Why are Crucial Conversations important for discipleship?

- The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast: CNLP 230: Pete Scazzero on Why So Many Successful Leaders Are Emotionally Immature, How to Tell Whether That's You, and How to Become Emotionally Intelligent and Spiritually Mature

How do you know when you need to have a CC?

- Results and/or Relationships are suffering

** "If we don't talk it out, we'll act it out." True of False?

- TAKE quiz

Start with the Heart (what do you really want) & Master My Stories = S.F.D.

- Victim
- Villain
- Helpless

S.T.A.R.T – Which step is hardest for you?

- Share your Facts
- Tell your story
- Ask for Others' Paths
- Talk Tentatively
- Encourage Testing

Apologize, Contrast

Mutual Purpose—WHY is that important to you?

Explore other paths

Action—Follow-up

ROLE PLAY

Dear Emily,
I appreciated your blog article **Recovering from False Perceptions**. I agree that apologies can do more harm than good, and it is important to assess the need and/or reason for the apology. However, that post was more from the point of view of the individual with the false perception. I was interested to see what your advice would be to someone who feels they are the victim of false perceptions. I have an employee whose coworkers have labeled as lazy, uncaring, and untrustworthy. He wants to restore his image/brand with his coworkers and managers. What advice do you have for someone in this situation?
Signed,
Wanting to Help
Dear Wanting to Help,
Combating false perceptions can be frustrating. We often feel as if we are the **Victim**: "Others have misjudged me despite my hard work, exemplary efforts, and noteworthy achievements!" We may cast our coworkers in a **Villain** role: "Why can't they just see me for who I really am?" And then we start to feel **Helpless**: "This is so unfair and there is nothing I can do about it!"
So, while your question is about personal brand, I'd like to look at it through the lens of what we teach in Crucial Conversations Training about **Mastering Our Stories**. I will direct my comments directly to your employee, the person who wants to restore his brand.
Victim story: What am I pretending not to notice about my role?
Whenever we tell ourselves a Victim Story ("Woe is me! I am the best, hardest-working employee here and others have unjustly judged me as lazy, uncaring, and untrustworthy."), we need to challenge our story by asking: "What I am pretending not to notice about my role in the problem?" I have several ideas on how this relates to perception and personal brand:
1. False perceptions don't exist. There is only *your* perception of my behavior and *my* perception of my behavior. Just because your perception is different than mine doesn't mean it is false. When I judge your perception as false, it lets me off the hook. It allows me to say, "I am right and good and just and you are wrong." I get to stop looking at me and my behavior because my perception is true and yours is false. But, if I can accept your perception as valid and real, I can shift my thinking and open myself up to self-reflection. I can clearly see what things I have done or not done that may have contributed to your perception.
2. Accept the starting point. You don't get to tell people what your personal brand is, anymore than Nordstrom or Coca-Cola get to tell people what their brand is. You get to act and people get to perceive. Their perception is your brand. We sometimes confuse personal brand with personal identity, personal values, or personal mission. It is easy to say, "That is not my brand. I am disciplined, focused, and driven." While it may be true that your personal identity is disciplined, focused, and driven, and that your personal identity impacts your brand, recognize that it is not your brand. Your brand is how others perceive you, not how you perceive yourself. While you get to influence your brand, you don't control it because you can only influence, never control, others' perceptions.
Villain Story: Why would a reasonable, rational, decent person do this?
When we tell ourselves the story that someone else has falsely judged us, we get to cast them in the Villain role: "They are wrong. How could they be so unseeing of the true me?" The antidote to a Villain Story is to ask yourself: "Why would a reasonable, rational, decent person do (or think) this?"
3. Understand your brand. If you want to know why someone thinks of you as lazy and untrustworthy, the easiest way to find out is to ask them. But before you rush out to start this conversation, realize this—asking for feedback on your personal brand is NOT a crucial conversation. Sure, the stakes are high and your emotions may run strong. And yes, there are differing opinions. So why is this not a crucial conversation? When we talk about crucial conversations, the goal is to fill the **Pool of Shared Meaning**: yours and mine. In this particular case however, the goal is to fill the pool with only their meaning. This is a focus group, not a conversation.
Think of it this way. If I work in marketing and want to know what my company's brand is in the marketplace, I get a group of people together and ask them questions about how they perceive my company. When they respond, I may probe deeper to understand. What I don't do is say, "Oh, that is interesting and not at all what we are really about. Our company is actually very different than that and here's why."

