

Your Style Under Stress Test

What kind of a self-monitor are you? One good way to increase your self-awareness is to explore your Style Under Stress. What do you do when talking turns tough? To find out, fill out the survey on the following pages. It'll help you see what tactics you typically revert to when caught in the midst of a crucial conversation.

Instructions: The following questions explore how you typically respond when you're in the middle of a crucial conversation. Before you begin answering, **pick a specific relationship at work**. Then answer the items as **True or False** while thinking about how you typically approach risky conversations in that relationship.

1. ____ At times I avoid situations that might bring me into contact with people I'm having problems with.
2. ____ I have put off returning phone calls or emails because I simply didn't want to deal with the person who sent them.
3. ____ Sometimes when people bring up a touch or awkward issue, I try to change the subject.
4. ____ When it comes to dealing with awkward or stressful subjects, sometimes I hold back rather than give m full and candid opinion.
5. ____ Rather than tell people exactly what I think, sometimes I rely on jokes, sarcasm, or snide remarks to let them know I'm frustrated.
6. ____ When I've got something tough to bring up, sometimes I offer weak or insincere compliments to soften the blow.
7. ____ In order to get m point across, I sometimes exaggerate my side of the argument.
8. ____ If I seem to be losing control of a conversation, I might cut people off or change the subject in order to bring it back to where I think it should be.
9. ____ When others make points that seem stupid to me, I sometimes let them know it without holding back at all.

10. ___ When I'm stunned by a comment, sometimes I say things that others might take as forceful or attacking—comments such as "Give me a break!" or "That's ridiculous!"
11. ___ Sometimes when things get heated, I move from arguing against others' points to saying things that might hurt them personally.
12. ___ If I get into a heated conversation, I've been known to be tough on the other person. In fact, the person might feel a bit insulted or hurt.
13. ___ When I'm discussing an important topic with others, sometimes I move from trying to make my points to trying to win the battle.
14. ___ In the middle of a tough conversation, I often get so caught up in arguments that I don't see how I'm coming across to others.
15. ___ When talking gets tough and I do something hurtful, I'm quick to apologize for mistakes.
16. ___ When I think about a conversation that took a bad turn, I tend to focus on what I did that was wrong rather than focus on others' mistakes.
17. ___ I'm pretty good at persuading others by helping them understand the reasoning behind my views.
18. ___ I can tell very quickly when others are holding back or feeling defensive in a conversation.
19. ___ Sometimes I decide that it's better not to give harsh feedback because I know that it's bound to cause real problems.
20. ___ When conversations aren't working, I step back from the fray, think about what's happening, and take steps to make it better.
21. ___ When others defensive because they misunderstand me. I quickly get us back on track by clarifying what I do and don't mean.
22. ___ There are some people I'm rough on because, to be honest, *in the moment* I feel like that need or deserve what I give them.

23. ___ I sometimes make absolute statements like "The fact is..." or "It's obvious that..." to be sure I get my point across.
24. ___ If others hesitate to share their views, I sincerely invite them to say what's on their mind, no matter what it is.
25. ___ I sometimes feel so frustrated or put down that I come across pretty aggressively toward the other person.
26. ___ Even when things get tense, I'm good at finding out why people are upset and getting to the root cause of the problem.
27. ___ When I find that I'm at a cross-purpose with someone, I often keep trying to win my way rather than looking for common ground.
28. ___ When things don't go well, in the heat of the moment I'm inclined to think the other person is more at fault than I am.
29. ___ After I share strong opinions, I go out of my way to invite others to share their views, particularly opposing ones.
30. ___ When others hesitate to share their views, I listen even more attentively and show more interest in their view.
31. ___ I often have problems with people failing to do what we agreed to and then the burden is on me to bring it up again.
32. ___ After conversations, I have additional problems because I have different recollections of what was discussed or agreed to.
33. ___ When trying to work out problems with others, I find we either disagree or have violated expectations about who has the final say on some issues.

