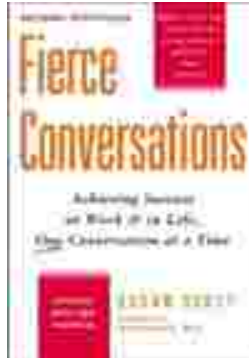




Best Summaries



FIERCE CONVERSATIONS

Achieving Success at Work & Life, One Conversation at a Time

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About the Author



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Susan Scott maintains an international consulting practice through her firm, Fierce Conversations Inc., which provides Fierce Conversations, Fierce Leadership, and Fierce Coaching programs to CEOs and company leaders. For fourteen years, she ran think tanks and seminars for business leaders through TEC International, an organization dedicated to increasing the effectiveness and enhancing the lives of CEOs around the world. Scott has extensive experience assisting companies with mission, vision, values, leadership development, cultural transformation, strategic planning, and executive coaching.

Wisdom in a Nutshell

Have you ever had conversations that ended up in arguments, dispute or broken relationships? How about conversations that lead you to an "Aha!" moment or one that gives you the job you are seeking? Conversations are the backbone of any relationship - with colleagues, with business partners, with friends and families. It succeeds when you get your message across, it fails when you are unable to communicate your ideas and feelings well.

This book shows you how to transform everyday conversations into effective and powerful tools to get your message across. It guides you on how to make more dynamic and more effective interactions "one conversation at a time."

The Idea of Fierce

Fierce conversations do not mean cruel, brutal or angry conversations. It means powerful or intense conversations. According to the author, it means "*one in which we come out from behind ourselves into the conversations and make it real.*" It simply means telling what you really feel and being real.

You will be taken step by step through the 7 principles of fierce conversations. These are guides in transforming relationships one conversation at a time.

Principle 1: Master the Courage to Interrogate Reality

The only permanent thing in this world is change. Markets and economies change requiring a shift in business strategy. People change, relationships change. You must be open and acknowledge the changes that occur around you.

Have you ever been in a meeting where no one expressed his opinion when asked? Have you ever been afraid to offer your view on a strategy on the premise that it will be shot down or it will be the cause of conflict? Most companies and relationships fail because people don't really express what they feel, and what they really are thinking. People are simply afraid to tell the truth.

In reality, most companies and leaders want to hear the truth, even if it is harsh. Knowing the truth can help the individual, as well as the company, realize faults, and mistakes. Knowing the truth stimulates growth. Unfortunately, while telling the truth is the grand simplifier, telling the truth is not that simple.

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in this world is change.*

Each individual owns a piece of the truth about a relationship, a company or an event. How then can you interrogate and get to the truth or the reality? There are three simple steps:

1. **Make a proposal.** Identify an issue. If you have a solution in mind, make a suggestion.
2. **Check for understanding.** Invite questions; ask if they grasp your proposal.
3. **Check for agreement.** Ask for opinion and views on the proposal. Be open to criticism. Listen to their views. Resist the urge to reply or defend your plan immediately.

When looking for a solution to a problem or getting to the bottom of things, avoid laying blame. Any person who can accurately portray reality without laying blame will come out as the leader.

Ground Truth vs. Official Truth

Ground truth refers to what is actually happening on the ground or the grass-roots. Official truth is what is generally available for public consumption and is often viewed as propaganda. Ground truths are discussed around water coolers, in the parking lots, but rarely shows up in the boardroom where it is needed the most. Knowing the ground truth is crucial in interrogating reality and in the success of any relationship.

The success and the quality of your life (and business) depend on the questions you ask and the quality of answers you give and receive. What are the right questions? These can be: *Where am I going? Why am I going there? How will I go there? Who will I take with me? What values are important to me and are they being met?*

The biggest hindrance to addressing change is fear - fear of the unknown, fear of the journey, fear of discovering who we are, fear of the truth. However, knowing and examining the truth can lead to a positive change. A change that is open to possibilities.

Principle 2: Come Out from Behind Yourself into the Conversation and Make it Real

Do not fear, "real" conversations, it is the "unreal" conversations that bring much harm to any business or personal relationship. Unreal conversations are expensive, tiring, and most often than not lead to a break-down of relationships and businesses. You will accomplish much when you make every conversation as real as possible.

Every individual in one way or another has withheld his true emotion for fear of conflict or in his aim to please. Some fear that by expressing his true emotions he is viewed as being selfish. However, consider this: successful relationships require that all parties' views are recognized. You have the right to clarify your opinion, state your view of reality and ask for what you want.

To have the life you want, make the decision you want or be the leader that you want, your actions have to be an authentic (truthful) expression of what you are and

what you want to become. Free your true self, others will acknowledge it and react.

How then will you free yourself from your perceived reality into the real you? The following exercises will help you “show up to yourself”, and will help you realize the “real you”.

