

Managing Difficult Conversations

MCOM-GB.3112.30

Spring 2018

Thursdays, 6-9pm: Mar. 29 – May 3

KMC 3-130

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OFFICE HOURS: By appointment

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Course Overview

Successful business relationships require the ability to manage difficult conversations. When managing clients, managing direct reports, or managing up, you will encounter difficult conversations. This course will enable you to effectively lead your most challenging and consequential conversations at work to desired outcomes. You will gain an understanding of the variety of difficult conversations, the neuroscience of what makes a conversation difficult, and the business case for why avoiding these conversations is too costly for employees' careers and for their organizations' effectiveness. Through readings, group practice with feedback, analysis of past challenging conversations, and class discussions, you will learn how to use the core communication skills to manage difficult conversations well, and how to identify and manage interests and motivations. You will practice difficult conversations, reflect on these interactions, and action plan for future conversations. As a result of this course, you will be able to identify the personalized mindset and behavior shifts you need to master "crucial conversations" and perform effectively during the most critical moments in your career.

Required Readings

- Bradley, Graham L. and Amanda C. Campbell. "Managing Difficult Workplace Conversations: Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes." *International Journal of Business Communication* 53.4 (2014):443-464.
- Delong, Thomas J. and Vineeta Vijayaraghavan. "HBS Case—Crucial Conversations," *Harvard Business School Publishing*, November 2002.
- Grenny, Johnson. "Four Ways to Control Your Emotions in Tense Moments." *Harvard Business Review*. December 2016.
- Groysber, Boris and Ann Leamon. "HBS Case—Difficult Conversations and Dealing with Challenging Situations at Work: The Questionable Contributions," *Harvard Business School Publishing*, December 2015.
- Hamilton, Diane Musho. "Calming Your Brain During Conflict," *Harvard Business Review*. December 2015.
- Patterson, Kerry, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler. *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*. McGraw Hill, 2012. (Available at NYU Bookstore.)

Supplemental Readings

- Barsh, Joanna and Johanne Lavoie. *Centered Leadership: Leading with Purpose, Clarity, and Impact*. Crown Publishing Group, 2014. (Available on Amazon.com)
- Clawson, James. "Active Listening." *Darden Business Publishing*. April 1991. (Available at <http://store.darden.virginia.edu/active-listening>)

- Knight, Rebecca. “How to Handle Difficult Conversations at Work.” *Harvard Business Review*. January 2015. (Available at <https://hbr.org/2015/01/how-to-handle-difficult-conversations-at-work>)

Grading

The assignments for this course are listed below. Each one of these assignments is designed to support your development as an effective communicator in difficult conversations.

ASSIGNMENT	% OF GRADE	DUE
Pre-course Survey	*	Session 1
Conversation Analysis #1	10%	Session 2
Conversation Analysis #2	10%	Session 3
Conversation Analysis #3	10%	Session 4
Case Analysis	20%	Session 5
Professional Plan	30%	Session 6
Participation (includes * item above)	20%	Ongoing

Class Participation

This course is designed to be highly interactive. Your full engagement and effort are needed in all in-class activities to learn from one another and to gain personal insight. For this reason, no phones are to be used during class, and attendance is mandatory at all class sessions.

Your participation grade is determined by your active participation during in-class activities (e.g., case discussions, difficult conversation role plays, giving and receiving feedback). You also have the *option* of submitting the following in-class deliverables:

- Reflection Journal Entry #1 (session 1)
- Reflection Journal Entry #2 (session 2)
- Reflection Journal Entry #3 (session 3)

Please come to class prepared. Class discussions and in-class activities are based on readings and deliverables, therefore late assignments are unacceptable.

Course Materials

Please purchase *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* at the NYU Bookstore. Additional course materials will be available through the online course site.

NYU Classes

I use the NYU Classes site to post announcements. Please check Announcements on the site regularly. You can find the documents related to assignments under Assignments. You can also submit your work to Assignments. Click “submit” to complete the process.

Integrity

I expect that you will adhere to the Stern MBA Honor Code.

Office Hours & Communication

My office hours are by appointment. Please email me to schedule an appointment; I’m happy to speak. I will respond to all emails within 48 hours and make every effort to respond sooner than that.

Accommodations

If you have a qualified disability and will require academic accommodation during this course, please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD, 998-4980) and provide me with a letter from them verifying your registration and outlining the accommodations they recommend. I look forward to working together.

Session Outline

SESSION 1

TOPICS: Course and Student Introductions

The Business Case for Managing Difficult Conversations

Overview and Neuroscience of Difficult Conversations

Self-Assessment of Triggers

READINGS: 1. Patterson, Grenny, McMillian, and Switzler, *Crucial Conversations (CC)*, Chapter 1

2. “Calming Your Brain During Conflict” (article)

DELIVERABLES: Pre-course Survey

Complete the pre-course survey (3 questions) so that we can better incorporate your experiences and goals. Submit by 11:59pm EST on March 28th (day before Session 1).

SESSION 2

TOPICS: “Outer” Skills
Interpersonal Communication
Conversation Practice of Outer Skills

READINGS: CC, Chapters 2 & 7

DELIVERABLES: Conversation Analysis #1: A past difficult conversation

This deliverable is part one of a three-part critical analysis of your past high-stakes conversation. Think about a time you recently had a high-stakes conversation at work or school that did not go well. It is best if this is one that you had within the last 6 months.