Style Under Stress Score

Please fill out the score sheets in Figures 1 and 2 below. Each domain contains two or three questions. Next to the question number is either a (T) or an (F). For example, under “Masking,” question 5 on Figure 1, you’ll find a (T). This means that if you answered it true, check the box. With question 13 on Figure 2, on the other hand, you’ll find an (F). Only check that box if you answered the question false—and so on. Total the points for each category for ONLY the boxes you checked. Your Style Under Stress score (Figure 1) will show you which forms of silence or violence you turn to most often. Your Dialogue Skills score (Figure 2) is organized by concept from the resource, *Crucial Conversations*.

Silence or Violence Conversation Strategy Tendency Figure 1

Silence ☐	Violence ☐
Masking ☐ 5 (T) ☐ 6 (T)	Controlling ☐ 7 (T) ☐ 8 (T)
Avoiding ☐ 3(T) ☐ 4 (T)	Labeling ☐ 9 (T) ☐ 10 (T)
Withdrawing ☐ 1 (T) ☐ 2 (T)	Attacking ☐ 11 (T) ☐ 12 (T)

Seven Domains Figure 2

Start with Heart ☐ ☐ 13 (F) ☐ 19 (F) ☐ 25 (F)	STATE My Path ☐ ☐ 17 (T) ☐ 23 (F) ☐ 29 (T)
Learn to Look ☐ ☐ 14(F) ☐ 20 (T) ☐ 26 (T)	Explore Others' Paths ☐ ☐ 18 (T) ☐ 24 (T) ☐ 30 (T)
Make it Safe ☐ ☐ 15 (T) ☐ 21 (T) ☐ 27 (F)	Move to Action ☐ ☐ 31 (F) ☐ 32 (F) ☐ 33 (F)
Master my Stories ☐ ☐ 16 (T) ☐ 22 (F) ☐ 28 (F)	

What Your Score Means

Your silence and violence scores give you a measure of how frequently you fall into these less-than-perfect strategies. It's actually possible to score high in both. A high score (one or two checked boxes per domain) means you use this technique fairly often. It also means you're human. Most people toggle between holding back and becoming too forceful.

The seven domains in figure 2 reflect your skills in each of the corresponding seven skill chapters. If you score high (two or three boxes) in one of these domains, you're already quite skilled in this area. If you score low (zero or one), you may want to pay special attention to these chapters.

Since these scores represent how you typically behave during stressful or crucial conversations, they can change. Your score doesn't represent an inalterable character trait or a genetic propensity. It's merely a measure of your behavior—and you can change that. In fact, people who take this book seriously will practice the skills contained in each chapter and eventually they will change. And when they do, so will their lives.

Reference: Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., Switzler, A. (2012). Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High, 2nd ed. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.



6 Styles Under Stress: Understanding Your Personal Coping Style

By [J.D. Meier](#)

“Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one.” — Hans Selye
As you begin to feel unsafe in a conversation, you start down one of two unhealthy paths.

You either move to Silence or Violence.

Silence is where you **withhold** meaning from the pool.

Violence is where you try to **force** meaning in the pool.

In [Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High](#), Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler write about six styles we use when we’re under stress, so that you recognize the patterns, step out, restore safety and then return to dialogue – before the damage is too great.

Identity Stress Patterns to Stay Calm, Cool, and Connected

If you know a few of the common forms of Silence and Violence, you can see safety problems when they first start to happen. If you know your stress patterns and the stress patterns of others, you can stay better connected when things get tough.

It’s Almost Unfair

I think it’s ironic that the more it counts, the less likely you are to perform well, by default. This is where practice and a plan are key to success.

Here’s what the Crucial Conversations team writes:

“It’s almost unfair.

*The bigger the deal, **the less likely you are** to bring up your newly acquired skill-set into the conversation.*

Like it or not, if your adrenaline is flowing, you’re almost guaranteed to jump to your Style Under Stress.”