Exercise 1: Write down what you feel about yourself, your life, your work. It could be in several words or phrases that capture your thoughts or emotions.

Exercise 2: Write down key aspects of the future that you desire. You can use these key questions: Where am I going? Why am I going there? Who is going with me? How will I go there?

Exercise 3: List the fierce conversation you have to have with others. These can be conversations you have avoided in the past or topics that need to be address and resolved.

Exercise 4: Before you have any fierce conversation with anyone, have one with yourself first. Take on the issue that is upsetting you the most, something you want and need to resolve. Here are the steps:

1. Identify your most pressing issue (personal or professional)
2. Clarify the issue. *What is going on? How long has it been going on? How bad is it?*
3. Determine the current impact. *How is this issue currently impacting me? How is it impacting others? What are the emotions?*
4. Determine future implications. *If nothing changes, what will happen? What will happen if I take another action? What is in stake for me and others?*
5. Examine your personal contributions to the issue. *What is the problem and how have I contributed to it?*
6. Describe the ideal outcome. *If the issues are resolved, what difference will that make? What results will I enjoy?*
7. Commit to action. *What might get in my way and how will I get pass it? When will I take action?*

Principle 3: Be Here, Prepared to be Nowhere Else

While no single conversation can assure the transformation of a company, a relationship or a person's life, any single conversation can. Speak and listen as if it is the most important conversation you ever had. Participate as if it matters.

Getting Past the “How are you?” Stage

Get past the “How are you?” stage and really start listening and conversing. Take a genuine interest in the response. When you are not paying attention and

*How you enter a conversation
is how you emerge from it.*

not really engaged, you might be missing out on opportunities to talk about something memorable and interesting. You might miss out on learning about something that might change your life.

When engaging someone in a conversation, focus on the basic aspect of being present - eye contact. Eye contact takes the pulse of the relationship by really listening to and acknowledging the person.

How you enter the conversation is how you emerge from it. Holding back, not paying any attention, half-asleep or available, present or awake can spell the difference between success and failure. When listening to a conversation or discussion you need to listen not only to the content but also to the emotion and intent of the message.

The goal of any fierce conversation is to expand the conversation rather than to narrow it. It is not about holding forth on your point of view or opinion, but about producing knowledge by sitting with someone (one on one) and mutually interrogating reality. Questions are much more effective than answers in bringing about learning.

Principle 4: Tackle Your Toughest Challenge Today

A problem identified is a problem solved. Burnout does not happen because you are solving problems, it happens because you are trying to solve the same problem over and over again. Identify and then tackle the real barriers to your path.

When confronting issues, it is best that you prepare a presentation of the problem. This helps preventing incoherent or inadequate explanations about the issue. You can use the following format in presenting a problem to a group:

1. The issue is: (Be concise and straight to the point. It is crucial that you identify the right problem).
2. It is significant because: (What is at stake? How will it affect the company and other relevant factors? What is the future impact if it is not solved?)
3. My ideal outcome is: (What specific results do you want?)

*“A careful conversation
is a failed conversation”*

4. Relevant background information: (This should be summarized in bullet form. How, when, where and why did the issue start? Who are the key players? What is the issue's current status?)
5. What have I done up to this point: (What have I done so far? What factors am I considering?)
6. The help I want from the group is: (The result you want - alternative solutions, critique of the proposed or current strategy, etc.)

Principle 5: Obey Your Instincts

Pay attention to your instincts and obey them. In your desire to gain approval, you are quick to disregard your inner voice. Following your instincts requires you to listen to your own internal voice, and acknowledge it. It could lead you to realize the truth about a situation, the company, the relationship or even yourself.

In fierce conversations, you are encouraged to swap ideas and sentiments while paying close attention to and disclosing your inner thoughts. You are also encouraging others to do the same. You are encouraged to trust and obey your instincts.

When talking or discussing you tend to filter your private thoughts, making public only what you assume needs to be heard, will not upset people, will get what you want, will not create conflict and so on. When you hold back important thoughts, you decrease your ability to learn and make good decisions.

During fierce conversations, your task is not to say what is easy to say or what can be said, but to say what you have been unable to say or what others are afraid to say. Pay close attention to the speaker when listening; listen not only for the content but for emotion and intent.

Can Your Instincts Get You in Trouble?

It is not your thoughts and feelings nor your disclosures that get you into trouble. Rather, it is your attachment to them and your belief that you are right. Participating in a fierce conversation means that you should be open to the possibility that your idea, opinion or feeling will be criticized or evaluated.

Remember the first principle: when asking for opinion, resist the temptation to defend your idea immediately. Fierce conversation is about listening and questioning rather than holding forth your point of view. It is about finding out other points of view.

