



# Crucial Conversations

Jeremiah Johnson  
Chief Operations Officer  
Muskego-Norway School District

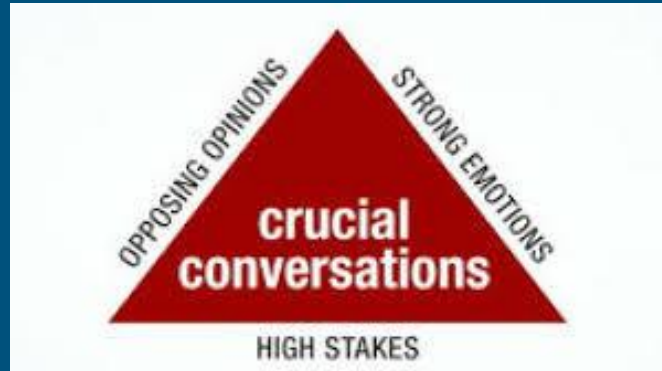
John Stangler  
Director of Buildings & Grounds/Safety Coordinator  
Pewaukee School District



# Learning Targets

---

- Learner will learn strategies to engage in complementary conversations
- Learner will understand the basics of “Stub Your Toe” conversations
- Learner will learn when to have investigative conversations



# What is a crucial Conversation?

---

**A crucial conversation is defined as “A discussion between two or more people where the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong”**

**A Learned Art...mostly through experience**

# What is the risk of not having a CC?

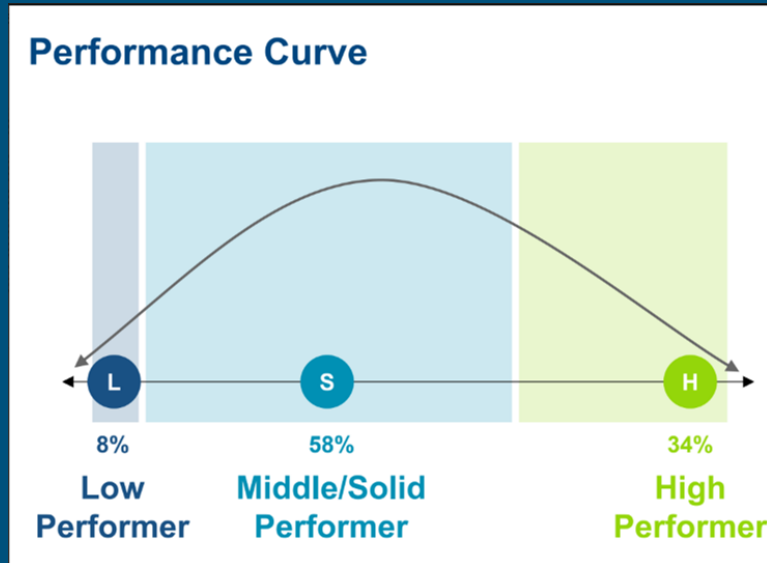
---

- Unclear expectations
- Escalation of issues
- Un-met outcomes
- “What you permit, you promote”...silence on an issue becomes “past practice”
- Leadership regret
- Poor Communication

# Conversations might look different

## High Performers & Low Performers

- Conversation & tone will look different when concerns arise



# Types of Performance Conversations

---

1. High- Re-Recruit
2. High- Affirming/Supporting
3. Low Solid- Affirming the good but goal setting

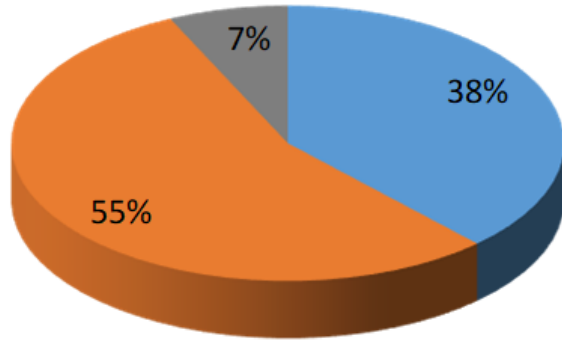
## Types of Performance Conversations

- High Performer**– Recognition/Re-recruit conversation
- High Solid Performer** – Coaching/Support/Re-Recruit
- Low Solid Performer**– Coaching/Support/Performance Plan
- Low Performer** – Coaching/Critical/Performance Plan