Asking people about your brand is all about getting information and understanding your brand. It is not about you convincing others with your words that they should see you differently.

Helpless Story: What can I do right now to move toward what I really want?

When we accept that we can't control others' perceptions of us, it is tempting to tell ourselves a helpless story: "Their perception is their perception and there is nothing I can do." We fail to see the difference between control and influence. While you can't control others' perceptions, you can influence them, as all good brand marketers know. You open yourself to influence when you consider this question: "What can I do right now to move toward what I really want?"

4. Build a positive brand, not a non-negative brand. Don't wage war against your negative brand and try to convince people that you are "not lazy, not uncaring, and not untrustworthy." Being "not lazy" is not a powerful brand. Rather than try to erase the negative brand, focus your attentions on defining what positive brand you want to create: "I am a hard worker that gets great results. I am a people person who cares deeply about individuals."

Once you have defined that positive brand, consider what behaviors or actions on your part would drive that perception in others. What would someone see that would lead him or her to conclude that you are a hard worker who gets results? What would someone see that would lead him or her to the conclusion that you are a people person who cares deeply about individuals?

These might be new behaviors for you. But the key is that they need to be behaviors that are ***visible*** to others if they are going to impact others' perceptions.

Armed with these new behaviors, you can then create a change plan for enacting these behaviors.

5. Close the loop. This is a powerful step in personal brand building. You have asked for feedback on your brand, accepted it, and now acted upon it. Now is the time to go back and close the loop. Return to those who gave you feedback and say: "Here is what I have done with the information you gave me. Have you seen an impact?"

This is powerful for two reasons. First, it validates and strengthens the relationship because you are demonstrating deep respect to the other person. You took what they said and did something about it. Second, if the other person hasn't noticed a change (and hence your brand hasn't changed), this provides a nudge for them to reflect and re-evaluate. They might say, "I hadn't noticed the change, but now that you point it out . . . " Or, if upon reflection, they haven't seen the change and their perception hasn't begun to shift, that is a great data point for you as you consider whether the behaviors you have changed are driving the results you want.

I hope this gives you some helpful ideas. Just remember, your personal brand is about *you*, not about the other person. You can influence your brand when you stop telling yourself Victim, Villain, and Helpless Stories.

Q&A How to Deal with Toxic Gossip at Work

by David Maxfield

Dear Crucial Skills,

One of my main concerns at work is how we talk about each other—the staff lunchroom can be especially toxic. What feels most shocking to me is how our boss is often thrown under the bus.

I am having a hard time thinking of an appropriate comment to make as I feel that listening to these conversations implies my agreement. And I have to admit there have been times when I've piped up with a rude wise-crack or two, so I don't want to seem like I'm above it all. There are times I just avoid the lunchroom and I know others do, too.

What suggestions do you have for responding to wisecracks made behind coworkers' backs?

Signed,

Staying in From the Lunch Room

Dear Staying In,

You've done a great job of describing a familiar problem. I bet many of us have been in the same situation. We're joking around in the lunchroom, one-upping each other's wisecracks, when somehow the

topic turns to our boss or maybe to a colleague. We keep on with the jokes and banter, but at some point, it crosses the line from play to poison. As you said, we're throwing someone under the bus—all in the name of fun.

In these situations, silence isn't golden. It's agreement. When we don't speak up, we show our support for the people doing the badmouthing. We're helping to throw the person under the bus.

It's this kind of poisonous conversation that causes bad morale to spread across a team or organization. It begins with a seemingly innocuous joke, which is really the leading edge of an attack. Instead of saying something like, "I see it differently," others in the conversation remain silent or add to the wisecrack, amplifying the attack.

The group is creating a villain story at someone's expense, without stopping to question the story's truth or giving the person a chance to respond. As the story is repeated and grows unchallenged, it becomes full of what the comedian Stephen Colbert calls "truthiness." It may be several steps away from the facts, but it feels true. And it poisons the workplace.

Why do we do this? Sometimes it's because we don't know the person's true motives and we assume the worst. Jamaicans have a saying, "If you don't know a man, you'll invent him." The implication is that we'll invent him as an ogre. Few of us know our managers—especially senior leaders—really well. We aren't privy to their information or motives. And as the saying suggests, we judge them harshly. We don't give them the benefit of the doubt.

