



Crucial Conversations Online

Group Discussion Guide



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* Indicates pages containing group leader instruction that are not designed to share as a presentation slide

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* Indicates pages containing group leader instruction not designed to share as a presentation slide

Instructions for Group Leaders

Welcome to Blended Learning Resources for Crucial Conversations. This program requires an eleven- to thirteen-hour time commitment for learners to complete. It consists of four group sessions (virtual or face-to-face) as well as individual assignments. But don't worry about teaching the course—the online training does that for you. As the group leader, your role is simply to create social learning opportunities in the group sessions. These will help deepen and reinforce what group members learn in the online training.

In this document, you'll find everything you need to manage the training from start to finish. Each group session outlined here includes four sections to help you prepare and lead discussions. The first section, Group Leader Notes, is just for you, but the other sections are presentation slides you can share in your group sessions.

Resources in This Guide



1. Group Leader Notes: Explains how you can prepare for and lead the group session



2. Review: A short summary of what team members should have learned from their individual assignments



3. Discuss & Practice: Questions for you to ask and scenarios for learners to practice in the group session



4. Next: Overview of assignments learners should complete before your next group session

Presentation Slides



Two-Week Schedule

This program is designed to be completed over a two-week period, but you can adapt it to shorter or longer schedules as needed.

Week 1	
Mon	Group session 1 (see pp. 6–13)
Tue & Wed	Learners complete individual assignments
Thu	Group session 2 (see pp. 14–28)
Fri	Learners complete individual assignments

Week 2	
Mon	Group session 3 (see pp. 29–39)
Tue & Wed	Learners complete individual assignments
Thu	Group session 4 (see pp. 40–52)



Group Session 1

Group Leader Instructions



SESSION 1



Group Leader Notes

Session Length: 60 minutes

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes

Purpose

To get your group members excited about learning the Crucial Conversations skills, to clarify what the online learning journey looks like, and to explain what it will require

Prep Checklist

- Email calendar invites for all group sessions to learners.
- Review the presentation slides and decide what content you'll share and which questions you'll ask.
- Make sure you have the registration link to the online training site (you should receive this from your senior client adviser when you order licenses for each learner).
- Review the online course so you're prepared to demo it for your learners.
- Set clear expectations beforehand that your learners should attend each group session and complete all assignments.

SESSION 1



Group Leader Notes

Session Length: 60 minutes

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes

Purpose

To get your group members excited about learning the Crucial Conversations skills, to clarify what the online learning journey looks like, and to explain what it will require

Review

- Since learners haven't completed any assignments to review, take five to ten minutes to define what a crucial conversation is and review the lessons from the course. Consider speaking to these topics:
 - The reasons you're implementing this skill set now
 - Skills you see as especially applicable for the team/organization

Discuss & Practice

Discuss the questions on the slide.

Next

- Provide the registration link for the online course and ask learners to register (registering is quick and easy).
- Share your screen and provide a brief tour of the online course, if necessary.
- Assign learners to complete online lessons 1–4 before the next group session (Introduction, Get Unstuck, Start with Heart, Master My Stories). The assignment should take 2.5–3 hours to complete.

Attention! Use the next page as the first slide of your Session 1 presentation.



Group Session 1

Presentation





Review



What Is a Crucial Conversation?

A crucial conversation is a discussion between two or more people where the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong.



Review

Lesson Overview

1. **Introduction:** Why crucial conversations are so essential to results
2. **Get Unstuck:** Identify the right problem to discuss
3. **Start with Heart:** Get your motive right
4. **Master My Stories:** Stay calm, cool, and collected
5. **State My Path:** Speak persuasively, not abrasively
6. **Learn to Look:** Notice the signs that people feel unsafe
7. **Make It Safe:** Create safety to discuss tough issues
8. **Explore Others' Paths:** Listen effectively to invite truth
9. **Move to Action:** Transform talking into action
10. **Finish the Course:** Plan for application





