

FOREWORD BY **TOM PETERS**

Never walk away from another conflict again!

crucial confrontations

**National
Bestseller**

nger **Tools for** misse
ments **resolving** acc
suits **broken promises,** divorce
bt **violated expectations,** loss
ustration **and** performance review
blems **bad behavior** productiv

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler

Authors of the National Bestseller *Crucial Conversations*

that we do not respect him or her. Problems are bad things, the other person is connected to the problem, and therefore we must think he or she is bad. Despite our best efforts, others feel unsafe and go to silence or violence, and we haven't even made it all the way through our first sentence.

Let's add a skill to help us with our very first sentence. We'll use it as a preemptive tool for stopping disrespect in its tracks. It's called *Contrasting*. It's the killer of the fundamental attribution error. Here's how it works.

Before you start the confrontation, anticipate how others might assume the worst. How might they feel disrespected? For instance, if you bring up a quality problem, the other person may believe that you think he or she is unskilled in general. If you address poor effort on a specific project, the other person may conclude that you believe he or she isn't motivated or can't be trusted, or perhaps you don't like him or her or are about to take disciplinary action, and so on. You've noticed a problem, and the other person prepares for the worst before you can finish your thought. To deal with these predictable misinterpretations, use Contrasting. First, imagine what others might erroneously conclude. Second, immediately explain that this is what you *don't* mean. Third, as a contrasting point, explain what you *do* mean. The important part is the *don't* portion. It addresses misunderstandings that could put safety at risk. Once safety is protected or reestablished, the *do* part of the statement clarifies your real meaning or intent. Here's what Contrasting sounds like when it is used up front to avoid feelings of disrespect:

"I don't want you to think I'm unhappy with how we work together. Overall I'm very satisfied. I just want to talk about how we make decisions together."

"I'm not saying that it was wrong of you to disagree with me in the meeting. We need to hear everyone's view if we want to make the best choice. It's just that I think the team heard your tone and words as attacking."

"I know you tried your best to improve your grades. I'm satisfied with your effort. Please don't hear me as being less than proud of your progress. I'd just like to share a few study ideas that might help you maintain your grades more easily."

Contrasting plays a huge role in initially describing broken promises. The bigger the problem is, the more likely it is that the other person is going to feel disrespected. Consequently, many discussions of failed promises and bad behavior start with a *preventive* Contrasting statement. In fact, this is the skill people are looking for when they pick up a book that deals with missed expectations because it answers the question: "How do I get started?"

If you suspect that the other person is going to feel offended or defensive, prepare the ground by explaining what you don't and do mean.

Of course, you can also use Contrasting in the middle of a conversation when you suddenly become aware that the other person is feeling disrespected. You didn't anticipate the reaction, but sure enough, he or she's found a way to feel disrespected:

"I'm sorry; I didn't mean to imply that you were doing it on purpose. I believe you were unaware of the impact you were having. That's why I wanted to bring it up in the first place."

Establish Mutual Purpose

When a conversation turns ugly, with greater intensity and speed than you ever imagined it could, it's usually because others misunderstand not your *content* but your *intent*. You're speaking respectfully. That part you got right. You merely want to solve a problem in a way that keeps the relationship on solid footing, but the people you're talking to think differently. They believe that the only reason you're bringing up the infraction is that you're out to humiliate them, make them do something they

don't want to do, overthrow their authority, or otherwise cause them pain and sorrow. They believe that bad things are *about to happen* to them.

Of course, once others allow vicious stories about your intent to romp freely inside their brains, they become angry, defensive, and emotionally charged. Blood rushes to their arms and legs so that they can be better equipped for the "fight or flight" reaction their bodies have been genetically designed for. Within seconds they're on their worst brain-starved behavior. Once this chemical transformation happens, there's a good chance you'll never get back on track. Anything you say carries with it the stench of evil intentions. And of course, since *they* are now dumbed down by adrenaline, their logical processes take a vacation and nothing you say really matters.

You can't let this happen. If you think others are likely to harbor bad thoughts about your intentions *before you've even said a word*, take another kind of preventive measure: Establish Mutual Purpose.

Build common ground before you even mention a problem. Let others know that your intentions are pure—that your goal is to solve problems *and* make things better for both of you. Start with what's important to you *and* them—not just you. Establish Mutual Purpose.

Here's an example:

"If it's okay with you, I'd like to spend a couple of minutes talking about how we made that last decision. My goal is to come up with a method we're both comfortable with."

"I'd like to give you some feedback that I think would help you be more productive with your meetings. [Add Contrasting.] I don't think this is a huge problem, but I do think that if you were to make a couple of small changes, things would run a lot more smoothly."

Note: If your sole purpose is possibly making the other person feel bad, or blaming others for becoming defensive, associated with the change you want, think about how everyone will feel, then establish Mutual Purpose.

"I'm concerned about a situation where, if we don't find a way to be competitive, our customer sources, and we're [Add Contrasting.] I don't want to physically or mentally stress myself with it for years to come. This leads to a more consistent..."

Ask for Permission

If the topic you're about to discuss is particularly sensitive, or someone doesn't normally discuss, ask for permission. Don't plunge into a topic without permission. Asking permission also helps allay people's suspicions if they are malicious.

Speak in Private

This safety tip is both obvious and important. Discuss problems in private. No matter how serious, retire to your office or another private place and talk one on one. Never discipline your child. Never discipline your child in front of others. Never confront your spouse in front of others. Never confront your friends, loved ones,