Sometimes these conversations are as simple as failing to give the benefit of the doubt, but there is often more going on. Sometimes your colleague is motivated by jealousy, revenge, fear, or dislike. Regardless of the cause, you need to speak up when you see this inappropriate behavior.

Use CPR to decide what to say. CPR stands for Content, Pattern, and Relationship. CPR can help you think about a problem and decide how to focus your conversation.

Suppose a person at your table says, "Sure, the boss says she's trying to improve staffing levels, but that's just to shut us up. What she really means is 'staphing' levels—you know like a staph infection!"

A statement like this may contain issues related to Content, Pattern, and Relationship. As a problem-solver, you can decide which issues are most central to you. You can use CPR to focus on the issues that are closest to the heart of your concerns.

Content: Addressing the content means you focus on the facts in the person's statement. Focusing on content is usually the simplest and safest way to respond because you aren't drawing any conclusions beyond what the person has just said. An example of addressing the content would be, "I don't think she's trying to shut us up. Why do you think that?" Addressing the content frames the problem as a question of facts. It focuses the discussion toward what your manager said and why your colleague doesn't believe it.

Pattern: Suppose this comment is just one in a pattern of passive-aggressive comments this group uses to badmouth the boss. You might address this pattern by saying, "I like the way we kid around with each other, but not when we start to throw people under the bus—people who aren't here to defend themselves." Addressing the pattern focuses on your colleagues' inappropriate behavior. It's a tougher discussion, but it may be closer to the heart of your concern.

Relationship: The long-term impact of these corrosive conversations is the undermining of trust and respect. The relationship with the boss is put at risk. If you feel that people's comments reveal a rupture in basic trust and respect for your boss, then you might address the relationship itself: "It sounds as if you're questioning whether you can trust and respect her. Is that right? If that's your concern, then I think you need to find a way to talk with her and hash it out." Note that you may decide to have this conversation in private, instead of putting the person on the spot in front of everyone. Again, it's a tough discussion, but it may be closer to the heart of your concern.

The mistake many problem-solvers make is to focus on content, the simple and safe route, when their true concern involves the pattern or relationship. They address a problem, but it's not the problem they really care about.

This CPR skill can be used in a wide variety of situations, not just in confronting gossip about your boss. The next time you have a concern, use CPR to decide which part of the concern to address. CPR can help you focus on the heart of your gossip problem.

influencer Q&A

What To Do When Perceptions Aren't Reality

by Steve Willis

Dear Steve,

For the past five years or so, I've often heard the phrase "perception is reality" and it makes me cringe. On one hand, I can see that in the heat of the moment it is very helpful to understand what the other person is feeling or perceiving to gain common ground and reach understanding. However, I mostly see the phrase used to justify those "Heat of the Moment" feelings and to make the case that your perceptions are truth and are also valid for all eternity. When a child says, "I hate you" to a disciplining parent, we usually agree it's a temporary feeling and will pass once the sting of discipline has come and gone. However, for some, there seems to be a general acceptance that how they feel is valid now and forever, almost as an excuse for not exerting self-control. Your thoughts?

Sincerely,

Searching for Reality

Dear Searching,

Like you, I've heard this phrase tossed around since the beginning of my career—some twenty plus years ago. While the original intention was to serve as a reminder that people equate their perceptions of their experiences as their reality, it soon became a way to justify inaction, unfair or uninformed judgements, or to pursue the easiest path forward. It started to become yet another, more acceptable way of declaring, "serenity now!"

Before I get too far into this, I should disclose that I started my career designing and analyzing organizational assessments in all their varieties. I played my part in slathering on a fair number of these types of phrases to position our services. But as I've studied both sides of the issue over the past twenty years, I've come to a more complete understanding of the concept. Perception is indeed reality . . . unless you take action to make it otherwise.

Here's how it works. There is a specific brain science (or brain curse for some) that comes into play here. Our brains are wired to help us identify and handle complex patterns of behaviors. It starts doing so when these patterns are first created—from the very first appearance of the very first instance. In these moments, we very quickly formulate a hypothesis as to why said instance came to be, as well as how it fits into our world. And here's where things get interesting: Once this new perception is created, the brain starts looking for confirming data that this is reality. In its search, the brain will accept all kinds of data as confirming data—regardless of whether it is, in fact, confirming data.

