

Cost of Conflict: Why silence is killing your bottom line

New research calculates the organizational costs of avoiding crucial conversations

April 6, 2010 – Provo, UT— New research reveals employees waste an average of \$1,500 and an 8-hour workday for every crucial conversation they avoid. These costs skyrocket when multiplied by the prevalence of conflict avoidance.

According to the study conducted by the authors of the *New York Times* bestselling book [Crucial Conversations](#), 95 percent of a company's workforce struggles to speak up to their colleagues about their concerns. As a result, they engage in resource-sapping avoidance tactics including ruminating excessively about crucial issues, complaining, getting angry, doing unnecessary work and avoiding the other person altogether.

View the full results: <http://www.vitalsmarts.com/userfiles/File/Research/TimeWastedConflict.pdf>

In extreme cases of avoidance, the organization's bottom line is hit especially hard.

The study of more than 600 people found that a shocking 8 percent of employees estimate their avoidance costs their organization more than \$10,000. And one in 20 estimates that over the course of a drawn-out silent conflict, they waste time ruminating about the problem for more than 6 months.

[Joseph Grenny](#), author of *Crucial Conversations*, says it's time organizations stop viewing interpersonal competencies as soft skills and start teaching their people how to speak up.

"One of the most costly barriers to organizational performance is unresolved crucial conversations," Grenny said. "The few who know how to speak up don't waste time avoiding crucial issues because they have the confidence and skills to raise them in a way that leads to productive dialogue."

The research confirms people who are skilled at discussing crucial issues waste significantly less time complaining, feeling sorry for themselves, avoiding problems and getting angry.

Grenny advises organizations interested in curbing the costs of conflict avoidance to teach their employees how to speak up quickly and effectively when they have concerns with their colleagues. He offers four tips to get started.

- **Confront the right problem.** The biggest mistake people make is to confront the most painful or immediate issue and not the one that gets them the results they really need. Before speaking up, stop and ask yourself, "What do I really want here? What problem do I want to resolve?"
- **Rein-in emotions.** We often tell ourselves a story about others' real intent. These stories determine our emotional response. Master communicators manage their emotions by examining, questioning and rewriting their story before speaking.
- **Master the first 30 seconds.** Most people do everything wrong in the first "hazardous half-minute"—like diving into the content and attacking the other person. Instead, show you care about the other person and his or her interests to disarm defensiveness and open up dialogue.

- **Reveal natural consequences.** The best way to get someone’s attention is to change their perspective. In a safe and non-threatening manner, give them a complete view of the consequences their behavior is creating.

About [VitalSmarts](#): An innovator in corporate training and organizational performance, VitalSmarts is home to [Crucial Conversations](#), [Crucial Confrontations](#) and [Influencer](#)—award-winning training products and bestselling books that enrich relationships and improve results. The company has been listed twice on the *Inc.* 500 list of fastest-growing companies and has taught 2 million people worldwide.
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Note to editor: Joseph Grenny, author of [Crucial Conversations](#), is available for interview. Copies of the book are available upon request.

About the research: The study collected responses via an online survey tool from 618 individuals. Margin of error is approximately 3%. Full survey results:
<http://www.vital-smarts.com/userfiles/File/Research/TimeWastedConflict.pdf>

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