Discuss & Practice

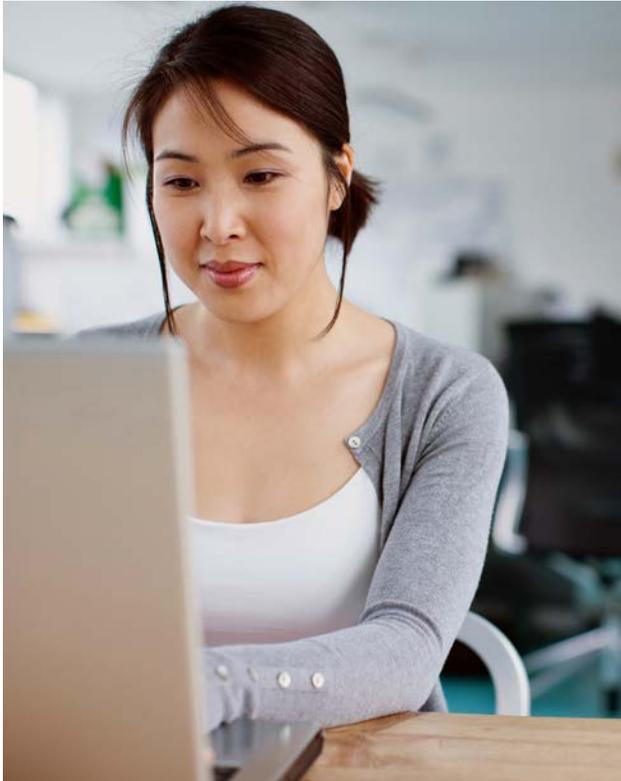


What are the common crucial conversations we face?

Where do we need to improve in the way we handle these conversations?



