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# BUSMHR 7236 – Crucial Conversations Syllabus

Summer, 2016 Course 7236 (Section 18708)

Fisher College of Business

The Ohio State University

## Professor Information \*

Dr. Mark Sullivan  
Phone: 614.292.8401  
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## Course information

Days: Sat, 8-5:30pm  
Mon. 6-10pm  
Gerlach Hall - 275

(\*Scheduled Dates Below)

## Office Hours

Tuesday 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm  
Or by appointment

Email: [sullivan.956@osu.edu](mailto:sullivan.956@osu.edu)

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION: CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS**

*Handling Tough Conversations for Accountability, Commitment and Performance*

Creating value and making a difference in a fast, high-change environment often involves addressing contrasting opinion and performance differences in a skilled, constructive and, sometimes courageous manner. Research indicates that almost 85% of all leaders derail due to an inability to recognize or successfully address conflict in a timely, well-practiced manner. Conversely, high performing leaders who consistently deliver superior results, do so with a capacity to collaboratively access and transform prickly, challenging issues into common areas of agreement and commitment. Further they are able to deliver tough messages, dramatically change expectations and challenge dysfunctional behavior in a constructive manner.

This fast-moving, research-grounded, experiential-based course focuses on further building relational (people-to-people) engagement muscles to conduct “straight talk,” in big and small ways, when it really counts. The underlying principles further builds a capacity to hold people accountable, while increasing commitment and performance. It drives and sustains impact and competitive advantage at the leader, team and organizational level.

The primary thrust of the work is based on the award-winning *New York Times Best-Seller* “*Crucial Conversations*” -- a perennial favorite found in signature Fortune 500 executive education programs. Included in this FCOB (Fisher College of Business) three credit course will be strategically-crafted applied research that further reinforces high performing practices and models in a series of real-world circumstances. That is, video shorts, role plays, audio case analysis, in-class exercises, discussion debriefs, and team projects will provide opportunities to further enrich knowledge and capability to facilitate accountable, high performing work environments.

Content will also be drawn from the companion book *Crucial Accountability*. The diagnostic framework which helps to identify performance gaps is further leveraged with the varied *Crucial*

*Conversation* (engagement) approaches. Finally, Amy Cuddy's work on *Presence* is considered as an intentional set of tools and tips for personally supporting oneself within tough environments.

As a special note, this is the first course of its kind in an American Business School. This class offers a premier leadership development experience that may further provide a transformative experience for its participants. Specifically, this course offers ways to deepen and leverage wisdom, judgment, knowledge, reflection and action to more skillfully engage in tough conversations for meaningful and sustainable results.

### **REQUIRED MATERIALS:**

Cuddy, A. (2015) Presence (First Edition) New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company  
ISBN:978-0-31625657-5

Patterson, K. & McMillan, R & Grenny, J & Switzler, A. (2012) Crucial Conversations Participant Toolkit (4.3/Fourth Edition) Provo, Utah: VitalSmarts  
Item Number: Red-2 Day-PTK-v4

Patterson, K. & McMillan, R & Grenny, J & Switzler, A. (2015) Crucial Conversations MP3 Audio Track, Provo, Utah: VitalSmart  
(Embedded in Course Web-Site)

Patterson, K. & McMillan, R & Grenny, J & Switzler, A. (2013) Crucial Accountability Participant Toolkit (1.0/First Edition) Provo, Utah: VitalSmarts

Patterson, K. & McMillan, R & Grenny, J & Switzler, A. (2015) Crucial Accountability MP3 Audio Track, Provo, Utah: VitalSmarts  
(Embedded in Course Web-Site)

(Note: The course material is not inexpensive. It is specially purchased licensed material from VitalSmarts, a premier global executive education corporate training house. However, given it is for an OSU leadership development class, the pricing is actually a full 50% off a typical commercial executive training engagement.)

### **COURSE EXPECTATIONS:**

Each of us is responsible for the success of this class. I have designed the course to maximize learning in an accelerated short form. I am committed to facilitating a positive, high impact, immersive learning environment in the classroom. However, what you get out of the course is ultimately up to you.

It includes a highly interactive set of experiences, where much of the learning is in the "doing". It is unlike most other courses as it is skill-based rather than knowledge-based. It is an experiential encounter. It is more about linking and leveraging what you say, think, feel and do for impact; and less about what knowledge you create or memorize for intellectual utility (e.g. planning, analysis,

etc.). Therefore, regular attendance throughout the six weeks is critical. Keep up with the readings. Engage in regular introspection and apply the course material to your own experiences. Come ready for class; engage, observe, experiment, ask questions of any kind.

Be respectful and supportive of the different skill levels and efforts within the role plays and discussion scenarios. Approach differences from a strength-based perspective. So first consider “what do I see happening that is effective”; “what is working well”. Developmental gaps will be considered after real and legitimate strengths are highlighted.

