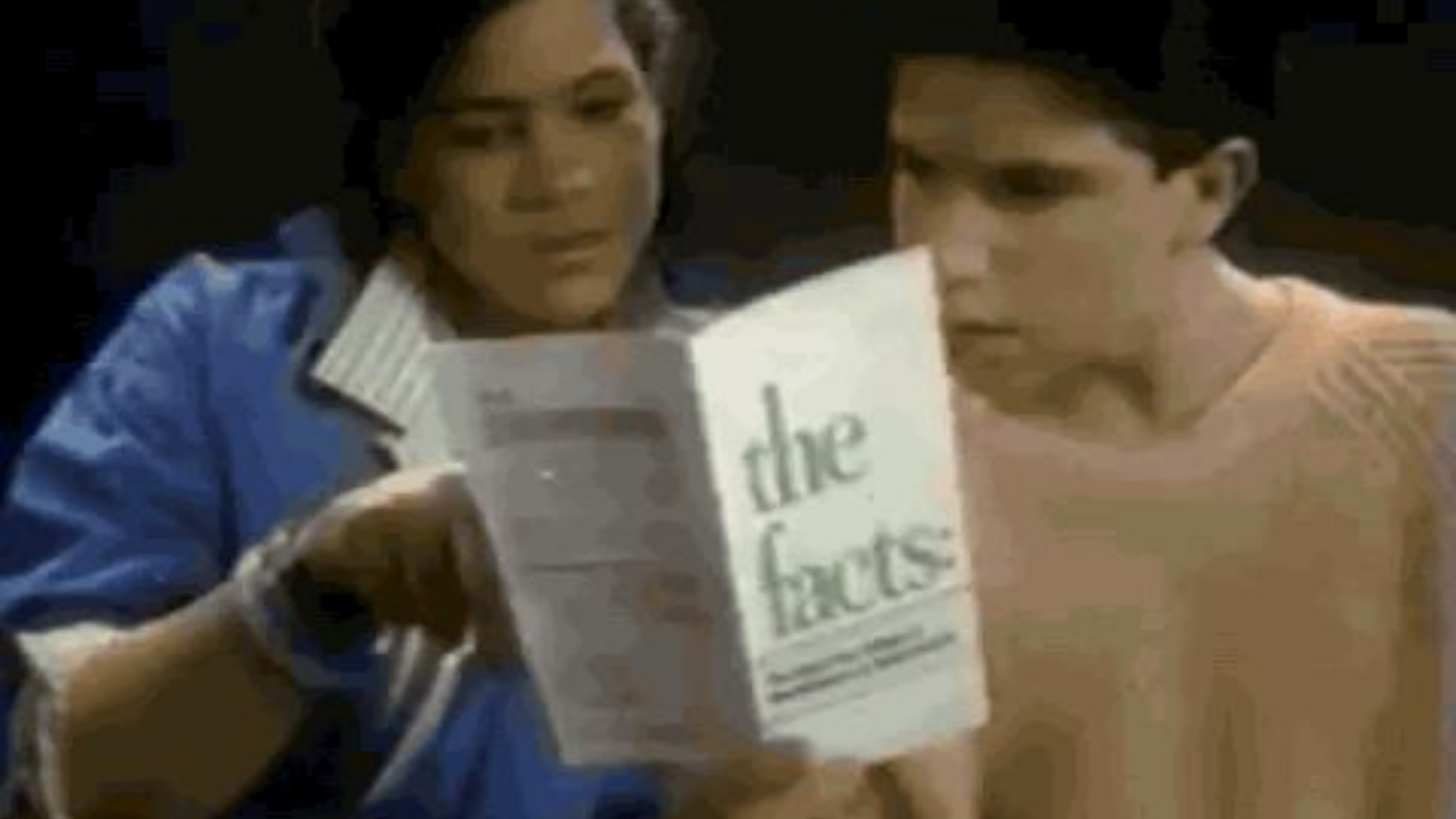
1. **Start with Safety**
2. Lead with Facts
3. Share Conclusions
4. Open it Up

Start with Safety

- Build safety: ask for permission to have the conversation
  - "Is this a bad time?"
- Look at your body language, remain neutral or open

Having the Conversation

1. **Start with Safety**
2. **Lead with Facts**
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the facts

Having the Conversation

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Share Your Conclusions

- Talk about how it affected you or the conclusions you drew
- Avoid judgements and speak tentatively
  - "It seems like…" or "It looks like…"

Having the Conversation

1. **Start with Safety**
2. **Lead with Facts**
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4. **Open it Up**

Open it Up

Open-ended questions: good

- How do you see it?
- What are your thoughts?
- Can you help me understand?
- What might I be missing here?