Next

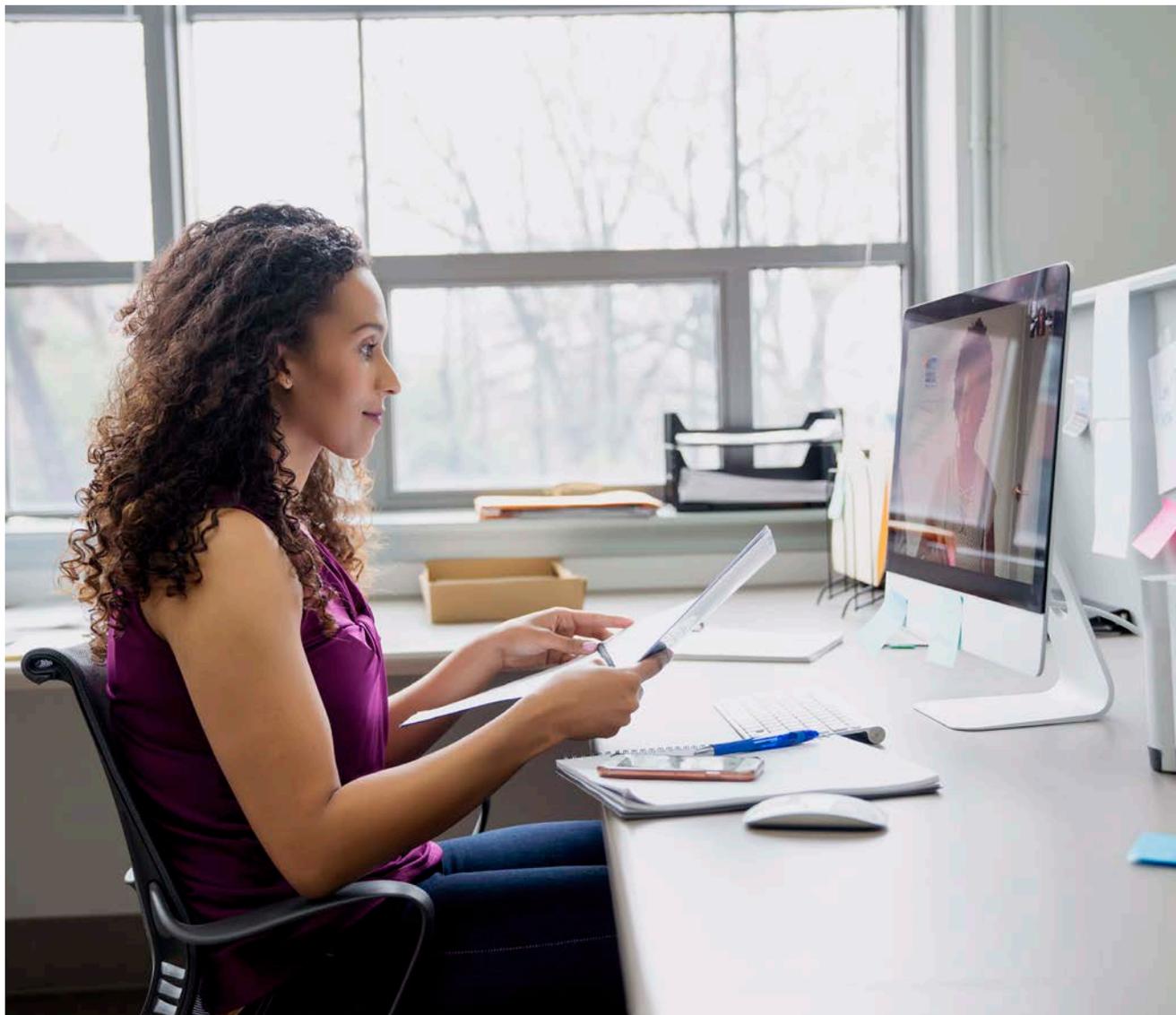


- **Log in to the online course.**
- **Complete the following lessons before our next group session.**
 - Lesson 1: Introduction
 - Lesson 2: Get Unstuck
 - Lesson 3: Start with Heart
 - Lesson 4: Master My Stories



Group Session 2

Group Leader Instructions



SESSION 2



Group Leader Notes

Session Length: 60 minutes

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes

Purpose

To make sure your learners completed their assignment (Introduction, Get Unstuck, Start with Heart, Master My Stories) and to discuss how and where they would apply those skills

Prep Checklist

The day before the session:

- Send a reminder email to complete online lessons 1–4.
- Review the presentation slides and decide what content you'll share and which questions you'll ask.
- Group leaders with administrator access can log in at training.vitalsmarts.com to view learner activity reports, as well as observe what learners are saying by reading course discussion feeds.

SESSION 2



Group Leader Notes

Session Length: 60 minutes

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes

Purpose

To make sure your learners completed their assignment (Introduction, Get Unstuck, Start with Heart, Master My Stories) and to discuss how and where they would apply those skills

Review

The goal is to not reteach what they learned on their own. Instead, give a high-level summary of each lesson from the assignment. Ask a few people to share the insights or skills they found helpful.

Discuss & Practice

- Discuss the questions on the slide.
- Review the practice scenarios for Get Unstuck, Start with Heart, and Master My Stories. Consider sharing one or two of the scenarios with your group and asking them to formulate answers before showing the answer slide.