So, there you have it. The brain draws a tentative conclusion which very quickly converts from perception into reality. That is, unless you take action to make it otherwise. Here's what I mean: the longer this new perception goes unchallenged, the closer to reality it becomes. That's why these perceptions are so difficult to dismiss verbally. You need to actively generate a new data stream—one that helps people realign to reality.

One of my long-time partners, Kerry Patterson, described the phenomenon this way: "In an uncertain atmosphere, all ambiguous behaviors will be interpreted negatively. And by the way, all behaviors are ambiguous." So, don't leave it up to perception to decide what something means, take action to reverse the perception curse.

One of the most effective ways is to engage in symbolic actions. A symbolic action is any interaction taken where others who witness it will walk away knowing your values and priorities. While they can take many forms, there are some big categories of symbolic actions to tap into including sacrifices of time, previous priorities, and ego.

Next time you hear "perception is reality" ask yourself what actions would provide unmistakable data about reality?

Time: How can I, and/or other leaders, make time to demonstrate our highest priority? What meetings or events should we attend? Are there opportunities to share messages or teach mini-lessons that would reinforce desired values? Am we present for both formal and informal gatherings? How could we spend my time in a way that sends a positive message about our desired reality?

Priorities: What is most important to our team? What alignments could be made in work, projects, and other initiatives to demonstrate what matters most? Are there previous priorities we can put aside in favor of higher value ones?
Ego: Are there times and/or places where I haven't walked the talk? Do I need to publicly acknowledge personal shortcomings? Have others coached me to become better? If so, how can I recognize their contributions? How can I demonstrate that even though I fall short, I keep on practicing to get better?
Bottom line, when others justify their behavior or attitudes by their perceptions, you can counteract the incorrect assumptions they've made by asking yourself, "What could I do that would be visible and meaningful? What would create new data points that would help individuals realign their perceptions with reality?"

crucial conversations Q&A

How to Tell Someone You're Offended

by Emily Hoffman

Dear Emily,
Our company was recently acquired and I was asked to be on the transition team to merge the two companies. This project required that I work with several members of the parent company throughout the weekend and late into the night. I was trying my best to be chummy and start the relationship on the right foot, but people from the new company spent much of our time together making crude, sexual jokes and using very foul language. Not only did it really offend me, but it certainly didn't feel like appropriate workplace humor or decorum. How can I make it known that I don't appreciate their humor (or lack thereof) without seeming like a prude or threatening my ability to work with them in the future?
Signed,
Cautiously Offended
Dear Cautious,
In Crucial Conversations, we teach a concept we call the Fool's Choice. It is basically this: when we face a crucial conversation (when the stakes are high, our emotions are in play, and there are differences of opinion), we tend to devolve to binary thinking. We assume we can either be honest or respectful. We can be candid or kind. We can stand up for ourselves or roll over.
What I love about your question is that you are rejecting the Fool's Choice. Sure, you might not know what the third way is, but you know there must be another way—a way to be candid AND preserve the relationship. For decades, I have watched as people have made the Fool's Choice and, most commonly, chosen silence. We have all tolerated bad behavior, bad ideas, and bad decisions because we have felt pressured to choose respect or conflict avoidance over honesty. Sadly, when we've done so, we've failed to recognize that we don't actually have to make that choice. More often than not, we literally can have it both ways.
Here are some ideas about how to reject the Fool's Choice and have it both ways.
1. Make it safe . . . for them. Most often, when we think about stepping up to a hard conversation, we think about how hard, scary, or uncomfortable the conversation will be for us and how we can make it better . . . for us. This is natural. No one likes to do scary things (well, mostly no one. There are all those people who go to haunted houses each year). So, we make things less scary. For us.
However, if we want to be successful in our crucial conversations, we have to spend as much time, if not more, thinking about how to make it less scary for the other person. Being told something you did was wrong or offensive is scary, too. And our natural response to scary things is to defend ourselves. So, how can you make it easier or less scary for the offender to hear your message? A good place to start is by sharing your intent. Your positive intent might include:

- You aren't bringing up your concern simply to criticize or complain.
- You like working with this new team, are excited about being part of the new company, and want to learn from them over time.
- You want to work well with them long-term.
- Most importantly, you want to talk about issues as they come up, rather than letting them fester.

- In addition to sharing your perspective, you want to know their views and how they believe the relationship can work well.