Closed questions: not so good

- Isn't that the case?
- Am I wrong?
- Does that makes sense?
- What can we do to ensure this never happens again?
- Why did you do that?

Mirroring

- Refined approach to active listening
- Repeats the last word of phrases from their statement

Labeling

- A summary of what they just said
- Fosters empathy and clarity
- Talk tentatively, use "it seems like," "it sounds like"

Probing

- Strive for clarity
- Use labels and summaries to uncover their needs

Try to structure feedback

- **Do**: mandatory, a must-have
- **Try**: explore an option or area, report back
- **Consider**: share an alternate way of thinking

Do

Mandatory feedback

Used very rarely.

"Do" feedback is appropriate when the quality bar impact or systems impact goes beyond the scope the team is responsible for.

- Find a solution and implement it by the next milestone
- Loop back with stakeholders if new information comes up
- Usually takes, minutes, hours or days

Try

Request a specific exploratory next step

eg. drawing some options or looking into the code to cost something. After doing the exploration, the team is empowered to decide whether to change course or not.

- Share the exploration with stakeholders & let them know what you decide
- Usually takes minutes or hours

Consider

Share ideas or alternate ways of thinking

After thinking through the point briefly and responding, the team is empowered to take the feedback or not.

- Think about the feedback and respond, either in the moment or in a written follow-up
- Usually takes seconds or minutes

Source: Jackie Bavaro from Asana

What if they come to you first?

- Do not tell them to calm down
- Use mirrors and labels
- Talk about the sliding scale
- "How am I supposed to do that?"
  - Let them figure it out for you

What's one question you've asked to get someone talking?

Part Two

Q&A

Disaster Recovery

Part Three

Disaster Recovery

1. **Safety Check**
2. **Add Contrast**
3. **Create Shared Purpose**
4. **Pull Back**

Safety check

Signs someone may not be feeling safe

- Withdrawing, terse responses
- Abrasive, yelling
- Shaking/trembling
- Crossed arms/avoiding eye contact

Disaster Recovery

1. Safety Check
2. **Add Contrast**
3. Create Shared Purpose
4. Pull Back

Use contrasting statements

- Refocuses and helps conversation get back on track
- "I'm not saying X, I'm saying Y"

I'm not saying

————,

I'm saying

————.

Add Some Contrast

(I'm not saying ___, I'm saying ___)

Disaster Recovery

1. Safety Check
2. Add Contrast
3. **Create Shared Purpose**
4. Pull Back

Create Shared Purpose

- We all want the same thing
- Our definitions of good might differ from each other
- Ask clarifying questions:
  - How does this fit into our objective?
  - What's the core issue?
  - What's the end goal of what you're trying to accomplish?

Disaster Recovery

1. Safety Check
2. Add Contrast
3. Create Shared Purpose
4. Pull Back

Pull Back

- Know going into it that your conversation might fail
- It's okay to walk away
- Deliver a tough message

Tricky Situations

Part Four

How do I deal with someone interrupting me?

- "There's a lot to this story and I need you to hear the entire thing."
- "I wasn't finished."
- And of course…just keep talking

How do I deal with someone yelling at me?

- It's fine to leave a conversation and return when emotions have died down
- Hack your amygdala by having a statement prepared
  - "We can't talk to you until you lower your voice."
  - "That hurt."
  - "When you raise your voice I can't think straight."

How can I do this if I'm remote?

- Do it live
  - Video is best
  - Audio is an acceptable fallback
- Use email for documentation, not communication
- Try not to text about it
- You can't see body language so you need to work harder to signal it's safe to stay in the discussion

What if text is my only option?

- You have to work harder to establish safety because your words can be misinterpreted
- Don't be afraid of an emoji or emoticon
  - People respond to them just like a human face
- Make sure you make clear requests of them

What if they're from another generation or culture?

- Learn about their culture and their context
- Ensure they feel respected and safe
- Prototype, don't stereotype
- Realize you have to build a bridge between two cultures and that you may have to adapt your strategies

What if it's my boss?

