

Communicating with **NANCY STERN** COMMUNICATION PLUS

F2F is Alive (and Sorta Well)

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Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee, and often just as hard to digest.

-Anne Spenser

F2F communication, which is code for face-to-face, is indeed alive. At least that's what a new research study says. I was beginning to wonder about this since I often see people texting and talking on cell phones.

I especially got worried when my friend's 17-year-old son (Gen Y) told me he "texted" a girl telling her he really didn't want to go to the prom with her, (she was a senior who asked him, a junior to go). He said yes at first but then decided against it because it was too expensive and it was not his prom. So, instead of calling and explaining, he sent a short text message. I asked him why he didn't call and he said, "I didn't want the drama."

That took us into a conversation about F2F communication. For Gen Y, he said, texting is easier. There's no confrontation. It reminded me how much of the message is not getting across with text messages (or email).



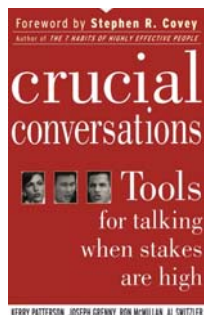
When you strip out the non-verbals like voice and body language there isn't much left. This often leads to misunderstanding. He told me the girl in question later avoided him and he didn't understand why. Duh! I explained she didn't know he didn't have the cash for the prom. All she knew was he didn't want to go which she probably understood to mean he didn't like her.

When it comes to work, people don't like confrontation either. But, a survey done by KHR Solutions which included

people of all generations, found that 56 percent of respondents prefer F2F with their bosses while more than half prefer F2F with co-workers.

These numbers are not staggering but they are still a majority. I don't think we will ever eliminate F2F at work. So, it's important you improve communication skills. Two good books are presented in a guest book review in the following pages written by my colleague and coauthor Maggi Payment. These are books everyone should have!

Guest Book Review by Maggi Payment



Words for the Wise

Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler (McGraw-Hill: 2002)

Difficult Conversations: How to discuss what matters most by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, Sheila Heen (Penguin Books: 1999)



Every day we have countless opportunities to engage in difficult conversations. Difficult conversations are a normal part of life. Difficult conversations are about whatever we find hard to discuss. You probably have such a situation on your mind at this very moment. Examples are

- Ending a relationship
- Giving feedback about a colleague's work
- Asking a neighbor to cut down a tree
- Talking to your teenager about texting.

Crucial conversations are defined somewhat differently. They are discussions between two or more people where three elements are present: stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions are strong. According to the authors of *Crucial Conversations* we typically handle our difficult and crucial conversations by avoiding them, facing them and handling them poorly, or facing them and handling them well. (Avoiding them usually gets the most votes.)

Both of these books present similar strategies, techniques, and tips for facing our tough situations and handling them well. The material is straightforward, the concepts are simple enough—but let's not pretend this is easy. It isn't. Most of us don't have much experience with good role models, so when we need to have difficult or crucial conversations we wing it. We can learn and practice to do better, much better.

It's important to remember that as we approach difficult and crucial conversations our emotions are running high and adrenaline is pumping. Our brains are alerted to fight or flee, and precious little energy is available for clear thinking. We're just built that way. Additionally, when we are suddenly surprised by a difficult situation that demands our immediate response—and our brains are shutting down according to our biological directive—we are highly unlikely to exhibit model behavior. We end up saying self-defeating, maybe stupid, things.

"At the core of every successful conversation lies the free flow of relevant information," according to the authors of *Crucial Conversations*. This free flow of meaning between people is called dialogue. Both books teach clear, step-by-step ways to greatly improve our skills to dialogue in difficult situations.

The more we elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate.

-J. B. Priestley

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Difficult and crucial conversations call for preparation—the opposite of winging it. A difficult conversation involves working on ourselves first to notice our role in the situation. There are steps to follow for this. Then we must become clear about what we really want for ourselves, for others, or maybe for a relationship. We learn to express ourselves appropriately and how to avoid a variety of pitfalls such as, “I know what I meant to say but he made me so mad I forgot!”

There is a “Style Under Stress Test” in *Crucial Conversations* to help with awareness of ways to stay in dialogue even when angry, scared or hurt. In *Difficult Conversations* we learn to identify “Learning Conversations” and ways to steer dialogue into them. There is also a handy checklist to help prepare for difficult conversations. Both books have diagrams and plentiful examples of how difficult and crucial conversations play out in real, everyday life.

As the authors of *Crucial Conversations* remind us, “Tough conversations come at us out of nowhere, fill us with adrenalin, and evoke comfortable (but not necessarily good) routines. They are spontaneous, emotional, and backed by years of practice.” With new tools we can improve our tough conversations and increase our life satisfaction.

Readers are invited to visit www.crucialconversations.com and sign up for regular resources to help keep your new conversation skills sharp.

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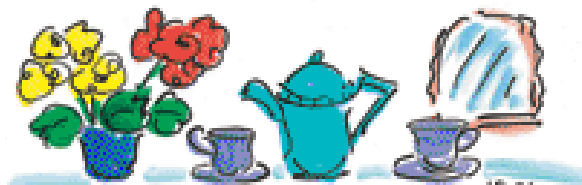
Maggi Payment began writing book reviews, essays and poetry in elementary school. Although professionally known as a workplace trainer and facilitator, she is never far away from a book, an opinion, or a silly poem. She blogs on topics for older workers at www.jobing.com and her books are available at www.amazon.com.

The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.

-Peter Drucker

Happy Musings
by Sally Huss

*Sometimes talking to
a friend means more
than what is said.*



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“Communication is a continual balancing act, juggling the conflicting needs for intimacy and independence. To survive in the world, we have to act in concert with others, but to survive as ourselves, rather than simply as cogs in a wheel, we have to act alone.”

-Deborah Tannen

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- Improv(e) Your Life™
- Facing the News Media
- Shift Happens: *Managing the Dynamics of Change*
- Team Building for Creativity, Productivity and Peace of Mind
- Inter-Generational Communication

Why Nancy Stern?

Nancy Stern, MA is the president/owner and senior consultant of Communication Plus, a consulting firm in San Diego specializing in leadership and employee development. Since 1972, she has taught thousands the art and science of effective communication. She is a former columnist with the *San Diego Daily Transcript* and has taught at the University of California San Diego and San Diego State University Management Development Center.

She inspires managers, employees and individuals of all ages through the

simple, yet powerful, lesson that *how you say what you say, matters™*. Personal experiences form the foundation of her programs, creating presentations that are personal, professional and practical. The result—Improvement of the “whole person” and therefore, the “whole organization.”

She is an EMMY award-winner, who produced and appeared in the national PBS television series *Communicating With Nancy Stern* (1990-95) and she is the coauthor of *101 Stupid Things Trainers Do To Sabotage Success*.

Nancy holds a Master of Arts degree in Communication Education from Michigan State University and is a former member of the American Society for Training and Development and the National Speakers Association.



Nancy Stern