2. Assume poor skill, not poor motive. Typically, when someone has done something offensive or disrespectful, behaved poorly, or otherwise violated an expectation we had, we assume it is because of poor motive. They don't care. They don't respect me. This is just who they are—disrespectful and uncaring. We make character judgments about people and we do it quickly. If you are going to be successful in this conversation, you need to step back from those judgments. Maybe they think this kind of behavior is okay. Maybe this is how they have always built relationships and rapport with new colleagues. Maybe they don't know any other way to connect with new people.

Now, I know what you are thinking. No way, everyone knows this kind of behavior is taboo. We have been having annual harassment training for decades now. But let me ask you this—is it possible no one has ever been courageous and kind enough to give them feedback about their behavior in the past? Is it possible others they have worked with have faced this same Fool's Choice (I can speak up or I can preserve the relationship) and made the choice to stay silent rather than find the third way?

I am surprised by just how often I give feedback to someone on a long-standing behavioral pattern and the response is, "No one has ever said anything before." Silence is pervasive. And it means people often continue their behavioral patterns simply because they don't know anything different.

3. Seek others' perspective. As you consider what to say, you may want to validate your perspective. Check in with your two long-time coworkers. Did they notice the same behaviors? What did they think? It can be helpful, validating, and strengthening to know that others experienced the same thing and see it similarly to you.

At the same time, you don't need to back away if your coworkers see it differently. Perhaps they experienced the same behavior but it didn't impact them the same, or it didn't seem offensive to them. That doesn't lessen the impact on you or excuse the poor behavior. It just gives you a perspective that is different to consider as you enter the conversation and hopefully helps bring greater understanding of your new coworkers.

4. Invest in relationship-building and connection. You want a good working relationship with these folks. Starting the relationship off with a crucial conversation can be a great way to set a foundation of trust and respect ("You know you can always trust me to be honest and candid with you.") However, great working relationships need more than just trust and respect. They need fun, humor, enjoyment, technical competence, shared purpose, etc.

Recognize that the start of this relationship has been a bit rocky and look for proactive things you can do to create positive experiences, ideally, immediately. Remember, you are going to tell them they have done something that doesn't work for you. Make sure in the coming weeks, that you show them how much they do that does work for you.

crucial accountability Q&A **Transforming a Negative Environment**
by David Maxfield

Dear David,

I am a mid-level manager in human services, and support a twenty-one person staff. Nineteen of these team members have a professional approach to their work, manage their emotions appropriately, and are respectful to others. However, two team members are constantly negative, complaining, and disrespectful. I have addressed these behaviors with them, but they only improve for a little while before reverting back. I am continually amazed at how these two team members can negatively affect nineteen otherwise positive people. Over the years, I have seen this on other teams as well, where the negative member(s) adversely influence the positive members, even though the positive members are in the majority. Is there a reason that negativity trumps positivity?