3 things you should work to establish with your boss for a successful conversation:

- Respect for them and their position
- An understanding that you might not see the whole picture
- Reassurance that you're there to work it out together and you aren't out for yourself

Other tactics

- Work to establish a mutual purpose
- Relate your needs to their goals if possible
- Don't hedge
- Share risks, let them decide

What about the aftermath?

- Emotions and behavior can't flip like a switch, folks need time to adjust and process
- Follow up in a few days if you're still experiencing issues or weirdness
- Apologize only if you've offended and be sincere
- Apologies that contain "but" negate anything that comes before it

Recap

Part Four

Recap: Preparing

- Make sure to check yourself first
  - Are you assuming positive intent?
  - What role did you play?

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- Get the facts, form solid conclusions

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- Patterns vs one-off

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- Patterns vs one-off
- Goals and making clear requests

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- Ask "How am I supposed to do that?"

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Recap: Disaster Recovery

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- Use contrasting statements
- "How am I supposed to do that?"
- If they refuse to help resolve the issue, it's time to get others involved
- Sometimes you have to deliver a tough message, but make it your last resort
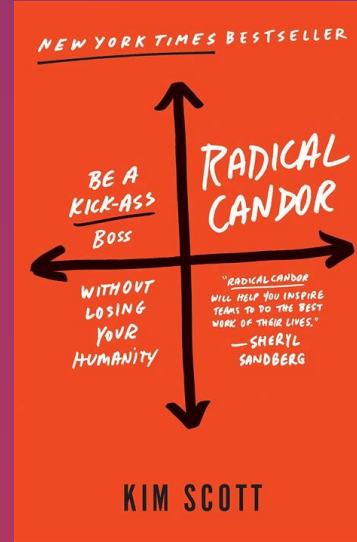
Helpful resources
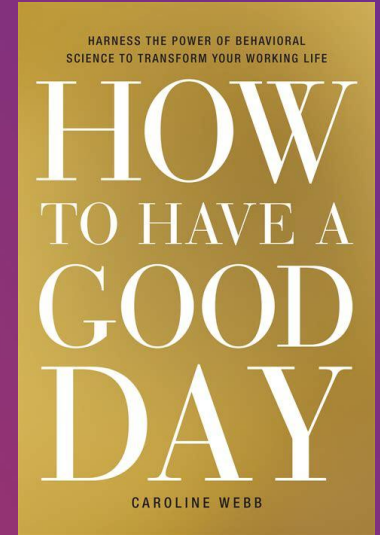
Epilogue
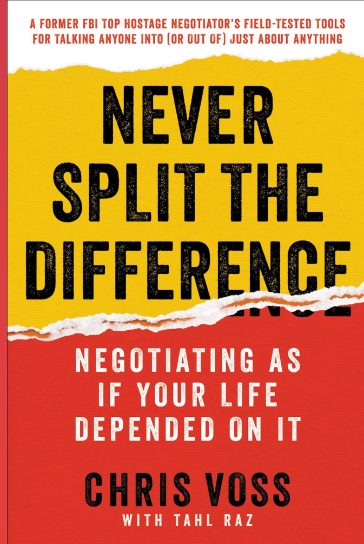
Never Split the Difference
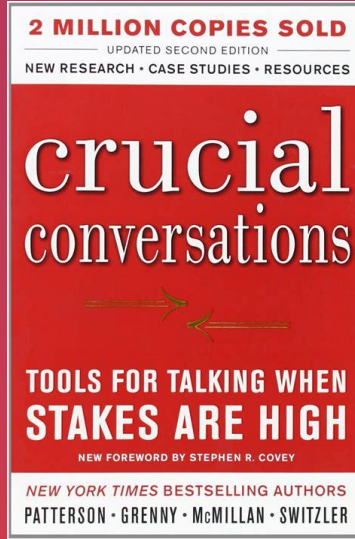
Crucial Conversations

Radical Candor

How to Have a Good Day

Helpful resources

- [The best teams thrive on disagreement](#)
- [5 Dysfunctions of a Team](#)
- [Atlassian Team Playbook](#)
- [The five keys to a successful Google team](#)

Cheat Sheet

http://bit.ly/conflictcheatsheet

Thanks! Any questions?

Let's keep in touch!

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