

TIPS for DISCUSSING HIGH-STAKES BUSINESS INITIATIVES

- **Start with safety.** People don't become silent until they feel unsafe. Try starting your next high-stakes conversation by assuring the other person of your positive intentions and your respect for them.
- **Start with the facts.** Once you've created safety, you start describing your concerns facts first. Don't lead with your judgments or conclusions (you're a slacker). Start by describing in non-judgmental and objective terms the behaviors that are creating problems.
- **Don't pile on.** As you lay out the facts, monitor safety. If people become defensive, pause for a moment and check in. Reassure them of your positive intentions and allow them to express any concerns they may have.
- **Invite dialogue.** Finally, having shared your concerns, encourage the other person to share their perspective. Invite dialogue. If your goal is to be truly constructive, you'll want to know where your data is wrong, limited or unfair.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH. The study collected responses via an online survey of 589 individuals in February of 2007. Margin of error is approximately 3%.

LEARN NEW SKILLS. To learn how Crucial Conversations® Training can help you discuss high-stakes business initiatives, visit www.vital-smarts.com or call 1.800.449.5989.

According to our study of more than 575 people, **82 percent** of employees say there are significant organization-wide initiatives underway in their workplace that will likely fail, and 78 percent say they are personally working on a "doomed" project right now.

In addition, more than 90 percent say they know early on when projects are likely to fall short. And even though 77 percent compare their failing projects to "slow motion train wrecks," only 10 percent feel they can effectively speak up about these "train wrecks." Some of the reasons people cite for being unable to discuss crucial issues with a decision maker include worrying about damaging their credibility or reputation, as well as fear that the decision maker might get angry or defensive.

According to the research, the reason most employees don't speak up when they know a project is doomed is that they don't know how to speak up in a way that solves the problem. Eighty-one percent say approaching a key decision maker about the project is nearly impossible, more than 71 percent say they try to speak up to key decision makers but don't feel they are heard, and 19 percent don't even attempt to have the conversation.

There is a strong tendency for people to 'go silent' on important issues because they expect the conversation will go badly. With the right set of skills, employees and senior leaders should be able to discuss crucial issues that, if resolved, can ultimately save companies billions of dollars in wasted time, squandered resources, lost jobs, and sagging revenues, and prevent the failure of high-stakes initiatives.

Backed by a previous research study—*Silence Fails: The Five Crucial Conversations for Flawless Execution*—released by VitalSmarts and The Concours Group, 85 percent of all project failures can be attributed to "organizational silence." The study points to five key conversations that, if held quickly and effectively, can decrease failure rates by 50 to 70 percent. For more information about the Silence Fails study, visit www.silencefails.com.

An innovator in corporate training and leadership development, VitalSmarts combines three decades of original research with 50 years of the best social science thinking to help leaders and organizations change human behavior and achieve new levels of performance. VitalSmarts has identified four high-leverage skill sets that, when used in combination, create healthy corporate cultures. These skills are taught in the Company's award-winning training programs and *New York Times* bestselling books of the same titles: *Crucial Conversations*, *Crucial Accountability*, *Influencer*, and *Change Anything*. VitalSmarts has consulted with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies and trained more than one million people worldwide. www.vital-smarts.com

KEY RESULTS

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