Next

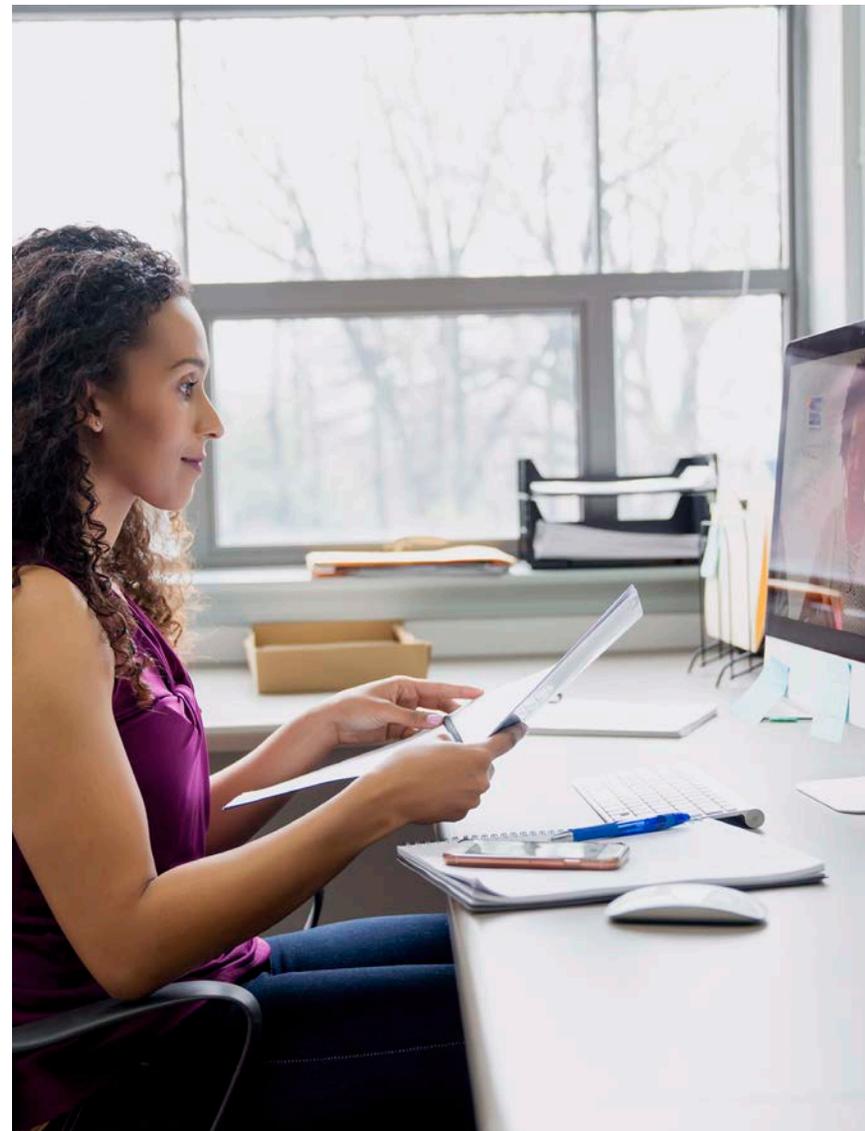
Assign learners to complete online lessons 5 and 6 before the next group session (State My Path and Learn to Look). The assignment should take 2–3 hours to complete.

Attention! Use the next page as the first slide of your Session 2 presentation.



Group Session 2

Presentation





Review



Introduction

- Anytime you find yourself stuck, there are crucial conversations keeping you there.
- Avoid silence and violence.

Get Unstuck

**Unbundle with CPR
(content, pattern, relationship)**



Review



Start with Heart

- **Focus on what you really want.**
Ask: What do I really want for
 - me?
 - the other person?
 - the relationship?
 - the organization?

Master My Stories

- **Separating facts from stories**
- **Tell the rest of the story**



Discuss & Practice



Introduction

- **What is our style under stress as a team or organization? Silence? Violence? Both?**

Get Unstuck

- **What are some examples of conversations we've held at the content level but need to be addressed at the pattern or relationship level?**



Discuss & Practice

Start with Heart

- What are examples of crucial conversations where our motives often degrade and where we want to be right, save face, or win?

Master My Stories

- What are some of the common stories we tell in our organization that have a negative impact on our conversations?
- How and where could we apply the skill of separating facts from stories? Telling a different story?





Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:
Get Unstuck

Instructions

Identify the content,
pattern, and
relationship issues you
see in this case.

Will the Real Problem Please Step Forward?

