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A TRACOM GROUP WHITEPAPER

SOCIAL STYLE® and Crucial Conversations

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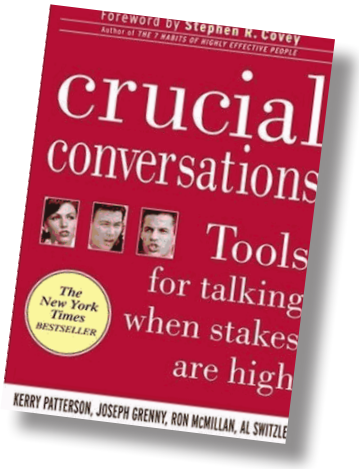

OVERVIEW

The book "Crucial Conversations"[1] provides advice for having conversations when failure is a strong possibility. The authors (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler) provide a model for working through potentially disastrous conversations in a way that increases the chances of successful outcomes for all parties. The Crucial Conversations and SOCIAL STYLE models complement one another in a number of ways. This whitepaper looks at the synergies of SOCIAL STYLE and Crucial Conversations.

SOCIAL STYLE Connections

SOCIAL STYLE is the world's most effective interpersonal skills model. The *Connections* Whitepaper Series looks at how SOCIAL STYLE complements and supports other popular workplace programs including Situational Leadership, Emotional Intelligence, Crucial Conversations and The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

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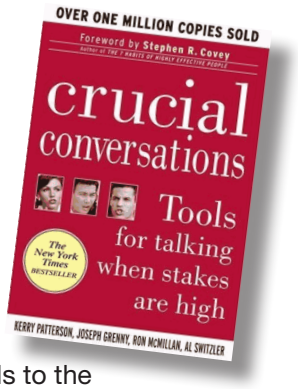
SOCIAL STYLE Connections

Introduction



The book Crucial Conversations[1] provides advice for having conversations when failure is a strong possibility. The authors (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler) provide a model for working through potentially disastrous conversations in a way that increases the chances of successful outcomes for all parties. While the ability to effectively handle conversations can benefit all aspects of our lives, the authors claim that in the workplace the most influential and successful people are the ones who can master their crucial conversations.

The Crucial Conversations and SOCIAL STYLE models complement one another in two specific areas. First, the "Style under Stress" concept is very similar to Backup Behavior of the SOCIAL STYLE Model™. The Style Model adds to the effectiveness of the communication strategies given in the book by providing Style-specific advice that can make the Crucial Conversations techniques even more successful. Second, the Crucial Conversations model deals with the importance of empathy and other Feedback skills for understanding the context of conversations instead of just the content. Again, the SOCIAL STYLE Model can increase the effectiveness of these strategies by describing Style behaviors that are related to the use of Feedback skills.

An additional way that Style enhances the Crucial Conversations model is through TRACOM's Profiles. The various Profiles provide individuals with a measure of their performance in some of the areas described by Crucial Conversations, in particular Feedback skills, as well as Style. This type of input is critical for engaging people in practice and skill development.

Key Elements of Crucial Conversations

The Crucial Conversations model begins with the premise that the only person we can control is ourselves. The authors' overarching advice for improvement, as summarized in the final chapter, is similar to TRACOM's Steps for Increasing Interpersonal Effectiveness – Know Yourself, Control Yourself, Know Others, and Do Something for Others.

The authors consistently reiterate the importance of self monitoring (know yourself, control yourself). Based on this self awareness, they provide tips to practice when having crucial conversations (know others, do something for others).

The key elements of the model, and how they relate to Style and Versatility, are described in the following sections.

What is a Crucial Conversation?

There are three factors that distinguish a crucial conversation from a normal conversation:

- Stakes are high
- Opinions vary
- Emotions run strong

In these situations, the authors advise people to start with the right motives and stay focused on their goals. People should ask themselves, what do I really want and what are my goals? Because of the tense nature of crucial conversations, it is likely that people will slip into their style under stress, or backup behavior.

Style Under Stress and Backup Behavior

How do you spot crucial conversations? Different people (different Styles) have different cues that indicate they are under stress during a conversation. These cues can be physical (dry mouth), emotional (internal feelings of anger), or behavioral (pointing fingers). The behavioral cues are most noticeable to others, and are related to Style differences. For example, Expressive Styles are likely to raise their voices, and Analytical Styles are likely to become quieter.