# Aspects of face-to-face communication

## Body Language

---

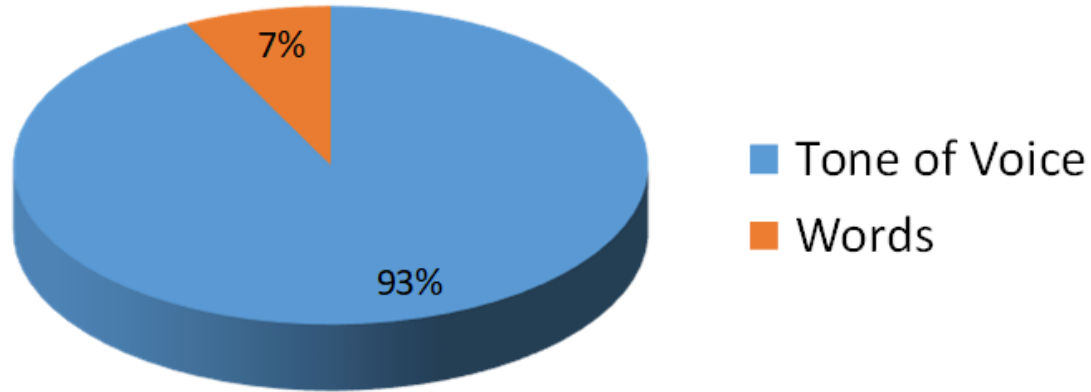


- Tone of Voice
- Body Language
- Words



# Aspects of telephone communication

---





# On-Boarding...Yes, it is a conversation

---

Interview questions are critical...

- Learn a person's past behavior.

"Tell me about a time that you disagreed with your supervisor, how did you handle it?" Vs "What do you do when you disagree with your supervisor?"

- Theft on a background check

"If we catch you stealing from the company in the future, what do you expect that we would do?"

# Have Crucial Conversations with your HIGH Flyers! (90/10)

---

- Find out what interests them most about the job
- Include them in big decisions
- Ask what can be improved
- When their stress levels are high, give appreciation
  - Buy them lunch or bring them coffee
  - Arrange for a time for them to get away from work
  - Tell them where you would be without them
  - Write Thank you letters....why?



# Project Management

---

- Ensure clarity
- Define roles
- Decide on leads
- Who can make the final call?
- Who will bring others up to speed if roles change?
- Avoid “We/They”

## Questions to ask if you are getting inconsistent results

1. Was training provided to all involved as to what the expected behavior is and have we over-communicated the WHY?
2. Is the behavior role-modeled by leadership?
3. Are leaders giving positive feedback when we see the behavior being done correctly?
4. Are we correcting poor performance quickly and on the spot if necessary?
5. Are there consequences for non-compliance up to and including termination?

# Coaching for performance...

---

Avoid email

**I NEVER SAID SHE STOLE MY MONEY**

Avoid Group Lectures if the behavior is isolated to one person. If one person is showing up late, no need to coach everyone.

“Praise in Public, reprove in private”

# Example

---

# Stub your toe... (ROLE PLAY)

- Late on an assignment
- Late to work
- Poor workmanship
- Body language
- Gossip
- Safety Concern

The goal is to correct the behavior, so it does not continue

Hey, is everything okay, this is not like you...

Important for new leaders to establish norms



# ROLE PLAY

---

## Low Performer-Clear Expectations

- Do not start meeting on a positive note
- **Describe** *what has been observed.*
- **Evaluate** *how severe the behavior is.*
- **Show** *what needs to be done.*
- **Know** and **share** *consequences of continued same performance.*
- Follow up

# Ensuring they own the issue

- Do they understand the concern?
- Do they admit to the concern?
- Are they apologetic?