Your boss has grown accustomed to asking you to produce complex reports for her. She's not asking you because it's part of your job but because you have some background in databases and know how to work with your system. To make matters worse, it's often a last-minute request that takes you away from other priorities. She's just asked for a "special," last-minute report that is very time-consuming to produce. Not only is it tough for you to produce, she's requiring it by 3:00 p.m. today (a time frame that is way too condensed). To top it all off, you don't believe it will provide her with the information she really needs. But she's your boss, and if she wants it, she should get it—right?



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:
Get Unstuck

An Answer:

Will the Real Problem Please Step Forward?

Content

- The report is useless.
- Today's request was last-minute.

Pattern

- It's always a last-minute request.
- Your manager consistently demands unrealistic time frames.

Relationship

- It doesn't seem like your manager values your other work.
- You don't feel comfortable speaking up to your manager.



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:
Start with Heart

Testy Teen

Imagine you're in the middle of a crucial conversation with your high-school-age daughter. You thought the two of you were going to discuss colleges, careers, and the SAT tests. But then she announces she's dropped math and science and she's not going to college. You respond by yelling at her and, in the heat of the moment, calling her a knucklehead. She responds in kind. You pause and realize you've messed up. Let's see how the skill might help in this situation. How might you use the skill "Focus on What You Really Want" in this moment?



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:
Start with Heart

An Answer: Testy Teen

“What do I really want for myself, my daughter, and the relationship?”

You want to be a supportive parent with a happy and successful daughter. You want her to have the means to provide for herself. You want the two of you to be able to talk about these types of things, and you want her to feel comfortable talking with YOU about them.

“How would I behave if I really wanted these results?”

You would apologize and clarify to her that your passion came from the longer-term goal of her being happy and successful.



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:
Master My Stories

Lazy—Fact or Story?

Let's say you're telling yourself a story that your colleague is "lazy." Lazy is a story, not a fact. What are some things you observed in his behavior that led you to the conclusion that he is lazy?



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:
Master My Stories

Big Idea

We tend to believe that the stories we tell are facts. Once we separate facts from stories, we start to realize that we can tell an infinite number of stories with the same set of facts.

An Answer: Lazy—Fact or Story?

Here are some possibilities:

- He missed half of the staff meetings last month.
- The QA team found twice as many bugs in his code when compared to the average.
- When asked in a meeting if he'd be willing to pitch in to help clean the third-floor kitchen (which he uses), he said, "I'd rather not."
- He tends to arrive at work around 10 a.m., takes an hour-and-a-half lunch, and then leaves around 4:30 p.m.



