



Business Management Institute

Leading Through Complexity: Courageous Conversations and Accountability

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CHECK-IN POINT

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WACUBO 2026

Business Management Institute



Session Objectives

1. Describe key principles for managing conflict and maintaining trust during difficult conversations
2. Analyze approaches for addressing performance and accountability challenges
3. Demonstrate techniques for leading clear, direct, and constructive conversations



Reminders

1. **Engage** with me
2. **Participate** in our group discussions and breakout activities
3. **Share** your experiences and knowledge



Real-Talk Moment

Think about this past 6 months. What was a difficult conversation you had to have with a direct report, colleague, or your supervisor.

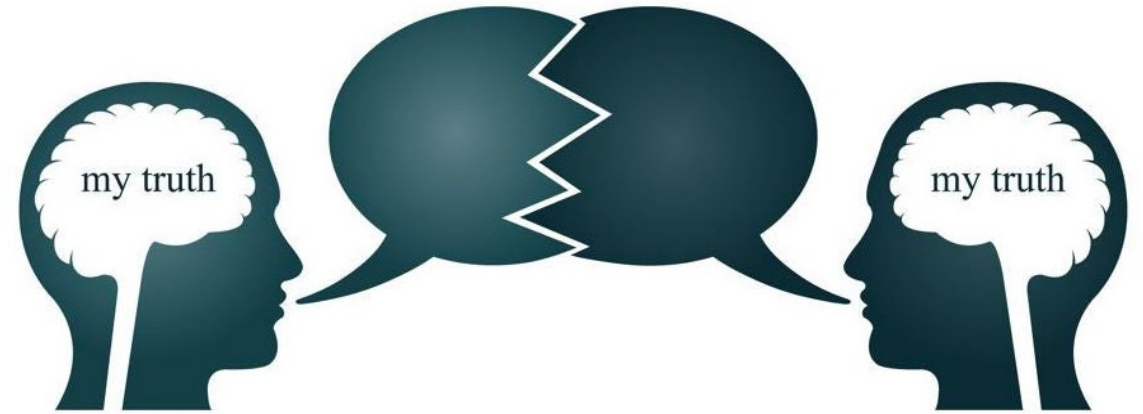
1. How did you feel going into the conversation?
 2. How did you feel during the discussion?
 3. How did you feeling leaving and having some time to process?
- Discuss your sentiments with the person next to you for **5 minutes** and let's discuss as a larger group



Why Difficult Conversations Matter

The Cost of Avoidance

- Performance declines
- Trust erodes
- Frustration grows
- Expectations become unclear
- Conflict intensifies



The conversation you avoid today often becomes the problem you manage tomorrow.



Conflict Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
Conflict is always negative	Healthy conflict improves decisions
Good leaders avoid conflict	Good leaders address conflict directly
Difficult conversations damage relationships	Avoidance damages relationships

Courageous Conversations

Before You Speak....

FACTS - What do I know?

Observable
behaviors

Specific examples

Clear expectations



CURIOSITY - What don't I know?

Perspective

Challenges

Motivations



CLARITY - What needs to happen next?

Expectations

Accountability

Follow-up

Courageous Conversations

When You Speak....

S

Share Your Facts - start with objective observations.

T

Tell Your Story - explain your concern or interpretation.

A

Ask for Others' Paths - invite their perspective.

T

Talk Tentatively - remain open and curious.

