

HIGH STAKES CONVERSATIONS

CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER





High Stakes Conversations can make or break a career, a relationship or a deal. Some people just seem able to have these conversations that matter more easily than others.

The rest of us may avoid having these conversations - to our detriment. That low performer keeps being a low performer. You deserve a raise and keep being underpaid. You really do need to revamp that agreement, yet you fear the fight.

Here are some examples of conversations considered to be "high stakes":

- Asking for a raise
- The last interview before a big job opportunity
- Delivering unwelcome news
- Navigating a significant decision with people who disagree
- Communicating value to someone new in your life
- Holding someone accountable while keeping them engaged

The difference between those who are successful in these conversations and those who are not often happens in the background, in the invisible territory that sets up your approach to the conversation.

You can learn to have these conversations if you prepare properly and set yourself up for success. While they may never become easy for you, they can become more manageable.

This tool is designed to help you prepare.

It breaks the components of your preparation into Body, Mind, Emotion, and Spirit. While these topics might seem "ethereal", they can make or break you when it counts. In fact, we will begin with "Spirit", because that is truly the game changer

STEP 1: SPIRIT PREPARATION

SET AN INTENTION FOR THE CONVERSATION

- What is my highest purpose for this conversation?
- What "spirit" do I want to bring to this conversation?
- What will ideally happen in the background as a result of this conversation? (Example: We will still be friends; we will leave with no hard feelings;)

STEP 2: MIND PREPARATION

PLAN THE CONVERSATION

DECIDE THE CONVERSATION YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE

(ie what is the real issue you are here to address?)

Examples:

- A content conversation (for the first time)
- A meta conversation (to discuss a pattern)
- A consequences conversation (to decide on fallout from a set of actions or patterns)

BRING YOUR MINDSET TO CENTER

- If you are judging the other person as right or wrong, good or bad, those judgments will take you off-center
- Instead, consider the consequences of the actions surrounding the conversation and get really curious about what is behind the actions you don't like.
- Example: Instead of feeling like "Joe" is always taking advantage of you, craft a question that assumes positive intent and speaks to the visible evidence of the situation. "Joe, you have taken the first widget for the last 5 times. I'm pretty sure you are not aware of this - however, it would work better for me if we alternated. Are you willing to do that?"

OUTLINE YOUR OPENING REQUEST OR QUESTION

Be sure to set context and describe what is in it for the other person to have this conversation.

STEP 3: BODY PREPARATION

CREATE THE APPROPRIATE FEELING STATE

When you are angry, offended, worried, or cautious, your body radiates those feelings. Others can read this even if you think you are covering it up. In fact, trying to hide it creates a disconnect between what you are saying and how people perceive your mood. It also makes you more likely to get knocked off center. Bringing yourself to a feeling state of calm strength will prepare you to navigate the difficulties of the conversation. Do this in private, and immediately before the conversation if possible:

- Use your breath to experience whatever you are feeling and with each breath, envision that you are releasing unwanted emotions on the out breath. With the in-breath, envision expanding the strength and caring from within you.
- Deeply ground your feet to the floor and feel the magnetic sensation of the balls of your feet and the heels of your feet being locked to the earth.
- If you have access, practice bio feedback with something like Inner Balance to deepen the feeling state of calm strength.

STEP 4: EMOTIONAL PREPARATION

PREPARE YOURSELF TO RECOVER FROM BEING TRIGGERED

Emotions can cause us to operate out of old habits and patterns. Especially in a high stakes conversation, our emotions can make us vulnerable to feeling attacked, defensive, or otherwise keep up from hearing things clearly.

- Be aware of your triggers - the kind of words or actions that push you into habitual thinking and action.
- Develop your strategy for counteracting your triggers (your pocket strategy, including a script if need be)
- Allow emotion in others without letting their emotion make you emotional or you going cold
- If an emotion comes up, name it, acknowledge it and allow it to pass through.

TIPS FOR THE CONVERSATION

1. Remember that people would rather be heard than to be agreed with
2. When they do something that seems not good, assume positive intent
3. Speak to their best selves, no matter how they act
4. Don't make them wrong, even if you think they are wrong
5. Speak to the data, not your conclusions
6. Take a break if needed
7. Remember your intention for the conversation
8. Keep your feet grounded - Four on the Floor