

WHAT IS YOUR STYLE UNDER STRESS™?

From the *New York Times* bestseller
*Crucial Conversations:
Tools for Talking
When Stakes are High*



*“When we use
crucial conversations skills,
we can influence decisions,
improve relationships,
and speak our minds
in a way that gets heard.”*

- Joseph Grenny

How do you react when conversations suddenly move from smooth and easygoing to tense or awkward? Do you retreat into silence? Do you go on the attack? Or do you do your best to keep the conversation calm and focused on the issues at hand?

Crucial conversations take place when the stakes are high, opinions differ, and emotions run strong. Handling crucial conversations well can dramatically improve your personal relationships, your career progress, and your work team’s performance.

Take this 33-question test to explore how you typically respond when you’re in the middle of a stressful situation. Have your friends, colleagues, or family members take the test as well. The answers may surprise you.

A self-scoring version of this test is available online at www.vital-smarts.com/styleunderstress. Information on what your score means can be found on pages 68-69 of the *New York Times* bestseller *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*.

Instructions

Before you start, read through the following points:

- **RELATIONSHIP**
Think about the relationship you want to improve— with your boss, coworker, direct report, friend, or family member— and keep this relationship in mind.
- **CIRCUMSTANCE**
Next, think of a tough situation—one you might have handled poorly or avoided altogether.
- **APPLY**
Now, with that situation in mind, respond to the statements on the following pages as either true or false.

Style Under Stress™ Test

- T F 1. At times I avoid situations that might bring me into contact with people I'm having problems with.
- T F 2. I have put off returning phone calls or e-mails because I simply didn't want to deal with the person who sent them.
- T F 3. Sometimes when people bring up a touchy or awkward issue I try to change the subject.
- T F 4. When it comes to dealing with awkward or stressful subjects, sometimes I hold back rather than give my full and candid opinion.
- T F 5. Rather than tell people exactly what I think, sometimes I rely on jokes, sarcasm, or snide remarks to let them know I'm frustrated.
- T F 6. When I've got something tough to bring up, sometimes I offer weak or insincere compliments to soften the blow.
- T F 7. In order to get my point across, I sometimes exaggerate my side of the argument.
- T F 8. If I seem to be losing control of a conversation, I might cut people off or change the subject in order to bring it back to where I think it should be.
- T F 9. When others make points that seem stupid to me, I sometimes let them know it without holding back at all.
- T F 10. When I'm stunned by a comment, sometimes I say things that others might take as forceful or attacking—terms such as "Give me a break!" or "That's ridiculous!"
- T F 11. Sometimes when things get a bit heated I move from arguing against others' points to saying things that might hurt them personally.
- T F 12. If I really get into a heated discussion, I've been known to be tough on the other person. In fact, they might even feel a bit insulted or hurt.
- T F 13. When I'm discussing an important topic with others, sometimes I move from trying to make my point to trying to win the battle.
- T F 14. In the middle of a tough conversation, I often get so caught up in arguments that I don't see how I'm coming across to others.
- T F 15. When talking gets tough and I do something hurtful, I'm quick to apologize for my mistakes.
- T F 16. When I think about a conversation that took a bad turn, I tend to focus first on what I did that was wrong rather than focus on others' mistakes.
- T F 17. When I've got something to say that others might not want to hear, I avoid starting out with tough conclusions, and instead start with facts that help them understand where I'm coming from.
- T F 18. I can tell very quickly when others are holding back or feeling defensive in a conversation.
- T F 19. Sometimes I decide it's better not to give harsh feedback because I know it's bound to cause problems.
- T F 20. When conversations aren't working, I step back from the fray, think about what's happening, and take steps to make it better.
- T F 21. When others get defensive because they misunderstand me, I immediately get us back on track by clarifying what I do and don't mean.
- T F 22. There are some people I'm rough on because, to be honest, they need or deserve what I give them.
- T F 23. I sometimes make absolute statements like "The fact is..." or "It's obvious that..." to be sure my point gets across.
- T F 24. If others hesitate to share their views, I sincerely invite them to say what's on their mind, no matter what it is.

