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Mind and Matter



A publication of the University of Miami Faculty and Staff Assistance Program

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Five Tips for Managing Crucial Conversations

by Orlando Gonzalez, MEd, LMHC, CEAP

Positive outcomes to life's many challenges are not often afforded without the expenditure of some form of personal effort, or a heroic response. This is true with regard to the nurturing of important relationships in that, from time to time, each will warrant a crucial conversation to help us "clear the air," move past indiscretions, or free ourselves from emotional burdens.

Al Switzler, co-author of the book *Crucial Conversations; Tools for Talking when Stakes are High* and co-founder of US consultancy VitalSmarts defines a crucial conversation as one that is, "characterized by three conditions: high stakes, opposing opinions and strong emotions." He mentions that it is quite natural to clam up at the first sign of a crucial conversation and, as time wears on, to blow up or lash out. "Holding a crucial conversation is the healthy and helpful alternative to both silence and violence."

Switzler offers the following tips for managing crucial conversations:

1) Notice when a conversation turns crucial.

When stakes are high, emotions run high and we are likely to do one of two things, shut down, or go into the fight or flight response. "When conversations turn crucial, masterful communicators are aware of the behavioral and physical early warning signs." This insight is the first step, and with practice, cues you to engage the use of your, "best skills."

2) Use your best skills.

In the face of a potentially threatening interaction, we commonly move to more destructive skills over those that are more constructive. "We quickly become very adept at sulking, showing offense, debating, interrupting, stacking the deck and preparing our rebuttal while pretending to listen," when we should be engaging skills, "better suited for dialogue...ask, probe, listen, rephrase, take turns, give the benefit of the doubt, and dialogue." These skills should be turned on as soon as you notice the conversation becomes crucial.

3) Call time-out and reengage with an agreement.

Our bodies commonly produce more adrenaline when conversations become emotional which fuels the fight or flight response. Call a timeout as soon as you feel the fight or flight response, agreeing to return to the discussion at a later date or time. It takes about 10 minutes for the adrenaline to dissipate and for your body to return to its natural state; that is, if you truly honor the break by giving your mind (thoughts) a respite as well.

4) Lead with observations and questions, not conclusions and emotions.

“Too often, people begin their conversations with conclusions, accusations and emotions launching them into a long and heated debate about who’s right and who’s wrong.” Give the person with whom you speak the benefit of the doubt. Be careful not to let your imagination embellish the situation at hand. Don’t imagine the other person to be the enemy. “When you use these skills, you start the conversation off from a place of safety and mutual purpose. As a result, what follows is more likely to lead to solutions rather than hurt feelings and misunderstanding.”

5) End the conversation well.

“The purpose of a crucial conversation is to share meaning in such a way that you can make better decisions and take more committed action – leading to improved results and relationships.” The final skill involves moving to action. Switzler suggests the application of WWWF which stands for who does what by when and follow up. “If you don’t determine WWWF, you can’t hold people accountable to the agreed solutions.”

If, in your personal or professional life, you find yourself struggling to have a crucial conversation, please do not hesitate to contact your UM FSAP. UM employees and their eligible dependents may arrange complimentary consultation visits to discuss the barriers each may be facing and/or explore options for developing their own heroic response.



2017'S TOP 5 APPS FOR WELL-BEING



KGA, a New England based Employee Assistance provider has released its annual list of top behavioral health apps for the year. The apps were tested for reliability, simplicity and efficiency as well as their overall aesthetics by KGA's EAP counselors and work-life specialists. The selection process focused on free or low-cost apps by reviewing customer review, ratings, popularity and history of updates. Here are 5 of their top 10 well-being apps:

1. **Mood Kit**- Offers psychological tips and tools to help improve mood and overall well-being. Items are specific, simple and not overwhelming.
2. **Happify**- Provides effective tools and programming to help combat stress, anxiety, depression and negative thinking.
3. **Insight Timer**- Offers timed and guided meditations. It's free and is the most popular free app in the Apple store.
4. **Pacifica**- Uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness meditation, relaxation and mood/health tracking to address stress, anxiety and depression.
5. **Relax and Rest Guided Meditations**- Offers three programs of varying lengths (breath, deep rest, and whole body) to allow the listener to relax deeply regardless of how much time the user has.

These apps work best when used in combination with counseling as they provide useful information and motivation between counseling sessions.

Source: Greer, K. (2017, 3rd Quarter). Relevant EAP Apps: This Year's Top10 List. The Journal of Employee Assistance, 20-22.

FEATURED SEMINAR

Art Therapy for Enhanced Well-being

Seminar participants are invited to engage in both the educational process and experiential practice of art therapy for enhanced well-being. This seminar will be facilitated by Rachel A. Upton-Rice, MPS, ATR-BC, LCAT a registered, board certified and licensed creative arts therapist from the University of Miami Hospital's Behavioral Health Services Department.

Coral Gables campus: Tuesday, September 26th, 12-1:00 p.m., McKnight Building, Room 201AB

Miller School campus: Wednesday, September 27th, 12-1:00 p.m., Clinical Research Building, Room 692

UPCOMING SEMINARS: Mindful Living (monthly), Crucial Conversations, Social Security Benefits Update

"We must accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope"

Martin Luther King Jr.



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