E

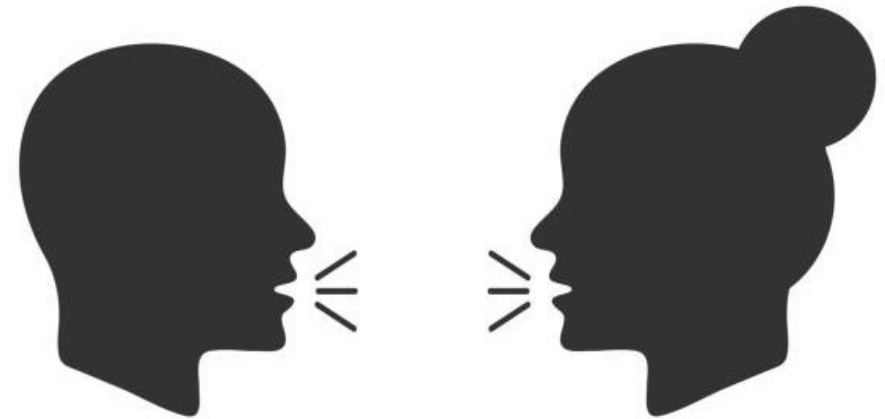
Encourage Testing - welcome feedback and alternative viewpoints

Source: *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler.

Reframe the Conversation

Breakout Discussion

- Practice turning these statements into a proper STATE opener:
 - Scenario A - "You never communicate"
 - Scenario B - "You're not being accountable"
 - Scenario C - "This team isn't collaborative"
- Take **5 minutes** to discuss at your tables and then we will report-out as a group.





Performance Conversations

Address Behavior, Not Character

- Focus On:
 - Observable behaviors
 - Expectations
 - Impact
 - Solutions
- Avoid
 - Labels
 - Assumptions
 - Personal criticism
 - Generalizations



Source: Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI™) Feedback Model.



Higher Education Leadership Reality

Common Challenges

- Shared governance
- Multiple stakeholders
- Influence without authority
- Faculty/staff dynamics
- Competing priorities

Discussion Question

Which challenge is most common in your area?

Breakout Activity

Case Study

A respected employee consistently misses deadlines.

The employee is:

- ✓ Experienced
- ✓ Well-liked
- ✓ Technically strong
- ✗ Increasingly unreliable

Small Group Discussion

At your tables, please take **15 minutes** to discuss the following questions:

1. What is the issue?
2. What are the risks of avoiding it?
3. How would you open the conversation?
4. What accountability measures would follow?

Ask one rep per group to share your approach and report-out.



Accountability Without Losing Trust

High Support + High Accountability

Leaders should:

- Set clear expectations
- Provide coaching
- Give timely feedback
- Follow through consistently

Leadership Truth

Accountability is not punishment.
Accountability is clarity.



Personal Action Planning

My Next Courageous Conversation

Who?