As an aside, and as you can appreciate, only course-related screen activity is accepted. No IMing, no surfing the web, no text messaging, etc. If you come in late to class be sure that you do so in a way that does not distract your peers. Also, audio or video recording of classes are not permitted without instructor permission. Moreover, posting of course materials on the web is not permitted.

Any student with special accommodation needs due to a disability should speak to me within the first week of the course. Students with special needs are responsible for making me aware of their situation.

Remember, this course is for your benefit and development and you will get the most out of the course (and ultimately be most successful) by making it relevant to your own life situation. If we both do our parts, this course will make a difference for you and be a positive learning experience for all of us.

## **GRADING:**

### **Grades**

This three credit course moves at a quick pace from May 14<sup>th</sup> to June 13<sup>th</sup>. Given the limited time, the syllabus will be streamlined, in-order to specifically focus on the foundational, “must-know” concepts. Yet, do not under-estimate the intensity or the level of effort required to partake in this course.

Regarding grades, we all know that some students may be just a few points away from the next grade. The cut-off points and final grades based on those cut-offs are NOT NEGOTIABLE. I am not sympathetic to students who approach me during the last week looking for extra points. The time to accumulate points is during the course, not at the end.

If you are concerned about your class performance, contact me as soon as those concerns arise. I will try to help you improve your performance but you must take the initiative to do so. In addition, there may possibly be an opportunity to earn extra credit by participating in research. *If an extra credit opportunity arises, I will announce it in class and provide additional details.*

A straight 100 point scale will be used to determine your final grade based on the total points you earn during the course (see below).

❖ **Individual Participation**

**25%** (25 points)

Includes attendance, active engagement, and observable contribution adding to self, team and class knowledge/skills. An optional make-up assignment is offered for any one missing hours from this very short course.

❖ **Team Content Assessment Exercise**

**10%** (10 points)

Consists of a content review exercise in a team setting where individuals demonstrate understanding and application of key principles in the Crucial Conversations and Crucial Accountability modules of the course.

❖ **Team Presentation on Presence**

**30%** (30 points)

A review of three chapters on the book 'Presence' is selected in-order to describe and demonstrate principles in an applied job relevant setting. The team address ways of engaging in a structured and spontaneous/improvisational setting where stakes are high, opinions vary and emotions run strong. All team members must have similar amount of face-time in the delivery of the class presentation.

❖ **Capstone Individual Legacy Project**

**35%** (35 points)

Develop a career-life portfolio profiling values, strengths, skills, interests and developmental opportunities for securing meaningful high impact actions and commitments for the future. This consists of developing a thoughtful 3-5 page guiding reference, based on collected assessment data and reflection, for enriching a broad range of relationships and goals for your future.

## Course Grading Scheme

Letter Grade	Point Range
A	93 - 100
A-	90 – 92
B+	87 - 89
B	83 - 86
B-	80 - 82
C+	77 - 79
C	73 – 76
C-	70 - 72
D+	67- 69
D	60 - 66
E	0 – 59

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's Code of Student Conduct, and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's Code of Student Conduct and this syllabus may constitute "Academic Misconduct."

The Ohio State University's Code of Student Conduct (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: "Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process." Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) *plagiarism, collusion* (unauthorized collaboration), *copying the work of another student, submitting the same or similar work for credit in more than one class, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination*. Ignorance of the University's Code of Student Conduct is never considered an "excuse" for academic misconduct, so you need to review the Code of Student Conduct and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct.

If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to COAM. If COAM determines that you have violated the University's Code of Student Conduct (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct in this class could include a failing grade for the course, disciplinary probation, suspension or dismissal from the University. If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me.

## **Course Outline and Assigned Reading\***

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**Week #1:** Saturday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, Day Long - Saturday, 8-5:30pm

**Part I:** Saturday, 8-12noon: (Morning)

**Intro:** Course Overview, Syllabus, Strategies and Opportunity Discussion

**Session Topic:** Appreciating Strengths, Getting Unstuck, Recognizing Intentions

(Read: Ch. 1, "Get Unstuck" and Ch. 2, "Start With Heart" in the *Crucial Conversations Participant Tool-Kit*. Optional Supplemental Read: Ch. 1-3 in the *Crucial Conversations Paperback*.)

