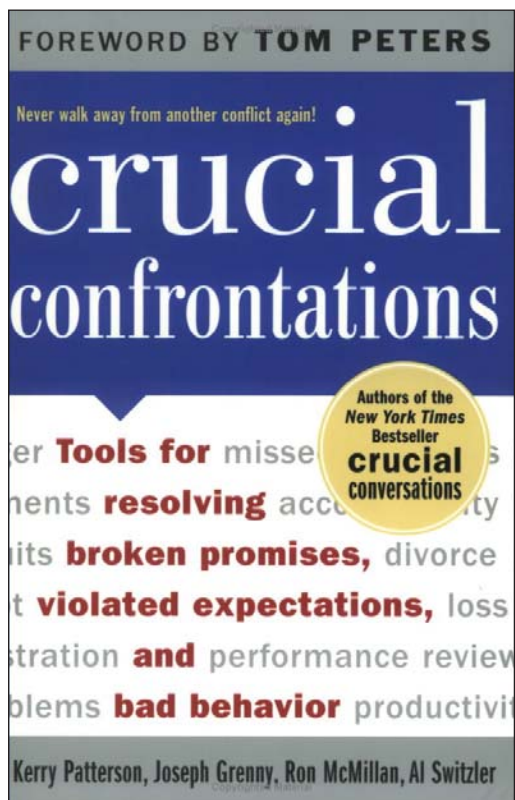


BOOKS



How to Deal



Crucial Confrontations

By Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny,
Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler

Reviewed by Nancy Seebert

Just when I thought that *Crucial Conversations* had said it all, along comes *Crucial Confrontations*, a sequel to the bestselling communication guide. Because my shelves are filled with articles and books about conflict, stress, performance, and getting along in the workplace, I was curious to see if it contains new material. What I found is that the two books support each other.

According to the authors, *conversations* are about differences of opinion. During a disagreement, people tend to go into either “silent mode” to avoid an argument or erupt with the opposite—extreme anger. Either way, important decisions and relationships are negatively affected. *Crucial Conversations* helps

readers work through differences when stakes and emotions are high.

Crucial Confrontations takes the issue one step further and deals with disappointments that result from poor conversations: broken promises, violated expectations, and overall bad behavior. It helps readers identify accountability without diminishing responsibility. The tips and information in this new book help bring about change more rapidly.

In organizations around the world, workloads, stress, and expectations have risen to enormous proportions. Most business people are working harder and leaner. Under those circumstances, interactions with co-workers, managers, customers, and family members become

strained and often result in uncomfortable working and living conditions. They show that people with those communication skills live longer, get promoted more often, and are twice as likely to stay happily married. Furthermore, organizations that consistently practice those skills improve productivity by 20 percent to 50 percent.

So, what do you do when the people around you aren't doing what they should? Or, how do you deal with a boss who commits you to a deadline that you know you cannot meet? Of course, the authors say that such situations require confrontation, and they define that as "holding someone accountable, face to face." They also suggest these four tips to safely and effectively master confrontations with others:

Don't undermine character. The worst communicators draw gross, rapid, and negative judgments about those they confront. It seems their goal isn't to solve the problem; it's to impugn the character and competence of the other person. That behavior does nothing for the relationship or problem except make it worse.

Begin with facts, not accusations. When starting a confrontation, don't say, "You've made an error in judgment." Instead, be sure you are addressing the right issue; the one behind the emotion. The book helps readers do that by showing how to identify the motivations for specific behaviors and expose root causes. That way, issues get resolved and not just pacified for the moment.

Determine common ground. One of the best ways to damage a confrontation is to focus on how you disagree. While good communicators are candid about differences, they are equally careful to build a foundation of agreement. They look for common ground first and deal with disagreements second.

Minimize defensiveness. Effective communicators are scrupulous about manag-

ing defensiveness. The skills described in *Crucial Confrontations* are all about how to do that. The authors show readers how to recognize defensive behavior and intervene in ways that fosters safety for the other person. When people feel safe, they can be confronted about almost anything. Knowing how to cultivate that sense of security is paramount.

The information presented in *Crucial Confrontations* may not be new, but it is definitely supported by research that speaks to many people. When I read an article or book, I want to be able to use that information easily in my professional and personal life. And the authors predict that major improvements in productivity, retention, quality, employee satisfaction, and relationships will result from utilizing the skills that they discuss. In addition, the book is full of specific incidents and real-world examples that are easy to follow and add validity to their work.

While I do think it could have been shortened (some of its information is similar to the previous book), *Crucial Confrontations* offers readers insights and principles that yield positive results. I know because I've tried them. And since disappointments are certainly not limited to the workplace, I recommend this book to almost everyone: managers, trainers, spouses, and siblings. I give it three and a half cups of coffee.

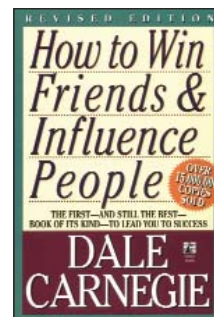
Crucial Confrontations, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler. McGraw-Hill: New York. 284 pp. US\$16.95

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If This, Then....

Want to learn more communication skills? Try this classic best-seller or recent release.



How to Win Friends and Influence People

By Dale Carnegie
(Simon & Schuster, 1998, US\$14.00 paperback)

Believe it or not, this communications

classic has been around for more than 65 years. That's because Carnegie's fundamental premise—that people want to feel important and appreciated—isn't outdated. In fact, it's the basis of many bestselling leadership publications currently available.

The book targets business people who lack the necessary "people skills" that they need to climb the corporate ladder. It includes

- six ways to make people like you
- 12 methods to convince people of your way of thinking
- nine ways to change opinions without causing resentment.

Listening Leaders: The Ten Golden Rules to Listen, Lead, and Succeed

By Lyman K. Steil and Richard K. Bommelje
(Beaver's Pond Press, 2004, \$29.95)
Successful leadership and good listening skills go hand in hand, according to Steil and Bommelje. And their guidebook shows readers how to achieve both.

Based on more than 50 collective years of studying leaders around the world, this book presents readers with 10 principles that effective listening leaders practice. It also includes real-life advice from the cited leaders as well as reference pages for more in-depth research.