Leadership Development Initiative (LDI) Curriculum

Crucial Conversations
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Originally Presented by Carl Johan Furst & Eileen Piersa

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Overview

Exemplary leaders often need skills that create alignment and agreement in high-stakes, emotional or risky endeavors. Learning to have the ‘crucial conversation’ and encouraging others to do the same fosters the highest quality decisions and achievements for a team or organization. For best efficiency, a team needs open dialogue and mutual respect. A crucial conversation is one where:

- Opinions are different
- Stakes are high
- Emotions are strong

There are three parts to having the conversation. The first is "me": my intention, observations, and my story. Second is "you": your observations and your story. Third is "us": understanding, action plan and follow-up.

A demonstration of a crucial conversation is presented and role-playing case studies take place in small groups. Observation and feedback to the conversation participants is offered.

In the book Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High, Patterson describes steps to having crucial conversations. The goal of the conversation is to resolve the differences, and ideally, to arrive at a consensus solution. In brief, the steps he describes are:

- State intentions.
- Describe facts and observations.
- Share the interpretation of the observations (this interpretation is a story, not ‘truth’).
- All others share their facts and stories.
- Build safety to express different or opposing views. Listen and seek to understand all perspectives.
- Listen for shared goals, interests and values.
- Share/agree on an action plan: who will do what by when, and write it down.
- Arrange the follow-up meeting to hold each other accountable.

After a role-play, a debrief time for feedback will help speakers share what went well and identify ideas that could be used for improvement. A worksheet is included to guide the process and capture feedback and steps for improvement.

Objectives

After this presentation, participants will:

1. Describe components of a crucial conversation.
2. Engage in common crucial conversations with partners.
3. Move through the steps needed to resolve challenging conversations.
Important Teaching Points

- Take time to become very clear about the situation (observations, your interpretation).
- Listen well.
- If the matter is crucial, practice key components of the conversation prior to actually engaging in the conversation.
- Aim for progress toward resolution, not perfection.

Resources / References

2. Crucial Conversations. www.vitalsmarts.com: A proprietary company that offers a great website and further information.