Next



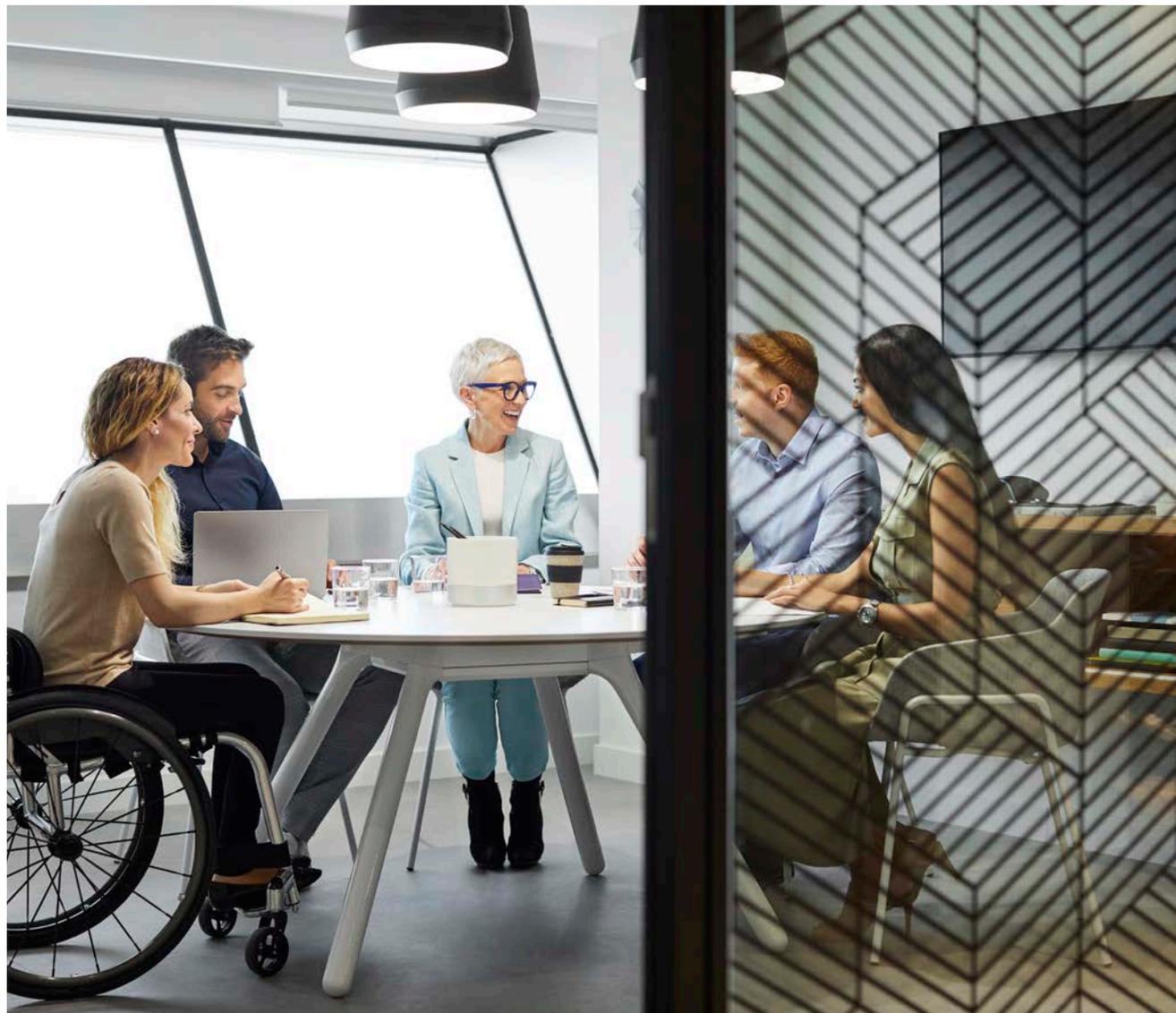
Complete the following lessons before our next group session:

- Lesson 5: State My Path
- Lesson 6: Learn to Look



Group Session 3

Group Leader Instructions



SESSION 3



Group Leader Notes

Session Length: 60 minutes

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes

Purpose

To make sure your learners have completed their assignment (State My Path and Learn to Look) and to discuss how and where they would apply those skills.

Prep Checklist

The day before the session:

- Send a reminder email to complete online lessons 5–6.
- Review the presentation slides to decide what content you'll share, which questions you'll ask, and how you'll facilitate practice.
- Group leaders with administrator access can log in at training.vitalsmarts.com to view learner activity reports, as well as observe what learners are saying by reading course discussion feeds.

SESSION 3



Group Leader Notes

Session Length: 60 minutes

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes

Purpose

To make sure your learners have completed their assignment (State My Path and Learn to Look) and to discuss how and where they would apply those skills

Review

The goal is to not re-teach what they learned on their own. Instead, give a high-level summary of each lesson. Consider asking a few people to share the insights or skills they found helpful.

Discuss & Practice

- Discuss the questions on the slide.
- Review the practice scenarios for State My Path. Read each case and give learners two to three minutes to formulate a response. Ask a few learners to share their script before showing the answer slide.

Next

Assign learners to complete online lessons 7–10 before the next group session (Make It Safe, Explore Others' Paths, Move to Action, Finish the Course). The assignment should take 2.5–3 hours to complete.