The first session is about deepening the awareness of what is working well and what is not; and how to quickly explore below the water-line intentions and motives that are creating relational roadblocks. Topics include:

- ❖ Taking inventory of what makes each of us successful; the “secret sauce”
  - ❖ In Conversation: Common themes of the challenges that get in the way
  - ❖ The visible and invisible barriers
  - ❖ Getting “unstuck”: beyond a “fools-choice”
  - ❖ Mining for ground truth in the moment
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## **Week #1: Part II:** Saturday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 12:30-5:30pm, (Afternoon)

### **Session Topic: Staying in Dialogue When It’s Toxic or Less-Than-Ideal**

*(Read: Ch. 3, “Master My Stories” and Ch. 4, “State My Path” in the Crucial Conversations Participant Tool-Kit. Optional Supplemental Read: Ch. 5-7 in the Crucial Conversations Paperback.)*

The second session is about re-setting conditions that soften defensive or argumentative ways. It explores an authentic fashion to support simultaneously the person behind the position while setting soft ground rules for engaging straightforwardly and honoring legitimate differences between self and others. Topics include:

- ❖ Getting clear what we want
  - ❖ Recognizing how we function under stress
  - ❖ Getting centered: Connecting our head and heart to be grounded in a tough environment
  - ❖ Reckoning what we think and feel but don’t say, versus what we actually say
  - ❖ Experimenting with ways to re-start, re-direct our brain in a hostile context
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## **Week #2:** Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 6-10pm

### **Session Topic: Safely Surfacing and Sorting Differences While Advocating Options**

*(Read: Ch. 5, “Learn To Look” and Ch. 6, “Make It Safe I” in the Crucial Conversations Participant Tool-Kit. Optional Supplemental Read: Ch. 8 in the Crucial Conversations Paperback)*

Moving to healthy, productive dialogue involves softening the social space – making it safe to “let go” of known, comfortable, predictable positions and interactions. Further, testing and building the capacity to recognize and talk about competing realities and multiple truths, allowing parties to willingly understand and even embrace the pain and promise of unstated or misunderstood wants and needs. Topics include:

- ❖ How to listen when others blow up or clam up
  - ❖ How to make it safe to almost talk about anything
  - ❖ Modeling how to share views and opinions in a way that encourages others to do the same
  - ❖ Testing assumptions and where it takes one in the broader context
  - ❖ Building a pool of “shared meaning” that collectively connects thoughts and action
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## **Week #2:** Saturday, August 20<sup>th</sup>, Day Long - Saturday, 8-5:30pm

### **Part I:** 8-12:00pm (Morning)

#### **Session Topic:** Moving to Action - Building Agreements and Collective Impact

*(Read: Ch. 7, "Make It Safe II"; Ch. 8, "Explore Other's Path"; and Ch. 9, "Move To Action" in the Crucial Conversations Participant Tool-Kit. Optional Supplemental Read: Ch. 9-11 in the Crucial Conversations Paperback)*

This section focuses on turning crucial conversations into action and results. It can help to think of this lesson and *Get Unstuck* (in Day 1, morning), as bookends to the Crucial Conversation process. In *Get Unstuck*, we link the ability to hold crucial conversations to improved results. In *Move to Action*, we make the points that how we end the conversation is as important as how we begin, and that our crucial conversations will only lead to better results if they lead to new actions. Topics include:

- ❖ How to create mutual purpose that aligns intentions and interests
  - ❖ Testing for shared understanding; and level of commitment to change views and actions
  - ❖ Explore readiness to commit beyond the words while acknowledging reservations
  - ❖ Document or agree who does what, how and by when
  - ❖ Establish specific ways to follow-up or reinforce new behavior, position or practices
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## **Week #2:** Part II: Saturday, August 20<sup>th</sup>: 12:30-5:30pm, (Afternoon)

#### **Session Topic:** Going Deeper – Crafting Accountability for Sustainable Results

*(Read: Ch. 6, "Diagnose" and Ch. 7, "Make It Easy" in the Crucial Accountability Participant Tool-Kit)*

*Making it Work for the Long Run*, involves accountability and support on all sides. This section provides a framework for why people do what they do. It allows learners to more accurately diagnose and resolve the underlying causes of gaps. Topics include:

- ❖ Reviewing the 2X3 Diagnostic Framework: (six combinations)
    - motivation and ability mapped against: personal, social, structural Dimensions
  - ❖ Testing each combination for utility (value and results)
  - ❖ Applying the framework to real world scenarios
  - ❖ Case Analysis: Critiquing accountability conversation from start to finish; focus on gap closure and action planning with renewed commitment
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### **Week #3:** Monday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 6-10pm

#### **Session Topic: Safely Surfacing and Sorting Differences While Advocating Options**

(Read: Ch. 8, "Make It Motivating" and Ch. 9, "Move To Action" in the *Crucial Accountability Participant Tool-Kit*.)

#### **Session Topic:** Toward Mastery – Deliberate Practice for Impact and Value

*Crucial Conversation Lab*, that provides practice within and between pairs and groups. This is an opportunity to apply conversational frameworks that demonstrate capacity to engage in tough conversations at different stages from beginning to end. This includes: Before engagement...