Regards,
Discouraged

Dear Discouraged,

Thanks for a winning question. Infectious negativity saps the vitality from far too many workplaces. Your final question is especially interesting to me: Why does negativity trump positivity?
I'll describe several reasons for why negativity spreads and persists, as well as suggest a variety of solutions.
1. Negativity trumps positivity because humans are designed to be risk averse. This makes sense when you think about our survival instincts. Bad news signals danger and may require action. Danger signals are processed by the amygdala, the emotional part of our brain, instead of by the prefrontal cortex. These amygdala-mediated thoughts seize our attention and focus it on the danger. This is why even people who are normally positive pay more attention to negative than to positive information.
2. People pay attention to negative information because it violates the organization's public relations bias. Most organizations and most leaders try to sugarcoat problems, hiding them from employees. The result is that employees are hungry for the truth—especially for the less-flattering truths they believe are being withheld from them. This means they pay special attention, and seriously consider, the negative information they hear—even when it comes from less-than-trustworthy sources.
Solution: The solution to these first two problems is to add more and more honest information to the pool. People who have questions and concerns will turn to darned near anyone for information. Make sure you are there first with honest answers.
3. Too many people count on others to speak up for them. They are too timid to speak up for themselves. The people who *do* speak up fall into two camps: those especially skilled at crucial conversations and those who aren't. Those especially skilled folks know how to speak up in ways that are frank, honest, and respectful. Those who are especially unskilled are honest, but offensive, and may not even realize how negative they actually are.
Solution: Create opportunities and make it safer for people to raise questions and concerns. Don't force the silent majority to rely on their least-skilled members to raise their concerns. In addition, train and coach the less-skilled communicators to be more skilled in how they raise their concerns—and direct them to raise their concerns with you.
4. The fourth reason that negativity spreads is different from the first three because it deals with a different kind of negativity: disrespectful behavior. When someone is disrespectful, others often respond with disrespect—tit for tat. As a result, disrespect becomes a poison that spreads quickly through a team.
Solution: Every team has informal/implicit norms for what constitutes respectful behavior. When disrespect is seen too often, it may be necessary to make these norms more formal and explicit. This may require a team meeting, a few crucial conversations, or an actual code of conduct. You'll need to decide how explicit the norms need to be.
However, the key to success isn't the norms, but how they are enforced. You need to achieve 200 percent accountability: Team members are 100 percent accountable for being respectful; they are also 100 percent accountable for others being respectful. This means that team members, not you, hold each other accountable. It may require some coaching or training, but it is essential. You, as the leader, can't keep these norms alive. They must be enforced by the team members themselves.
5. Negativity is a habit that's hard to break. We've all observed this unfortunate truth. People commit to stop complaining, rumor-mongering, or being disrespectful, but then fall back in to their old ways.
Solution: Use our CPR skills to make sure you frame the problem correctly. Here is an example.
Content: If the problem is a single incident, then address the content. The content includes the facts about what you expected and what you observed. For example, "When you have a concern or hear a rumor, I expect you to bring it to me, so I can deal with it in a productive way. I hear you shared a rumor this morning—as if it were true—with several team members without checking it out with me first. What happened?"
Pattern: If your chief concern is with the pattern of behaviors, then address the pattern. The pattern is that the person has made a commitment or promise, and has failed to live up to it. For example, "We've talked before about sharing rumors without checking them with me first. I thought I had your commitment to stop doing this. I hear you shared a rumor this morning. If my facts are right, then you broke your commitment to me. Help me understand."

Relationship: If your chief concern involves trust or respect, then address the relationship. The relationship may need to change. For example, “When you make commitments to me and then fail to follow through on them, I begin to think I can’t trust you. And if I can’t trust you, I don’t see how I can have you on my team. Help me understand.”

I hope these ideas help you deal with the negativity that spreads in your workplace. Let me know how they work.

Q&A How to Get Over a Grudge

by David Maxfield

Dear David,

I was in a business relationship where it became apparent that the managing partner no longer saw my contributions as valuable. I had watched this partner gun for others in the past and “transition” them out of the company. Now her sights were set on me. So, before things got nasty, I devised my own exit strategy and found a job elsewhere. I tried to take the high road and not instigate a feud, I cloaked my departure in terms of a need for new horizons, etc. And while I did take a financial hit for a few years, things have worked out positively for me. Today, the ex-business partner is always friendly when we meet at events, and she recently suggested we do lunch to “catch up.” I'm conflicted. It feels hypocritical to pretend nothing happened, yet I don't want to nurse a grudge. Which way is the high road now?

Sincerely,

My Compass is Confused

Dear Confused Compass,

First, I’m glad things worked out positively for you. You should take pride in how you handled this crisis in your career. You assessed the situation and protected yourself and your family. You also avoided burning bridges or behaving in ways that would have compromised your values. Good job.

Sometimes I’m asked whether speaking up is an absolute virtue, whether people should always speak up, even when they think it might hurt them or their families. In other words, were you wrong to cloak the reasons for your departure?

My answer is no. Instead, I suggest that people weigh the risks of speaking up against the risks of *not* speaking up. Will failing to speak up put others at risk of harm? How serious a risk? And how serious are the risks of speaking up? In your situation, it sounds like you weighed the risks and made a sound decision.

So, should you meet your ex-business partner for lunch? You certainly can if you want to, but I don’t think you have any moral obligation to. I don't see a high road/low road issue here.

For one, you describe your past relationship as a business relationship, not a personal one. Secondly, you no longer have a relationship with this former colleague, and there is nothing I can see that says you ought to. Ask yourself: “What do I really want for myself, for her, and for our relationship?” I suspect your answer will be nothing. But if your answer is different, you might want to meet with her.

Regarding your concern about nursing a grudge, a grudge is defined as a “persistent feeling of ill-will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury.” It sounds like you do have a grudge. Here is how you might resolve it.

