

SOLVE A COMMUNICATIONS PROBLEM - MAKE IT SAFE

***"People don't remember what you say. They remember how they feel."
-- Attributed to Maya Angelou***

It's not the content of the conversation that keeps people from speaking openly. It's the perceived lack of safety. Make it safe for your co-worker or direct report to share her/his views of any given situation and you've begun the process. But before embarking on a conversation, determine if it is a relationship issue or a content issue. As an example, if your direct report is not communicating with you, the conversation to have is not about why s/he is withholding but rather how the two of you work together. Continue building your skills with the following:

Whenever you engage someone in a conversation, consider what it is you want to accomplish and set your good intentions. Intend to talk about what is working and what's not; allow issues to come up; see where to make things better and where you can work together.

- Begin by first sharing your good intentions. This provides a level of safe feeling.
- Show respect by asking permission to have the conversation (simply say "would it be okay...?").
- Always start with the facts as you know them, without interpreting them.
- Share your thoughts about the facts as they pertain to the two of you.
- Ask for her/his perspective.
- Listen intently and sincerely show your interest in what is being said.
- Remember, people feel safe enough to open up when they feel a sense of mutual purpose and respect. It is vitally important NOT to become defensive about anything being said.
- If the other person is not feeling safe, use your best judgment as to when to stop the conversation.
- Some issues take more time to actually engage in an effective conversation. Keep building enough safety to allow for this.

Don't play the blame game. It's a useless exercise that wipes away any trust. Be bold and sincerely express feelings and intentions. Make the outcome a shared intention. Agree on how to proceed in the future, even if just to have another conversation. Intend for a win-win each and every time.

Based on concepts from "Crucial Conversations."