When experiencing these stress cues, the advice is to step back, slow down, and "turn your brain back on" before things get out of hand. In other words, control yourself. When people don't feel safe in conversations they go into backup behavior, which the model categorizes into two broad areas – Silence or Violence.

Three common forms of Silence are:

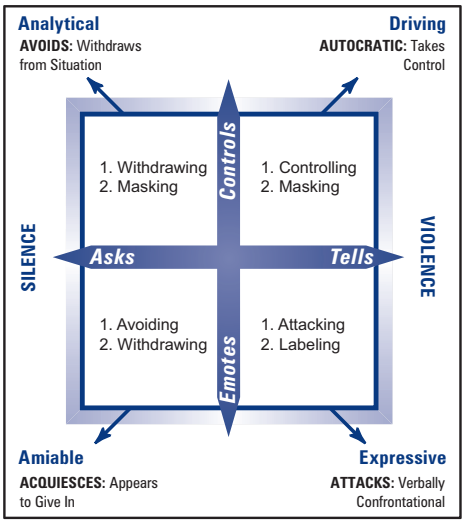
- Masking
- Avoiding
- Withdrawing

Three common forms of Violence are:

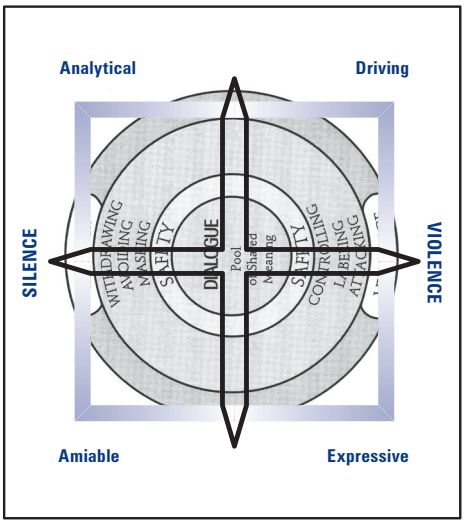
- Controlling
- Labeling
- Attacking

Style Under Stress and Backup Behavior – cont.

These are very similar to the backup behaviors described in TRACOM's model. The grid below indicates which behaviors are most common and likely for each Style.



SOCIAL STYLE Backup Behaviors and associated Silence and Violence Behaviors.



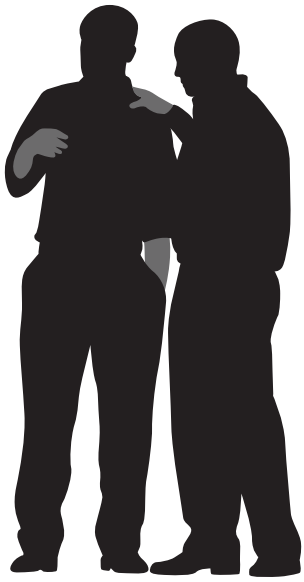
Overlay of SOCIAL STYLE and Crucial Conversations Models.

Again, the authors place critical importance on self-monitoring (know yourself). We have to pay attention to the impact our own stress behavior has on others, then alter our communication strategy if necessary. One way we can alter our behavior is by paying careful attention to others' Style preferences, and interacting with them in their preferred ways.

The Crucial Conversations model focuses almost solely on recognizing your own stress cues, and then controlling yourself by utilizing certain communication strategies. SOCIAL STYLE complements these strategies by educating people on how to recognize stress and tension in others, as well as themselves. Critically, it also shows people how to understand others' SOCIAL STYLEs, which gives insight into the best ways to communicate with them. In this way, the Crucial Conversations techniques can be customized to people of different Styles.

Dialogue Skills

In order to make it safe again, the Crucial Conversation model presents a series of dialogue skills. These dialogue skills can be utilized within the context of Feedback and Doing Something for Others. The dialogue skills contain a host of different mechanisms for creating productive conversations. What is important to remember about these dialogue skills is that they are always employed during crucial conversations, when people are in their backup behavior.



