



Crucial Conversations Key Development Curriculum at AgStar Financial



Difficult conversations abound in business, like delivering feedback to an underperforming employee, telling an internal job candidate they weren't selected, or letting a colleague know their behavior is distracting. The expectation of initiating these conversations often causes anxiety, and the results can be counter-productive, not to mention emotionally challenging, if not handled correctly.

The Crucial Conversations course teaches nine tools to support individuals in managing through an important and emotionally-laden conversation, helping develop more honest communication for problem resolution. The first step in preparing for a crucial conversation is to identify the motive and purpose of the conversation; the most important aspect of effectively conducting a crucial conversation is setting your thoughts and opinions aside and listening to the other person. The initiator of a crucial conversation can determine the best tool to use for each specific situation.

"A crucial conversation involves high emotion, high stakes and opposing opinions," says Sarah Spivey, Senior Consultant in FCC Services' Leadership Development group. "The process taught in the Crucial Conversations course allows people to eloquently state how they see what's going on and ask the other person's opinion, and through active listening, resolve the issue at hand."

AgStar Financial Services has been offering Crucial Conversations as part of its leadership and development program for several years, and Crucial Conversations is open to anyone in the organization. Each year, the 30-space class fills up quickly as word has spread about the efficacy of the course.

"Crucial Conversations is a great program we can offer to team members and team leaders alike to give them a strong foundation for professional communication," says Erin Porter, Senior Human Resource Generalist with AgStar. "It's become a tool that we believe in, and that our team members also value."



One of AgStar's core values is collaboration, and the organization believes that Crucial Conversations supports effective collaboration within and across teams.

"People working together on a team don't always agree, and the coursework in Crucial Conversations gives team members a common language to guide difficult conversations with each other," Erin says. "It helps our team members embrace the collaborative culture we've built and foster, and find common ground to achieve results that benefit the team and the organization."

In addition to the basic Crucial Conversations course, AgStar also offers an annual Crucial Conversations Business Review, a half-day course also offered by FCC Services to serve as a refresher for team members and an opportunity to practice skills and ask questions of the expert facilitators about particular tools or situations.

In today's business world, crucial conversations often happen between people from different generations who may have different communication styles and comfort levels with what can be perceived as confrontation. However, it's critical to remember that not everyone in a given generation shares the same characteristics or preferences, and to assume so may lead to unsuccessful communications.

"No one generation is better at communicating than the other – that would be like saying any given generation has better athletes than another," says Sarah. "The most important thing for us to keep in mind is that people are individuals, and extrapolating generational tendencies to individual members of that generation won't always be accurate, and can undermine communication and collaboration."

Another situation arising more frequently with the downturn of the agricultural economy is the need for loan officers to have difficult conversations with customers, who in some cases are from a different generation. AgStar recognized this and has encouraged team members who work directly with customers to enroll in the Crucial Conversations course.

"We've been encouraging team members with client contact to take the class so they can learn these foundational tools, to embrace difficult issues and develop acceptable resolutions," says Erin. "Overall, this is an important piece of our learning and development curriculum that's appreciated and valued by our team."

For more information regarding Crucial Conversations and availability of the program, go to <https://www.fccservices.com/training/leadership-development/crucial-conversations>.

2017 Open Enrollment – Crucial Conversations

- June 27-28, 2017