- ❖ Assessing the landscape: getting unstuck
- ❖ Reviewing assumptions and choices for framing the "as-is" and "to-be"

During engagement...

- ❖ Describing the gap and making it safe
- ❖ Acknowledging/creating a pool of shared meaning

After the engagement...

- ❖ Making clear what success looks like: who does what by when
  - ❖ Understanding ways to support success as challenges evolve
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### **Week #3:** Saturday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, Day Long - 8-5:30pm

#### **Part I:** Saturday, 8-12pm (Morning)

#### **Session Topic:** Crucial Accountability and Performance Learning

This modular reinforces skills in using the six source influence model in a variety of ways. Case scenarios are deployed in triads, joint triads (i.e. six members) in an ad hoc group/team setting and finally as a whole class – larger organizational setting. Feedback and coaching is used to highlight strengths and new opportunities to more precisely address disappointment and performance gaps while building new commitment to behavior that meets agreed upon expectations and goals.

Course Pivot Point: At this juncture, one has completed intensive skill building in both crucial conversations and crucial accountability. The work ahead is to integrate such skills in a broader operating arena with perspective-taking exercises focused on best ways to deepen and sustain personal leadership practices that have impact in continuous, high change, tough environments.

Performance Learning Theory – Focuses on foundational frameworks that provide deeper understanding around ways to improve and sustain skill-based learning. Areas addressed include:



- *Johari Window: Known and unknown areas as seen by self and others*
- *Pendulum*

Team presentations provide feedback and strategic analysis that guide organizational direction:

Fishbowl feedback on Team Presentations and Coaching Session

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### **Week #3: Part II:** Saturday, 8-12pm (Afternoon)

**Session Topic:** Continuation of Case Analysis – Leveraging Crucial Conversations and Crucial Accountability in Multiple Contexts.

*(Read: Assigned Team Case; and Ch. 1 and 2 in “Presence: Bringing your Boldest Self to your Biggest Challenges.”)*

Team presentations provide feedback and strategic analysis that guide organizational direction:

- ❖ ATT – IT Billing Operations
- ❖ Johnsonville Sausage – Global Manufacturing Safety
- ❖ STP Nuclear Power – South Texas Power Reactor Shutdown
- ❖ St. Joseph’s Healthcare System – Canadian Physician/Staff Operations
- ❖ TATA Sky Television – Indian Media Culture Clash
- ❖ Emery University – Faculty/Staff Conflict Within and Between Departments

Fishbowl feedback on Team Presentations and Coaching Session

- Includes team assessment using vitality score and results

#### ➤ **Team Content Assessment Exercise**

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### **Week #4:** Monday, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 6-10pm

**Session Topic: Presence Practice Lab- Huddle Sessions Featuring Personal Bio’s:**

*(Read: Ch 1 and 2 in “Presence: Bringing your Boldest Self to your Biggest Challenges.”). Also, take a quick look at the attached link:*

<https://bookpage.com/interviews/19181-amy-cuddy-.VzFRtufeMt8>

An Appreciative Inquiry into *Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*;  
Referencing *Presence* chapters 1-6 and 10-11

- Linking conversational tools with performance and presence styles
- Drawing on the HBR article: *Coaching the Alpha Male* - with use of the *Defensiveness Scale*

Review Capstone Legacy Projects in Discussion Groups

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**Week #6:** Monday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, 6-10pm:

**Session Topic:** Legacy Planning – Enriching and Securing a Noteworthy Future.

(Read: two self selected chapters in “*Presence: Bringing your Boldest Self to your Biggest Challenges.*”)

Envisioning and enriching an enhanced future with values linked and expressed to vital behaviors that matter for a life-time: (Committing to key practices that matter for the foreseeable future)

Using the book *Presence* for a class “Galaxy Walk” and to address:

- ❖ Stages of a successful change and what disrupts it
- ❖ Bridging the knowing-doing gap
- ❖ How to keep change alive
- ❖ Moving toward mastery

➤ **Capstone Legacy Project Due at beginning of class**

*\* I reserve the right to make changes to the readings and/or topics as needed. In the event that I do make changes, I will announce these changes in class and via Carmen.*

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**Faculty:** Dr. Mark Sullivan, an organizational psychologist, nationally recognized thought-leader and core-faculty member of the OSU Fisher College of Business, brings 35 years of industry and executive educational expertise. He has held C-level, cross-industry leadership positions as a Dow 30 chief learning officer; Fortune 50 consulting partner; chief talent officer; lead negotiator and Pacific Rim expatriate for a G-1000 airline conglomerate; manager of a \$1B product portfolio and business incubator; and advisor/coach to a broad

range of senior executives. His motivational speaking and consulting engagements include NASA, U.S. State Department, CIA, Russian Military Defense, Accenture, McKinsey, Honeywell, Battelle, United Airlines and Harvard Business School.