Dialogue Skills include:

- Start with the Heart
- Learn to Look
- Make it Safe
- Master My Stories
- STATE My Path
- Explore Others' Paths
- Move to Action

AMPP and Feedback

One of the most important dialogue skills is encouraging others to share their thoughts, or "exploring others' paths," as it is described in the book. To encourage others to share, there are four listening tools. These four skills are essentially the same as TRACOM's Feedback skills, and can be used to enhance a person's interpersonal Versatility.

- Ask to get things rolling
- Mirror to confirm feelings
- Paraphrase to acknowledge the story
- Prime when you're getting nowhere

Ask. Simply asking someone to state their opinions is an effective way to begin discussions. This seemingly simple technique is related to the first Feedback component, active listening. First ask the question, and then listen attentively.

Mirror. This technique is used when someone's non-verbal signals (voice or body posture) suggest that their emotions are not the same as what they're saying. In other words, it is employing empathy to understand others, and then describing back to them how they seem to look or act.

For example, an Amiable Style person might say that everything is okay, but his facial expressions and body language tell another story. By saying to the person that he seems uncomfortable, you are making it safe for him to engage in further conversation.

AMPP and Feedback – cont.

Paraphrase. This technique involves restating the other person's message in your own words. A gain, it is an additional way to make it safe for the other person to communicate, and to show that you are committed to understanding his point of view.

Paraphrasing is very similar to the Versatility concept of adaptive communication. It is communicating with someone in words they can relate to, and this is most effective when you consider Style preferences.

Prime. This technique is used when the other person still doesn't feel safe to open up, or is still engaged in violence. Use this technique when you believe that the person still has something to share and might do so with a little more effort on your part. You say what you think is on the person's mind.

This technique is simply an extension of the previous techniques, and involves all the aspects of Feedback – active listening, empathy, and adaptive communication.

Example – SOCIAL STYLE and a Crucial Conversation

As an example of how Style relates to this model, consider an Expressive Style person who has become verbally confrontational with an Amiable Style co-worker. She pulls herself out of her backup mode, but not before the damage has been done. The Crucial Conversations model would advise this person to step back from the situation and "make it safe" to resume dialogue. However, since people are not one-size-fits-all, it helps to understand the preferences of the Amiable Style.

For example, since Amiable Style people can be hesitant to express their opinions, the person should not only ask her co-worker for his opinion, but also should do it in a very open-ended and genuine way. Amiable Style people will sometimes say that things are okay, but in fact they are still feeling unresolved tension. With this Style awareness, the co-worker can use empathy to recognize the non-verbal signals that the person is still uncomfortable, and then employ adaptive communication strategies to engage the person in further conversation.

Two Heads are Better than One: How SOCIAL STYLE and Crucial Conversations Benefit One Another

The Crucial Conversations model provides effective strategies for having meaningful and productive conversations. Following the advice in this book can help individuals develop better relationships through better communication. Incorporating SOCIAL STYLE can enhance the effectiveness of communication skills by providing lessons on how to tailor communication specifically to the behavioral styles and preferences of others.

Benefits & Summary:

Crucial Conversations is a model for communicating effectively with people when tension is high and people are in their backup modes. Thus, it fits naturally with the SOCIAL STYLE Model. However, Style and Versatility are extensions to Crucial Conversations in that they describe ways to interact with people in all facets of work, not just during crucial conversations when tension is high. In fact, the Style Model provides tools for communicating and interacting with others in ways that can actually decrease the chances that communication will become "crucial." Therefore, it is a pro-active approach to communication.

The Style Model provides the tools for determining co-workers' Styles, in addition to key advice for communicating with people of each Style. In addition, the SOCIAL STYLE & Versatility Profile enables individuals to measure and understand their Styles and Feedback communication abilities.

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Casey Mulqueen oversees the research and development of TRACOM's various assessment instruments and products. He has experience developing a wide variety of assessments such as personality inventories, 360-degree feedback programs, performance appraisal systems, and employee opinion surveys. His expertise in cross-cultural assessment and norming has helped ensure that TRACOM's global surveys are valid and reliable throughout the world. He is a writer who has authored a variety of materials including books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Casey has an M.S. in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in industrial/ organizational psychology.

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i. www.vitalsmarts.com/crucialconversations_book.aspx

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SOCIAL STYLE Connections

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