

**CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS:
TOOLS FOR TALKING WHEN STAKES ARE HIGH**
*Summary by Mark R. Elliott**

A crucial conversation is a discussion between two or more people where (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong.

We should come to crucial conversations with Mutual Respect, praying, “Lord help me to forgive those who sin differently than I do.” Then agree with the statement, “I have known a thousand scamps; but I never met one who considered himself so. Self-knowledge isn’t so common” (*Puck* by Ouida page 131). Followed by modeling “One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears—by listening to them.” (Dean Rusk)

We should also develop a Mutual Purpose by asking some critical questions:

1. What do I want for myself?
2. What do I want for the person(s) I am having trouble forgiving?
3. What do I want for my relationship with that person(s)?
4. [What do I want for my church?]

When it comes to risky, controversial, and emotional conversations, skilled people find a way to get all relevant information (from themselves and others) out into the open.

- They are able to avoid the two common paths of silence or violence (flight or fight). Instead they seek to engage others in an honest attempt to dialogue.
- They establish and maintain a safe environment where others are willing and able to share openly and honestly.
- They recognize their path action and seek to understand the path of others.

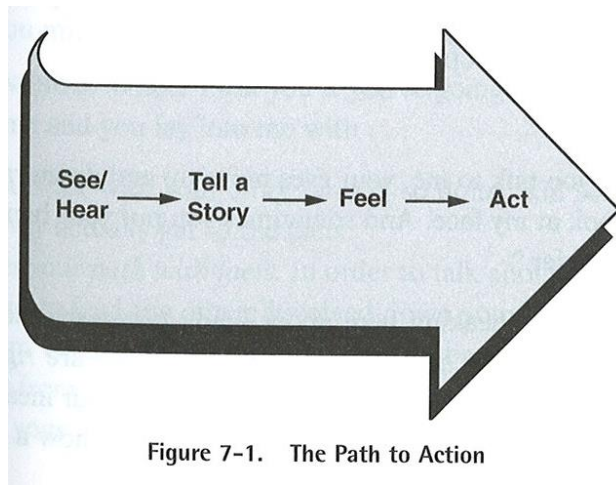


Figure 7-1. The Path to Action

- They utilize tools like the acronym STATE

Share your facts

Tell your story

Ask for other’s paths

Talk tentatively

Encourage testing

PRINCIPLE	SKILL	CRUCIAL QUESTION
1. Start with Heart	Focus on what you really want.	<p>What am I acting like I really want?</p> <p>What do I really want?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For me? • For others? • For the relationship? • [For my church?] <p>How would I behave if I really did want this?</p>
	Refuse the Sucker's Choice (silence or violence)	<p>What do I not want?</p> <p>How should I go about getting what I really want and avoiding what I don't want?</p>
2. Learn to Look	Look for when the conversation becomes crucial.	<p>Am I going to silence or violence?</p> <p>Are others?</p>
3. Make it Safe	Apologize when appropriate.	<p>Ask yourself, "Why is safety at risk?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I established Mutual Purpose? • Am I maintaining Mutual Respect?
	<p>Contrast to fix misunderstanding.</p> <p>CRIB* to get to Mutual Purpose.</p> <p>*<u>C</u>ommit to seek Mutual Purpose. <u>R</u>ecognize the purpose behind the strategy. <u>I</u>vent a Mutual Purpose. <u>B</u>rainstorm new strategies.</p>	<p>What will I do to rebuild safety?</p>

PRINCIPLE	SKILL	CRUCIAL QUESTION
4. Master My Stories	Retrace my Path to Action.	What is my story?
	Separate fact from story.	What am I pretending not to know about my role in the problem?
	Watch for Three Clever Stories: Victim, Villain, & Helpless.	Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent [Christian] person do this?
		What should I do right now to move toward what I really want?
5. STATE My Path	<u>S</u> hare your facts.	Am I really open to other's views?
	<u>T</u> ell your story.	Am I talking about the real issues?
	<u>A</u> sk for other's paths.	Am I confidently expressing my own views?
	<u>T</u> alk tentatively. <u>E</u> ncourage testing.	
6. Explore Other's Paths	<u>A</u> sk <u>M</u> irror <u>P</u> araphrase <u>P</u> rime	Am I actively exploring other's views?
	<u>A</u> gree <u>B</u> uild <u>C</u> ompare	Am I avoiding unnecessary disagreement?
7. Move to Action	Decide how you'll decide	How will we make decisions?
	Document decisions and follow up.	Who will do what by when?
		How will we follow up?

“When Clifford Notarius and Howard Markman (two noted marriage scholars) examined couples in the throes of heated discussion, they learned that people fall into three categories—those who digress into threats and name-calling, those who revert to silent fuming, and those who speak openly, honestly, and effectively.

After watching dozens of couples, the two scholars predicted relationship outcomes and tracked their research subjects’ relationships for the next ten years. Sure enough, they had predicted nearly 90 percent of the divorces that occurred. Over time, couples who found a way to state their opinions about high-stakes, controversial, and emotional issues honestly and respectfully remained together. Those who didn’t, split up.

Now, what about you? Think of your own important relationships. Are there a few crucial conversations that you’re currently avoiding or handling poorly?” (Pages 12-13)

*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for almost three decades. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, and church growth tend to find their way to the bottom of the stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ and that tend to find themselves on the bottom of most pastor’s stack. Many pastors have found them helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.