Attention! Use the next page as the first slide of your Session 3 presentation.



Group Session 3

Presentation





Review



State My Path

- **Share Your Facts**
- **Tell Your Story**
- **Ask for Others' Perspectives**

How? With Confidence and Curiosity

Learn to Look

See the Signs of Silence and Violence



Discuss & Practice



State My Path

- How could using the three steps of State My Path (facts, story, ask) benefit our team or organizational crucial conversations?

Learn to Look

- Which is worse—silence or violence?
- Which do we sometimes use in our voicemail, email, text, or social media?



Discuss & Practice

Practice Example #1: **State My Path**

Agrees but Doesn't Deliver

You work with a person who prefers to acquiesce rather than disagree with you—at least that's what you're beginning to conclude. You ask her if she will do a certain job. She hesitates. You explain why it needs to be done, and then she agrees—but doesn't do it. This has happened with the last three commitments you have gotten from her.

Each time, she's left you an email or note saying she's sorry but always after it's too late. You think she's afraid to tell you no, pretends to agree, and then purposely leaves messages so she won't have to tell you face-to-face.



Discuss & Practice

Practice Example #1: State My Path

An Answer: Agrees but Doesn't Deliver

FACTS: I noticed with the last three assignments that you hesitated when I asked you. You agreed to do them but weren't able to complete them. I received notes from you but not until after the due date.

STORY: I'm beginning to wonder if you have some concerns about these tasks but are afraid to tell me when we meet.

ASK: Can you help me understand your perspective on this?



Discuss & Practice

Practice Example #2: **State My Path**

The Insensitive Coworker

You have a concern you need to address with someone from another department. Over the last six months, she has given you four deadlines that required more work than she left you time for. You ended up either exhausting your team or missing the deadline, making your team members feel like failures. She's just given you another tough deadline.

You want to meet her expectations but know it will take longer than the time frame she's requesting to do the job right. In fact, even working the team full out and putting other projects on hold, finishing by the deadline is right at the edge of impossible. You're beginning to think she really doesn't care that much about quality or work-life balance.



Discuss & Practice

Practice Example #2: State My Path

An Answer: The Insensitive Coworker

FACTS: Over the last six months, you've given me four different deadlines that didn't leave my team enough time to finish the work required. Each time, we've either had to overwork the team or we've missed the deadline. You just gave me another deadline to take to the team that is too tight for the work you're asking for.

STORY: I'm beginning to wonder if you're fully considering quality or work-life balance for the team when you calculate your timelines.

ASK: How do you see this situation? I'd really appreciate your view on this.



Next



Complete the following lessons before our next group session:

- Lesson 7: Make It Safe
- Lesson 8: Explore Others' Paths
- Lesson 9: Move to Action
- Lesson 10: Finish the Course



Group Session 4

Group Leader Instructions



SESSION 4



Group Leader Notes

Session Length: 60 minutes

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes

Purpose

To make sure your learners have completed their assignment (Make It Safe, Explore Others' Paths, Move to Action, Finish the Course) and to discuss how and where they would apply those skills

Prep Checklist

The day before the session:

- Send a reminder email to complete online lessons 7–10.
- Review the presentation slides to decide what content you'll share, which questions you'll ask, and how you'll facilitate practice.
- Group leaders with administrator access can log in at training.vital-smarts.com to view learner activity reports, as well as observe what learners are saying by reading course discussion feeds.

SESSION 4



Group Leader Notes

Session Length: 60 minutes

Prep Time: 15–20 minutes

Purpose

To make sure your learners have completed their assignment (Make It Safe, Explore Others' Paths, Move to Action, Finish the Course) and to discuss how and where they would apply those skills

Review

The goal is to not reteach what they learned on their own. Instead, give a high-level summary of each lesson. Consider asking a few people to share the insights or skills they found helpful.

