

Extension provides constituents with crucial skills to engage difficult conversations

Issue:

Crucial Conversations are the conversations that we find difficult to engage because of the fear of repercussions or consequences that may have profound impact on our relationships. Our culture is competitive and often we find ourselves competing for who is right instead of engaging in dialogue for results. Crucial Conversation seminars focus on dialogue that reinforces understanding of individual difference and that helps individual examine their perceptions, interpretations and values. The seven crucial skills taught in this class provide participants the ability to engage difficult conversations for positive and mutually beneficial outcomes.

Extension response :

Four public sessions were conducted. Each class had an average of twenty-five participants. Participants came from non-traditional extension audience. Seventy-five percent came from health care organizations, small business, and community development organizations. Another workshop was conducted for extension professionals and a special session for the Hendricks Community College Network. Thirty people representing fourteen community organizations participated. The most effective learning that most participants related to was the “Styles under stress” assessment. Participants learned about what triggers their “native language” when casual conversations turn crucial. Participants learned the structure of a conversation and learned how to take ownership, determine outcome and create an intention that works for them and others involved. They learned to be responsible, by diagnosing their roles, contributions and other identity issues that stand in the way of a learning conversation. Participants work in dyads to practice the skills and test them against their difficult conversations. Most participants reported that the examples and skits that demonstrated best and worse approaches helped them to face up to their contributions and adopted new skills to enhance their ability to engage difficult conversations for better results.

Impact:

- One hundred percent of participants indicated that the style under stress assessment helped them to recognize how their values, perceptions and interpretations sabotage their ability to have win win outcomes
- Ninety five percent of participants indicated that the skills learned would be useful to them at work, home and in their communities. Even the few skeptics agree that although they had some unbendable issues, they agreed that understanding the structure and emotions in conversations would help them to get better.
- Overall, all participants felt confident that they can communicate effectively even in very difficult situations.
- Ninety percent of participants rated themselves high 6-10 points regarding their ability to affect conversations when stakes are high, emotions are strong and opinions vary.

- On average participants rated themselves 6-10 points at their ability to have effective conversations with members of their work team or group when stakes are high, emotions are strong and opinions vary.

Typical comments provided by participants:

- The training is good, impressive. I do not work in a “safe” environment; there are always repercussions even if ones motives are pure. There is no freedom to express anything. However – this is great – I will pursue further training.
- Make it safe-I am often in situations with my boss where I am threatened and belittled - I will work on making it safe during conversation
- I identified that I am controlling at time and will now have the ability to recognize that, step back, reevaluate and engage in a safer, healthier conversation to come to resolve.
- I will pay more attention to what I am saying and how I say it. I tend to attack when I feel I am unfairly questioned or when I feel that my position is threatened. This has reinforced my need for more training in this area to learn the best way to communicate in a given situation.
- Look inwards at my motivations or “stories” - realize how avoiding crucial conversations can affect my stress level.
- I have a new perspective on how to frame conversations and build safety more
- I plan to take the book, read, explore, and expand today’s presentation in depth. I liked the seven principles and commit to implementing them, thank you.
- I liked the CPR examples because they help me to use content, pattern and relationship principles to resolve the difficulty with my team
- When entering a conversation I will try to hold the assumption that I could be wrong and open up to hear other views and perspectives. With that, I should master my story, create a safe environment, listen and use the dialogue skills taught in the class.

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