What if they are not?

- Do you understand why I am concerned?
- Do you understand what will happen if this behavior continues?
- Help them see what they are doing
- Am I understanding you correctly?
- Just to clarify

# Escalating a CC- “2nd offense”

---

- Take some time to rehearse how the conversation might go, and run your thoughts by someone else. “Walk & Talk”
- Consider having someone with you when you discuss the issue
- Is there a clear violation of policy

## After the CC

- Do they know what will happen if the behavior continues?
- Consider summarizing the conversation in an email
- Reference your “Stub your Toe” conversation (Date/Time)

# Strategies

---

- Labeling (Sounds like this is a really busy time for you)
- Mirroring (What I hear you saying is that you are struggling to find time)
- Strategic Umbrage - Assertive without aggression

# Know when to step out of a conversation

---

Emotions run high: Tears, escalated tone, attack mode, shut down

- “I notice you are visibly upset, I am going to step out and allow you to gather your thoughts”
- “Let's continue this conversation tomorrow, when we have both had a little time to process”
- “Before returning to work, would you like to take a break?”

# Investigations- Who should handle this conversation?

---

While discussing the need for improved cleanliness of the cafeteria restroom with a custodian, he says, “I am tired of your F’ing stupid rules-you are a terrible leader and always favor the 3rd shift custodians.”

# Investigations- Who should handle this conversation?

---

A teacher tells you that they observed child pornography in their co-worker's storage space?

# Investigative Process

---

- Due process - There must be an investigation
- Timing of the meeting?
  - Time of day?
  - Close to the event
- Who should be investigated?
  - Witnesses
  - Accused
- Should you pre-plan questions?



- Keep a light/conversational demeanor
- Consider the setting
- Advise all being interviewed that you are conducting an investigation and expect that all statements are truthful
- Begin with questions that ask the person how they feel about certain conduct or policy.
  - *Do you feel it is appropriate to speak harshly to a supervisor? Why?*
  - *Do you feel it is acceptable to use vulgarity in front of students? Why?*
- If the person being interviewed is the offended party or a witness, ask them to provide a written statement (sign & date)
- Don't lead on that you know the answers to your questions. If an employee is going to lie - let them lie

# Employees Rights

---

## General Notice -Due Process

- Employee should know they are taking part in an investigation
- Conduct an investigation with another administrator/supervisor

## Weingarten Rights Apply To Union Members

- Employee MUST make the request for representation prior to or during the meeting
  - If denied representation, the Employee can refuse to respond

## Garrity Warning

- Applies to Criminal Investigations

- Take copious notes of responses
  - 1 admin ask ?'s
  - 1 admin take notes
- Ask follow-up and probing questions
- Direct the employee not to speak about the investigation and maintain confidentiality
- Ask that any new info be brought forward directly to you
- Thank employee for being part of the interview and notify them that you intend to have a speedy process, but the investigation is ongoing
- Do not arrive at a conclusion
- Do not re-assure employee
  - *“Don’t worry, you won’t be fired”*
  - *“You are a great employee”*

# Detecting Lies

- If a person is innocent they will generally be quick to deny with no other statements, and will be angry at the accusation
- Guilty persons will plead, “you know me”, “I swear to God”, “I give more time...Why would I?”
- Guilty persons will take more time to respond. People talk at 125 words per minute and think at 1200 words per minute.
- Guilty people give too much detail, avoid eye contact.

*Mind Bomb-*

*Is there any reason \_\_\_\_\_ would have told me that they seen you taking \$?*

If someone is innocent, they generally do not need to run scenarios in their mind.

# Coaching for Compliance

---

## **Non-Compliant Behavior**

- What is an example of non-compliant behavior that you need to address? With whom?
- Is there something that makes it difficult to address this non-compliant behavior?

What is one conversation strategy that you took away from this session?

Questions?