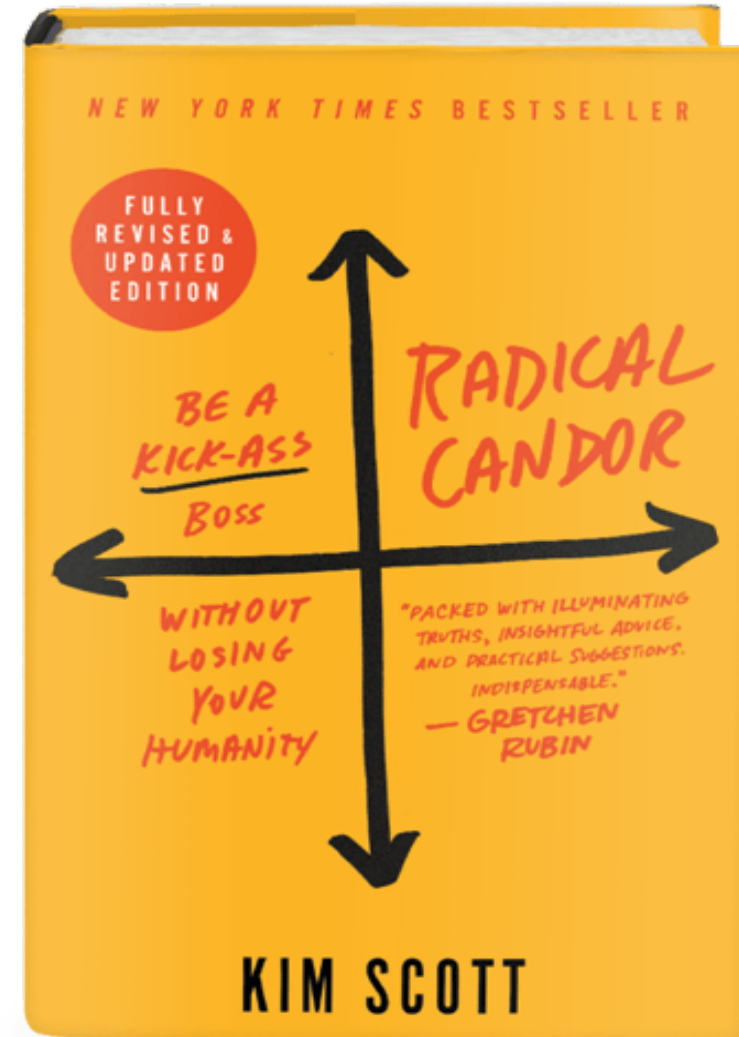
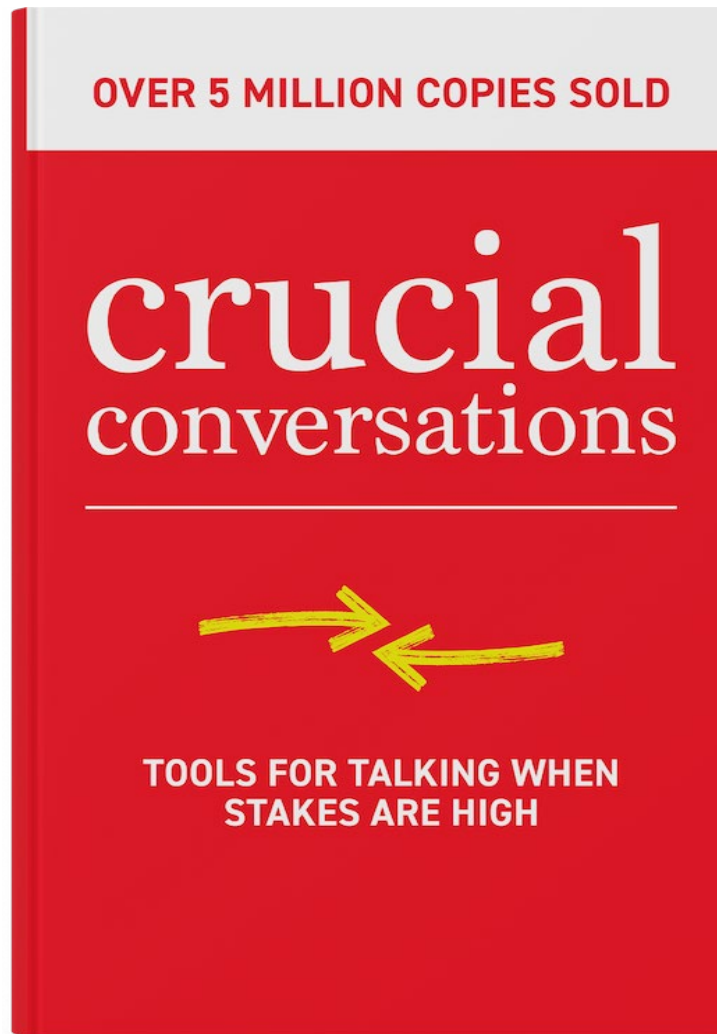
Issue?

Desired Outcome?

Opening Statement?

- Think about this exercise and commit to acting when you return to your campus next week. Consider sharing your plan with a trusted colleague for feedback, support, and accountability.

Resources/Books





Key Takeaways

Clarity is kindness

Lead with facts

Stay curious

Address issues early

Follow through

Courageous conversations are not about winning the discussion. They are about **strengthening relationships, improving performance, and achieving better outcomes together.**



Looking to Obtain CPEs?

**Don't forget to
Check-Out from
the system!**



Stay in Touch



Group Photo!