Avoid ruminating, reliving, and reactivating the bad feelings. Obsessing about the way you were treated doesn’t help you or the situation. Instead, place the events into the broader context of your life. View them as a test you passed. Take pride in how you handled yourself.

Finally, as part of this reappraisal, try putting yourself into your former partner’s shoes. Try to avoid making her the villain and yourself the victim. Examine the role you played, and why she might have found you wanting. Recall the facts of the situation and ask yourself whether you could be telling yourself stories regarding her behaviors and motives. Ask yourself why a reasonable person in her position might have behaved the way she did, and why she is acting friendly now. You might come to a new understanding and gain clarity on how you'd like to respond to her requests to catch up

crucial conversations Q&A

Start With Heart, and Finish With Heart, Too

by Emily Hoffman

Dear Emily,

I like to think of myself as someone who knows how to have crucial conversations. I've read Crucial Conversations, attended the training, and recently, I became a certified trainer for my organization. However, I can never seem to make headway with my teenage daughter. We disagree about almost everything—when homework should be done, what kind of media is acceptable, and the smartphone, well, everything from apps to time spent seems to surface an argument that turns into a fight. Whenever a conflict arises, I mentally review the Crucial Conversations steps, determined to get them right. I feel like I use the skills correctly, but to no avail. Where am I going wrong?

Signed,

What Am I Missing

Dear Missing,

Earlier this year, I married someone who has yet to attend Crucial Conversations training. After dedicating the last twelve years of my professional life and a huge amount of energy to the mission of Crucial Conversations, I probably should have made the training mandatory. Fortunately, my husband is good at having difficult conversations, at least those we have together, because he has good intent. Regardless of his skill level (and let's be honest, at times it is not high, bless his heart), my husband's intent is always true and good. And that comes through. Our conversations have reminded me of this principle: intent often trumps skill.

Unfortunately, this principle holds true in reverse. Why is that unfortunate? Because it means that no matter your skill level (and I like to think mine is high), intent can, and often will, trump skill. I'm not saying that having good intent can replace skills (everyone can benefit from learning HOW to effectively dialogue when stakes are high); I am saying that having all the skills can never replace intent. Let me give you an example.

Some time ago, I had a crucial conversation with a vendor. There was a pattern of gaps that was starting to impact our professional relationship. It was bothering me, so I knew I needed to address it. I invited this person to lunch, and I started by sharing my good intent. I wanted the relationship to work for both of us, and for that to happen I thought it was important we discuss this pattern of gaps. I then laid it all out for her. She was amazing. She accepted my feedback with grace and composure. She asked what she could do differently, and (this is the moment when my true intent became apparent) I replied, "Start delivering on your commitments. When you tell me you are going to do something, do it." Ouch. I compounded my failure of intent with a failure of observation. She took the feedback so well, I assumed our conversation was a success.

Fast forward a couple of weeks. I was on the phone with this vendor and the topic of our previous conversation came up. She thanked me for the feedback, which speaks volumes about her humility. Feeling I should reciprocate, I asked how I could better serve our professional relationship. She paused. Then she shared what she had felt during our previous conversation.

Her experience of that conversation was quite different than mine. She had perceived my intent as "I have shared the problem; now YOU go and fix it." And she was right. It didn't matter that I had stated my path, made contrasting statements, paraphrased, and used all the other skills we teach in Crucial Conversations. It didn't even matter that, prior to our conversation, I had asked myself what I really wanted for me, for her, and for the relationship. What mattered in that moment was, without realizing it, my motives had shifted. As I think back now to that conversation, I can see it. In that moment, I wanted to feel like I had done my part and held the crucial conversation. I wanted to check it off my list and walk away.

So, in your conversations with your daughter, continually assess your intent. I'm not certain this is your obstacle, but you wouldn't be the first to get caught up in holding a successful crucial conversation while having in mind the wrong idea of success. Start with heart, then check to ensure your good intentions sustain the conversation. I hope this helps.

How to Deal With Delicate Workplace Issues
by David Maxfield

Dear David,

I have a coworker who has FMLA approval (Federal Medical Leave Act), and I think she abuses it. She doesn't come to work on time. Multiple times she has run out of the office, citing various personal issues—issues not related to her FMLA approved issues.