First, in no more than 1 page, describe the experience. Provide relevant context for the conversation (e.g., topic, who participated, when and where it took place). Reflect upon what you wanted to have happen; what you feared was happening instead; and how you reacted in the moment. Include your insights about what was the source of the difficulty for you, the outcome of the conversation, and the impact that it had on you.

Second, divide the following page with a vertical line down the middle (see template and example on the online course site). Then, in the right-hand column record a short dialogue that captures a part of the conversation that was particularly challenging. Write down *exactly* what you and the other person said. Include about a page of back-and-forth exchanges, with a minimum of five lines of dialogue per person. In the left-hand column, write down your inner monologue (i.e., what you were thinking and feeling, but not saying aloud). The left-hand column is what *Crucial Conversations* refers to as “the story you’re telling yourself.”

SESSION 3

TOPICS: “Inner” Skills
Iceberg Model (framework for assessing drivers of ineffective behavior)
Conversation Practice of Inner Skills

READINGS: 1. CC, Chapter 5
2. “Four Ways to Control Your Emotions in Tense Moments” (article)

DELIVERABLES: Conversation Analysis #2: Outer skills

This deliverable is part two of your three-part conversation analysis. Reflect on your outer dialogue from your past high-stakes conversation. In the right-hand column, label each turn of the dialogue as one of the three outer skills discussed in class. Then write down your strengths and areas for improvement with outer

skills and how you could have used outer skills more effectively to lead the conversation to a more desirable outcome.

SESSION 4

TOPICS: Putting It All Together

Case Discussion

Role Play Difficult Conversation from Case

READINGS: 1. “Crucial Conversations” (case)

2. Bradley’s and Campbell’s “Managing Difficult Workplace Conversations: Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes.” (article)

DELIVERABLES: Conversation Analysis #3: Dialogue re-scripting

This is the final part of your three-part conversation analysis. Rewrite your past high-stakes conversation to lead it to a better outcome. Integrate the inner and outer skills that you practiced in sessions 2 and 3. Identify any neuro-science principles from session 1 that you would use to manage your reaction in the moment and effectively redirect the conversation.

SESSION 5

TOPICS: Case Discussion

Role Play Upcoming Difficult Conversation

Action Planning for Future Conversations

Self-Assessment of Difficult Conversation Skills

READINGS: “Difficult Conversations and Dealing with Challenging Situations at Work: The Questionable Contributions” (case)

DELIVERABLES: 1. Case Analysis

Respond to the assigned case by analyzing what went wrong in Sam’s management of the conversation and how she could have used the skills and frameworks discussed in this class to improve the conversation outcome. Then script an effective version of the conversation between Sam and her boss Margaret. Include:

- At least 10 lines of dialogue per person
- Application of inner and outer skills
- One or more frameworks from readings or class

SESSION 6

TOPICS: Professional Plan Roundtable
Summary and Next Steps

DELIVERABLES: Professional Plan

Write a professional plan (no more than 3 pages) that synthesizes what you have learned about effectively managing difficult conversations. Incorporate insights from reading assignments, class discussions, your difficult conversations practice and role plays, and your reflection paper and journal entries. Include the following:

- a. **Results analysis.** Complete your self-assessment of inner and outer skills (from session 5) and write down your results. Compare your pre-course and post-course ratings on the self-assessment. Identify a strength, your greatest improvement, and one remaining area for growth. For your greatest improvement, describe how you grew in that skill. For your chosen area for growth, describe how you plan to improve in that skill.
- b. **Long-term action planning.** Describe your plan for effectively managing future difficult conversations. Explain what strengths you will leverage, what you will do differently (both in your mindsets and behaviors), and the intended impact. Leverage your action planning from session 5.
- c. **Summary.** Summarize your key takeaways for how to manage difficult conversations. Deliver this information as though you were providing a summary to a colleague at work or a classmate who has not taken the course.

For the roundtable discussion, come to class prepared to share your lessons learned and long-term action planning from your professional plan (5 minutes).

SESSION	TOPICS	READINGS	DELIVERABLES
1	Course and Student Introductions Business Case Overview and Neuroscience of Difficult Conversations Self-Assessment	Patterson, Grenny, McMillian, and Switzler, <i>Crucial Conversations (CC)</i> , Chapter 1 “Calming Your Brain During Conflict” (article)	Pre-course Survey
2	“Outer” Skills Interpersonal Communication Conversation Practice of Outer Skills	<i>CC</i> , Chapters 2 & 7	Conversation Analysis #1: A past difficult conversation
3	“Inner” Skills Iceberg Model (framework for assessing drivers of ineffective behavior) Conversation Practice of Inner Skills	<i>CC</i> , Chapter 5 “Four Ways to Control Your Emotions in Tense Moments” (article)	Conversation Analysis #2: Outer skills
4	Putting It All Together Case Discussion Role Play Difficult Conversation from Case	“Crucial Conversations” (case) “Managing Difficult Workplace Conversations: Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes.” (article)	Conversation Analysis #3: Dialogue re-scripting
5	Case Discussion Role Play Upcoming Difficult Conversation Action Planning for Future Conversations Self-Assessment	“Difficult Conversations and Dealing with Challenging Situations at Work: The Questionable Contributions” (case)	Case Analysis
6	Professional Plan Roundtable Summary and Next Steps		Professional Plan