THE MISSING CONVERSATIONS

Critical Thinking During Times of Crisis

LEVELS OF THREAT GUIDELINES

By Dr. Craig Overmyer

1

2

3

Understand the impact of threat

The main job of our brain is to keep us alive. My brain is constantly scanning the environment for a potential threat. When rewarded it's much easier to interact with others, think creatively and generate new ideas. However, when we experience threat states, our capacity to stay focused and remain rational diminishes significantly.

Why does this happen? When the brain perceives a threat it responds quickly with an intense alertness. The limbic system "fight or flight" response kicks in and overrides the slower thinking process of the prefrontal cortex. This significantly impacts the optimal critical thinking from this part of the brain that is otherwise responsible for proactive deliberate rational thought and action.

Three levels of threat

It is clear from the research that there are at least three levels of threat, depending on how far away in space and time the perceived threat is from us. (Mobbes et al. 2007)

Level 1: Minor

This level of threat is acknowledging that there is a possible but not immediate threat. Knowing such a threat is out there in the world, will put our brain on alert but will not typically set off an alarmed state. For example, we live in Indiana and when there is a **tornado watch**, even when the brain is alerted, the critical thinking pre-frontal cortex in the brain can still think well.

Level 2: Major

At this level, the threat is much more tangible for us but does not place us in immediate danger. Our brains are in an alert state and can become a bit alarmed. For example, when the news says there is a **tornado warning** for our County, it becomes much harder to use the prefrontal cortex to focus on thinking about complex issues.

Level 3: Severe

A threat at this level impacts our safety directly both physically and emotionally. We are very alert and very alarmed because the probability of the threat impacting us is high. For example, when the sirens start blaring, the **tornado is right here**, right now our brain puts us into a full alert status.

THE
MISSING CONVERSATIONS

Levels of Threat Exercise

This exercise is intended for workplace work groups and teams facing the threat of COVID-19 and the business being disrupted.

1. The leader or facilitator will set up a Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or similar platform for a virtual meeting.

2. Beginning with the leader or facilitator, create a psychologically safe atmosphere for each person to answer these questions candidly. Begin with a warm greeting, and a brief review of the information from this guideline.

3. Ask each person to rate the experience using the following this system.

Level 1: Minor
(little impact on you, your family or business)

Level 2: Major
(your family, team and business are disrupted, but still functioning)

Level 3: Severe
(People, Strategy, Execution, Cash decisions are severely impacted.)

4. The leader begins by offering a candid vulnerable rating of themselves.
- First, they rate their personal experience when this health and business crisis began.
- Then, they rate themselves currently.
- And finally, they share the impact either on themselves, their health, their family, their team, their business function, their energy level in their own way of describing the impact.

5. Then the leader, asks each person to take a minute or two to share their rating and the impact on them. When each person shares, the leader will summarize what each person says. Thank them for their input.

6. If someone share a level 3 and personally shares a severe impact, the leader should just listen, make an appropriate expression of empathic concern, and then follow up later as needed.

7. I recommend a powerful resource from Amy Edmonson, who wrote the book ***The Fearless Organization***.

8. Also, read page 127 in our book, ***Accelerate Thru Conflict*** for additional understanding about creating a psychologically safe atmosphere for candid, In-The-Moment Conversations at work. These are often the missing conversations!

Please contact Dr. Craig Overmyer for guidance and help at 317-506-5788 or online at www.culturesthatwork.com