Discuss & Practice

- Discuss the questions on the slide.
- Review the practice scenarios for Make It Safe. Read each case and give learners two to three minutes to formulate a response. Ask a few learners to share their answers before showing the answer slide.

Next

- Explain how much time remains for learners to access the online content.
- Schedule ongoing learning by assigning specific lessons to review each week or month. Ask people to share insights in weekly meetings.
- Set up an achievement board or an online “Ring the Bell” page where people can post successes and questions.
- Inform them they can access the after-training site even once their online training access has expired: vitalsmarts.com/skill-review.

Attention! Use the next page as the first slide of your Session 4 presentation.



Group Session 4

Presentation





Review



Make It Safe

- **Contrasting to fix misunderstandings**

- “I didn’t intend to . . . My real intent was to . . .”

- **Create Mutual Purpose**

- Commit to Seek a Mutual Purpose
- Recognize the Purpose Behind the Strategy
- Invent a Mutual Purpose
- Brainstorm New Strategies



Review



Explore Others' Paths

- **Ask** — “What’s going on?”
- **Mirror** — “You say you’re okay, but the tone of your voice suggests you’re upset.”
- **Paraphrase** — “Let’s see if I’ve got this right. You’re upset because I voiced my concern about some of your clothes, and this seems controlling or old-fashioned to you.”
- **Prime** — “Are you concerned I purposely said that to make you feel bad?”

Move to Action

- **Document who does what by when and how you’ll follow-up.**



Discuss & Practice



Make It Safe

- What are some ways we could create more safety in our crucial conversations?
- What are some examples of conversations where we are regularly at cross purposes, and how can we create mutual purpose?

Explore Others' Paths

Where and how can we best apply the AMPP skills (ask, mirror, paraphrase, prime)?



Discuss & Practice



Move to Action

- How effective are you at clarifying who will do what by when and how you'll follow up at the end of crucial conversations?
- How could you more effectively use this skill in all meetings?
- What next action do you plan to take because you attended this course? When will you do it?



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:

Make It Safe (Contrasting)

Dropping the Ball

One of your peers is assigned to a project team you lead. She's very talented, and you're glad she's there to contribute. She's very busy with her regular job but routinely takes assignments from you as part of your team. She tries to fulfill them, but if her manager hands down an assignment that competes for her time, your work gets dropped—without you knowing about it until after the deadline has been missed. This has happened four times in the last two months. You understand that this happens from time to time, but it would be nice to be notified before the missed deadline rather than after. You've decided to address this pattern.

You bring up the issue, and she responds, “Hey, I'm really busy here. I've got a ton of work to do in my regular job. If you don't want me on the team, just say so.”



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:

Make It Safe (Contrasting)

An Answer: Dropping the Ball

“I’m not trying to suggest that I want you off the team. Your contribution is really important. I do want to talk about a pattern I’m seeing with deadlines and project contributions. I want to find something that works better for both of us.”



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:

Make It Safe

(Create Mutual Purpose)

Launch Debate

You are a web team lead who has just received an urgent assignment from the marketing team. The team is demanding an immediate update to the customer web resource to address a customer question by the next sales cycle (in one month). You don't believe it can be done in such a short time frame. In fact, even working the team full out and putting other projects on hold, finishing in a month is at the edge of impossible. You've committed to seek mutual purpose, and through recognizing the purpose behind the strategy, you've determined that marketing's goal is to give customers access to the information they need, while your team wants to come up with a quality solution and have time to implement it.

How would you invent a mutual purpose and brainstorm new solutions?



Discuss & Practice

Practice Scenario:

Make It Safe

(Create Mutual Purpose)

An Answer: Launch Debate

Mutual Purpose

- Satisfy the customer
- Meet revenue goals

Brainstorm New Strategies (How You'll Get There)

- Get the client a BETA version now and complete the rest in stages
- Divert resources from other areas for a short time to help



Next



- Continue to learn in the online course.
- Visit the post-training site:
vitalsmarts.com/skill-review
- Share best practices.
- Celebrate successes.

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