Finding Out What You Know

According to the author, “a careful conversation is a failed conversation.” Entering a conversation with a goal of being poised, clever or instructive inhibits the possibility of having an intimate conversation. It fails

to draw out the very thoughts and feelings that you are seeking.

Fierce conversations should be fluid and adoptable to the ideas and issues presented. Do not speak about what you know. Rather, speak in order to find out what you know and should know.

Following your instinct and sharing them with your colleague or partner allows you both to discover things you didn't know about each other. You begin to see where the conversation wants to go, and how to make it a reality.

Principle 6: Take responsibility for Your Emotional Wake

No comment is insignificant, unimportant or trivial. Something you have said (or not remembered saying) may have a damaging impact on someone or it may have inspired another. Your comments can leave a positive or a negative impact - an emotional

*No comment is ever
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wake.

An emotional wake is what one remembers long after a comment has been made. It can be what you felt, what made you think, or it can be a comment that led to the "Aha!" moment.

You have no control over how others might react on the statement that you gave. The most effective position to take is to focus on your own actions and to take responsibility for your emotional wake.

Your Stump Speech

Taking accountability for your emotional wake requires you to have a stump speech - the speech

you must be prepared to make and give to anyone, anywhere, anytime. Leaders share their stump speeches with their teams and customers constantly to send a clear and forceful story about the company and to leave a positive emotional wake.

The stump speech must be powerful, clear and brief expressing the following sentiments: *This is where we are going. This is why we are going there. This is who is going with us. This is how we are getting there.*

Negative and Positive Emotional Wake

A negative emotional wake is not solely caused by thoughtlessness or unkind comments. It may also be caused by lack of appreciative comments.

In today's world of confrontation, cynicism and anger, expressions of appreciation are given less importance. Yet this expression of appreciation is a value-creating activity. It brings a more positive change - an emotional wake. Sometimes the most powerful thing to say is *thank you*. Don't just tell the people that they are appreciated, tell them why. They will remember that conversation.

Sometimes people in a relationship have produced such a negative emotional wake that one or both parties are ready to pull the plug. Fierce conversations can turn things around and it requires going back to the basics.

For any relationship to work, it is best to follow the "golden rule" - *give unto others what you want others to give unto you*. In other words, give to others what you want to receive; live the principles you are focused on learning.

Deliver the Message without the Load

A negative emotional wake is costly. In order to leave a positive wake and lessen the chance for an incorrect spin to be attached to your message, learn to deliver the message without the load. Loaded messages can cause the other party to be defensive, withdrawn or fail to give you the response needed for positive change.

The following words, phrases or emotions can be considered loaded and can lead to inaccurate receipt of the message:

- Laying Blame. *"The whole thing is your fault." "It's you, not me."*
- Name calling, labeling. *"You're an insensitive brat." "You're a liar."*
- Using sarcasm or black humor. *"Seems you've hit bottom and have started to dig"*
- Attaching global weight to tip-of-the-iceberg stuff. Making mountains out of mole-hills.
- Threatening, intimidating. *"I don't want to pull rank but..." "You do this one more time..."*
- Exaggerating.
- Pointing to someone else's failure to

Silence presents you an opportunity to think and plan.

communicate, assuming a position of superiority.

- Saying *"if I were you..." "Why can't you be more like me?"*
- Bringing up old issues.
- Assailing and criticizing someone in public.
- Asking *"Why did you do that?"*
- Making blatantly negative facial expressions.
- Layering your interpretation on something someone has said or done, assigning negative or false motives.
- Being unresponsive, refusing to speak. This can be the worst load you can attach. It feels like a lack of caring, lack of validation

Attaching a load to a message leaves the relationship worst off than before you started. Remember: one of the philosophies of fierce conversations is enriching relationships. Acknowledge the load if you have one, but do not be so careful with what you want to communicate that there is no load, no message.

Memorable conversations occur because they have breathing space - a time where people can respond and react to the ideas presented. Slow down the conversation so that opinions can be given and you can discover what the exchange really wants and needs to be about.

Fierce conversations entail silence. It is about conversing with people, exchanging ideas. The more emotionally loaded the issue, the silence is required. Below are signs that specify silence is desired:

- Cutting someone in mid sentence. Interrupting or talking over someone else.
- Formulating your own response while someone is talking.
- Responding quickly with little or no thought.
- Attempting to be clever, witty, charming, etc.
- Giving advice before an issue is clarified.
- Using silence or break in conversation to change the topic of conversation.
- Talking in circles.
- Monopolizing the airspace.

Silence presents you an opportunity to think and plan. It gives you the space to focus on the cause not just the effect. It allows everyone to participate, to be part of the discussion. It lets you look for the ground truth. It teaches you to feel.

Principle 7: Let Silence do the Heavy Lifting