We have all agreed as a team that if we are not able to be on time, or need to leave early, or have an appointment, we will tell each other by text or in person. She has only followed through on this once. She might tell someone in leadership, but then leadership doesn't let the team know. It is an ongoing problem. I have met with her and described the gap between expectation and her behavior. I cited ten instances of when this has occurred. She still takes no responsibility. Leadership members are aware, but they avoid conflict and have asked me to hold her accountable. I have no official authority. What is my next step?

Signed,
Unauthorized

Dear Unauthorized,

Your situation sounds very frustrating. Your coworker is not taking responsibility, your leaders are not stepping up, and you've tried to hold her accountable with no success. I admire your patience and resolve. I want to help you. I'll share a few ideas. However, I'm not optimistic that your coworker will change unless her managers require it, and it doesn't sound as if they will. Let's consider the various aspects of your situation.

FMLA Statute. The purpose of the FMLA statute is: *"To balance the demands of the workplace with the needs of families . . . , and to allow employees to take reasonable leave for medical reasons . . . "* To accomplish this purpose, it permits, *"Up to 12 workweeks or up to 480 hours of job-protected unpaid leave for family and medical reasons during a 12-month period."*

Notice two points: The statute assumes a balance between the needs of workplaces and families—that both will need to absorb some side effects for the greater good. Second, it puts a time limit on the side effects a workplace needs to absorb.

Your Leaders. It sounds as if your leaders believe your coworker's actions are acceptable—a side effect they expect to absorb as a part of the FMLA statute. And they expect you and your team to absorb or manage the side effects as well. I'd like to raise a few questions related to this:

1. Ask yourself what you really want long term—for yourself, your coworker, and the team. For example, if you take a long-term view, say two years out, will your coworker's FMLA issues go away? Will she return to being a good coworker? Basically, is this a short-term issue?
2. Ask yourself whether you agree with your leaders—that the problems you are experiencing are within the scope of the FMLA's broad intent—and whether the legal risks of confronting the problems outweigh the costs.
3. Your leaders would like you and the others on your team to backfill for your co-worker while she is on leave. Is this possible? Or do you think your leaders need to take additional steps, such as hire a temporary worker to fill in? If your team needs short-term help, document the need and take it to your leaders.

Reflecting on these questions, I hope, provides you greater insight and clarity regarding the situation.

Yourself. Your frustration could easily get you into trouble. Remember, you don't have your leaders' support. They say they want you to hold your coworker accountable, but I don't buy it. Here is my story: I think they are mostly saying that *they* won't be the ones to hold her accountable—perhaps for fear of violating FMLA statutes. My guess is they want you to focus on getting the work done, while avoiding conflicts and any legal liabilities. The more you make an issue of your colleague's behavior, the more your leaders may come to see *you* as the problem.

But don't let my story prevent you from speaking up. If I were you, I'd check out my story with your leaders, taking care to make it safe for them, so they share their honest perspective.

Let's suppose you decide you need to live with this situation for the next few months. How do you get your heart right? You don't want to feel resentment toward your coworker or your leaders. This resentment won't help you be a better person and is likely to leak out in your words and actions.

I'll offer a few ideas, but I'm not sure which, if any, will work for you. First, try to identify and empathize with your co-worker's situation. Look for what you can respect about her. For example, it sounds as if her life is difficult in many ways, and yet she is trying to stay employed. Second, tell yourself that this situation is limited in time. When you look back at it five years from now, it won't matter. Third, focus on being the person you want to be. Be a role model for caring and patience. Use this circumstance as a test to demonstrate to yourself who you really are.

Your Coworker. Drawing on skills from Crucial Accountability, you could address your coworker's motivation and ability. I would do so not with the intent to change your coworker's short-term actions, but to make sure that when she completes her FMLA leave, she returns as a valued member of your team.

- **Motivation:** Should you address the problem as a matter of motivation, I worry your coworker will feel excluded and punished by the team. That would violate the whole purpose of FMLA and could create long-term damage to her relationship with the team. Ask yourself what you and your team can do to let her know she is still a valued member of your team. She needs to know that her team is there for her in her time of need.
- **Ability:** If you approach the problem as a matter of ability, ask yourself what you and your team can do to backfill for your coworker. Are there ways you can help her stay updated on information she misses? Can you extend her a lifeline or job partner who makes sure she doesn't get left out or left behind?

Again, I respect your actions, your patience, and your persistence. I hope some of these suggestions help.