- T F 25. At times I argue hard for my view hoping to keep others from bringing up opinions that would be a waste of energy to discuss anyway.
- T F 26. Even when things get tense, I adapt quickly to how others are responding to me and try a new strategy.
- T F 27. When I find that I'm at cross purposes with someone, I often keep trying to win my way rather than looking for common ground.
- T F 28. When things don't go well, I'm more inclined to see the mistakes others made than notice my own role.
- T F 29. After I share strong opinions, I go out of my way to invite others to share their views, particularly opposing ones.
- T F 30. When others hesitate to share their views, I do whatever I can to make it safe for them to speak honestly.
- T F 31. Sometimes I have to discuss things I thought had been settled because I don't keep track of what was discussed before.
- T F 32. I find myself in situations where people get their feelings hurt because they thought they would have more of a say in final decisions than they end up having.
- T F 33. I get frustrated sometimes at how long it takes some groups to make decisions because too many people are involved.

Scoring

Fill out the following score sheets. Each domain contains two to three questions. Next to the question number is either a (T) or (F). For example, under "Masking," question 5, you'll find a (T). If you answered question 5 true, check the box. With question 13, on the other hand, you'll find an (F). Only check that box if you answered the question false—and so on. Finally, add the number of checks in each column to determine your total score.

Your Style Under Stress score will show you which forms of silence or violence you turn to most often. Your Crucial Conversations Skills score is organized by concept and chapter from the book *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High* so that you can decide which chapters will benefit you the most. Again, a self-scoring version of this test is available at www.vitalsmarts.com/styleunderstress. This test is also duplicated on pages 63-69 of *Crucial Conversations*.

Style Under Stress

Your silence and violence scores give you a measure of how frequently you fall into these less-than-perfect strategies. It's actually possible to score high in both. A high score (one or two checked boxes per domain) means you use this technique fairly often. It also means you're human. Most people toggle between holding back and becoming too forceful.

Masking

5 (T)

6 (T)

Avoiding

3 (T)

4 (T)

Withdrawing

1 (T)

2 (T)

Controlling

7 (T)

8 (T)

Labeling

9 (T)

10 (T)

Attacking

11 (T)

12 (T)

Silence Total _____

Violence Total _____

Crucial Conversations Skills

The seven domains below reflect your skills in each of the corresponding seven skill chapters found in *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. If you score high (two or three boxes) in one of these domains, you're already quite skilled in this area. If you score low (zero or one), you may want to pay special attention to these chapters.

Start with Heart

(chapter 3)

13 (F)

19 (F)

25 (F)

Total _____

STATE My Path

(chapter 7)

17 (T)

23 (F)

29 (T)

Total _____

Learn to Look

(chapter 4)

14 (F)

20 (T)

26 (T)

Total _____

Explore Others' Paths

(chapter 8)

18 (T)

24 (T)

30 (T)

Total _____

Make It Safe

(chapter 5)

15 (T)

21 (T)

27 (F)

Total _____

Move to Action

(chapter 9)

31 (F)

32 (F)

33 (F)

Total _____

Master My Stories

(chapter 6)

16 (T)

22 (F)

28 (F)

Total _____

Conclusion

Since these scores represent how you typically behave during stressful or crucial conversations, they can change. Your score doesn't represent an inalterable character trait or a genetic propensity. It's merely a measure of your behavior—and you can change that.

Here are two ways to improve your skills:

• ATTEND TRAINING

Crucial Conversations is an award-winning, two-day course that teaches skills for fostering open dialogue around high-stakes, emotional, or risky topics.

www.vitalsmarts.com/crucialconversationstraining

• FREE NEWSLETTER

One of our best learning resources is our free, weekly e-newsletter. Subscribers of the *Crucial Skills Newsletter* receive expert instruction from our bestselling authors on handling real-life crucial conversations.

www.crucialskills.com