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CRUCIAL SKILLS

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editor's note

Final Sneak Peak and Survey: All Washed Up

The average doctor or nurse washes their hands less than half as often as they should. But what about your children? What about you?

With flu season just around the corner, we're taking a [poll](#) to see how well people and their kids wash up to avoid germs. [Take this 3-minute quiz](#) and receive a free MP3 download from the Influencer Audio Companion. Listen as author Ron McMillan shares tips on how to harness the power of social motivation.

Then, [watch](#) junior scientist Hyrum Grenny conduct his latest experiment using a group of unsuspecting kids

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Q&A

Confronting a Monopolizing Coworker

Q

Dear Crucial Skills,

I work with an individual who does not appear to realize she monopolizes every conversation and meeting she is in by giving excessively long and repetitive explanations and background information when discussing an issue. Several of us have discussed this and simply do not know how to approach her without hurting feelings and potentially destroying good working relationships. We think this is a crucial conversation we need to have with an expert on crucial conversations.

A

Dear Simply,

I noted your request to have an expert respond to your question. Since Kerry, Ron, and Joseph are unavailable, I hope you will settle for me.

Your question actually has a fairly straightforward answer. But first, let me start by backtracking a bit.

In chapter one of [Crucial Confrontations](#), we teach a concept called "[CPR](#)." CPR stands for content, pattern, and relationship, and helps you define the type of problem you are facing. The first time a problem comes up, talk about the *content*, or what just happened. The next time the problem occurs, talk *pattern*—what has happened over time. If the problem continues, talk about the *relationship*—what effect the problem has on your relationship.

We ask people to focus on what kind of crucial conversation or crucial confrontation they need to have based on the finding that people often talk about

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Al Switzler is author of three bestselling books, *Influencer*, *Crucial Conversations*, and *Crucial Confrontations*.

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and cupcakes to solve America's pervasive hand-washing problem using the six sources of influence.

This is the last week to [watch the video](#) on the Crucial Skills Blog, so don't miss out.



quote of the week

"You can talk about the wrong thing until you're blue in the face and get no resolution. Unfortunately, people often choose easy conversations over hard ones, simple issues over complex problems, or one instance over a pattern of bad habits."

-Al Switzler, coauthor of [Crucial Confrontations](#)

featured event

Influencer Training Coming to Las Vegas—October 13-14

Join us for two-day Influencer Training to learn a step-by-step strategy for solving entrenched problems by changing behavior. For trainer certification options, contact Janet Gough at jgough@vitalSMARTS.com.

[Register today](#) to attend Influencer Training in Las Vegas, or [visit our site](#) to find a training course in a city near you.



crucial tip

the wrong issue. You can talk about the wrong thing until you're blue in the face and get no resolution. Unfortunately, people often choose easy conversations over hard ones, simple issues over complex problems, or one instance over a pattern of bad habits. As people take the easy way out, they don't solve the problem because their discussion never addresses the real issue.

So with that introduction, let me suggest that you have a content discussion. Note that your colleague seems to be unaware of the problem and that neither you nor anyone else has previously brought it up. A content discussion is one of the most straightforward conversations you can have. The process we teach in [Crucial Confrontations](#) offers step-by-step suggestions.

- 1. Choose what and if.** You have several indicators that you need to hold this discussion. The main indicator is that you have been concerned about the situation for a while but your conversations have been *about* her instead of *with* her. As I suggested, have a conversation *with* her *about* content and maybe include a small discussion about the pattern.
- 2. Make it safe.** You need to get your head right before you open your mouth. You need to have a private conversation with your colleague. You need to show in your face and in your tone of voice that you are bringing this up to help—that you have not pre-judged her or oversimplified the concern.
- 3. Describe the gap.** Begin by explaining what you observe versus what you expect. For example, "I noticed you came in today at 8:20 a.m.; working hours start at 8:00 a.m. What happened?"

Granted, it is more difficult to discuss more complex behaviors like the ones you've described. Your conversation might begin this way: "Could I talk to you a moment? I noticed in our last meeting that only ten minutes were allotted to several of the agenda items. I also noted that we took about twenty minutes on two of the issues. This made the meeting run over by half an hour. From my perspective, you either gave background information we already knew or went into more detail than we needed—pushing us way over time. I've seen this pattern in every meeting this month. My goal is to make sure we all spend our time well. I'd like to talk about this with you."

Now there are many ways to start this conversation; while my suggestion may not be perfect for you, I'm confident that if you follow these steps and begin with a script, good things can happen.

Your colleague might thank you for your honesty and ask for your advice. Or, she might get upset and be forthright about her feelings. If she gets upset, reaffirm your purpose and the fact that you value your relationship and want to continue to work well with her. She might get upset and go to silence. If she goes to silence, restore safety by reassuring her of your intent to strengthen your relationship.

In conclusion, when faced with this kind of crucial confrontation, focus on the issue using CPR, make it safe for your colleague to speak up, and step up to the conversation honestly and respectfully.

Best wishes,
Al

[related material:](#)

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Focus on Importance First

A common problem that keeps organizations from removing perpetual barriers to their success is that people habitually focus on things that are *urgent* at the expense of things that are *important*.

- *Urgent tasks* are those things that are pressing and appear to require immediate attention. They may or may not be important.

- *Important tasks* are those that contribute to achieving valued goals—both team and organizational goals.

When discussing barriers with colleagues or employees, make sure you distinguish which tasks you're focusing on.



where can I learn more?

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[vol. 3 issue 10: my colleague thinks i'm an idiot](#)

[vol. 5 issue 16: being micromanaged by coworkers](#)

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Letters to the Editor

[RE: "Making a Safe Switch to Crucial Skills" \(July 29, 2009\)](#)

Years ago, I followed several of these suggestions when a similar situation arose. The environment was not supportive of a crucial conversations format, and I am glad to be gone from there even though the process was extremely painful. So while open and mindful interactions are effective, a two-way street has to exist. Sometimes it just doesn't work no matter what you do.

Ruth J. (from the Crucial Skills [blog](#))

[RE: "Influencing Corporate Culture" \(August 5, 2009\)](#)

I wonder if sending "an informal e-mail" to gather data might cause the sender to be perceived as someone stirring up trouble. Wouldn't a simple inquiry reflecting people's concerns and the impact on morale be more effective?

Gail L. (from the Crucial Skills [blog](#))

I think it definitely could. My suggestion should only be used if . . . it's a way of informally gathering data from close friends which you would use in an appropriate and modest way in calling attention to the concern.

Response from Joseph Grenny (from the Crucial Skills [blog](#))

[RE: "Confronting Poor Performance" \(August 12, 2009\)](#)

Thank you for this very uplifting article. After walking away from a job where I was treated poorly because I could not keep up with all they wanted me to do, I have been beating myself up and scared to move on. Now, I realize that training was sparse at best. They expected two people to do the work of what used to be four and the clients knew they were being rushed through. At first, I thought it was my age, but now I know it was too much power at the top.

Cheryl F. (from the Crucial Skills [blog](#))

[RE: "Kerrying On: Breaking Habits" \(August 19, 2009\)](#)

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For questions, contact us toll free at 1-800-449-5989.

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Questions, feedback, or information you would like to see in the newsletter? E-mail us at editor@vitalsmarts.com.

[Submit your Q&A question online](#) to the authors of *Crucial Conversations*, *Crucial Confrontations*, and *Influencer*.

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I laughed aloud several times throughout your story about breaking bad habits—my hallway neighbors at work must have wondered what was going on! Thank you for adding the humor to your stories that make them so memorable.

Cathy P. (from the [Crucial Skills blog](#))

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