Silence and Violence Patterns

According to the Crucial Conversations team, you can think about Silence and Violence patterns in terms of communication styles:

Silence Patterns – Silence patterns consist of any act to purposefully withhold information from the pool of meaning. It’s almost always done as a means of avoiding potential problems, and it always restricts the flow of meaning.

Methods range from playing verbal games to avoiding a person entirely.

The three most common forms of silence are **masking**, **avoiding**, and **withdrawing**.

Violence Patterns – Violence patterns consist of any verbal strategy that attempts to convince, control, or compel others to your point of view. It violates safety by trying to force meaning into the pool.

Methods range from name-calling and monologuing to making threats.

The three most common forms are **controlling**, **labeling**, and **attacking**.

The Six Styles Under Stress

According to the Crucial Conversations team, there is a range of 6 styles that people show when they are under stress.

1. **Masking** – Consists of understating or selectively showing our true opinions. Sarcasm, sugarcoating, and couching are some of the more popular forms.
2. **Avoiding** – Involves steering completely away from sensitive subjects. We talk, but without addressing the real issues.
3. **Withdrawing** – Means pulling out of a conversation altogether. We either exit the conversation or exit the room.
4. **Controlling** – Consists of coercing others to your way of thinking. It's done through either forcing your views on others or dominating the conversation. Methods include cutting others off, overstating facts, speaking in absolutes, changing subjects, or using directive questions to control the conversation.
5. **Labeling** – Is putting a label on people or ideas so we can dismiss them under a general stereotype or category.
6. **Attacking** – You've moved from winning the argument to making the person suffer. Tactics include belittling and threatening.

Figure Out Which Patterns You Use Under Stress

Here are some questions to check which styles you use under stress.

Via [Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High](#):

Style / Pattern	Checks
Masking	• <i>Rather than tell people exactly what you think, do you sometimes rely on jokes, sarcasm, or snide remarks to let them know you're frustrated?</i> • <i>When you have something tough to bring up, do you sometimes offer weak or insincere compliments to soften the blow?</i>
Avoiding	• <i>Sometimes when people bring up a touchy or awkward issue, do you try to change the subject?</i> • <i>When it comes to dealing with awkward or stressful subjects, do you sometimes hold back rather than give your full and candid opinion?</i>
Withdrawing	• <i>At times, do you avoid situations that might bring you into contact with people you are having problems with?</i> • <i>Have you put off returning phone calls or emails because you simply don't want to deal with the person who sent them?</i>
Controlling	• <i>In order to get your point across, do you sometimes exaggerate your side of the argument?</i>

	<i>If you seem to be losing control of a conversation, do you cut people off or change the subject in order to bring it back to where you think it should be?</i>
Labeling	<i>When others make points that seem stupid to you, do you sometimes let them know it without holding back at all?</i> <i>When you're stunned by a comment, do you sometimes say things that others might take as forceful or attacking – comments such as "Give me a break!" or "That's ridiculous!" ?</i>
Attacking	<i>Sometimes when things get heated, do you move from arguing against other's points to saying things that might hurt them personally?</i> <i>If you get into a heated discussion, are you known to be tough on the other person. In fact, does the person feel a bit insulted or hurt?</i>

Key Takeaways

Here are my key takeaways:

- **Know the patterns.** Knowing the patterns is half the battle. Knowing your styles under stress is a key to improving. Once you recognize your own reactions, you can shape your behavior to be more effective.
- **Identify silence versus violence patterns.** I think extraverts or more assertive or aggressive individuals will lean towards violence patterns, while introverts, or passive individuals will move to silence patterns. While there's exceptions, this is the pattern I've noticed.
- **Use the patterns as a vocabulary.** I think the power of patterns is efficient communication. Whether you're using them for yourself or for others, having a name for a pattern helps build and share knowledge.

The empowering point here is that a little self-awareness goes a long way.

If you can identify your own patterns, you can respond more effectively in any conversation.