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CONTEST

Influencing Your Spouse or Significant Other

Win a \$100 Gift Card for a Special Night Out!

Have you ever influenced your spouse or significant other to change his or her behavior in a positive way when words alone didn't seem to work? What was the situation? How did you do it? What strategies did you use? How long was the behavior going on before you were able to change it? We'd like to hear your story.

The two readers who submit the BEST "influence" stories will win a night out with their spouse or significant other. We will reward two winners each with a \$100 gift card to use for dinner, movie tickets, shopping, or any activity you like to do together.

The winning stories may be published in a future issue of the *Crucial Skills Newsletter*, and the stories may also be used in a national media promotion. Please e-mail your submissions to: editor@vitalsmarts.com. Entries should be 400 words or less.

All submissions will be edited for

TIPS FOR GETTING THE RESULTS YOU WANT

"Strong and bitter words indicate a weak cause."

– Victor Hugo

Q&A

Dealing with an Abusive Physician



Dear Authors,

I was wondering if I could present you with a question. I have read your book and think it is great! I have used your suggestions and they have worked in just about every situation except one. I am a registered nurse with ten years of critical care experience. I also have a master's degree and specialty certification. I feel that I am very knowledgeable and have saved a few physicians from disaster or inappropriate orders on several occasions. But one thing continues to bother me and I am not sure how to deal with it. What do I say or do when I have a physician act very sarcastic, rude, or insulting on the telephone?

It is rare, but lately I have had to deal with it on two separate occasions. I do let their supervising physicians know about the situation and how it made me feel, but I get the same excuses, "Oh they are just having a bad day," or "They are tired and don't really want to be on call; don't take it personally." What should I say other than I don't appreciate being spoken to in that manner? It is a huge problem and the verbal abuse needs to stop. If their supervisors won't deal with it what can I say to tactfully stand up for myself? Thanks in advance for any input you might have for me and the rest of the nursing community.

Signed,
Trying to Be Tactful



Dear Tactful,

Good for you for applying your crucial skills to tough problems in healthcare. Your patients, colleagues, and other healthcare professionals have all benefited from your willingness and ability to step up to high-stakes

About the Author



Kerry Patterson is coauthor of the *New York Times* bestseller, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*. [▶ more](#)

length, clarity, grammar, and taste and may be republished in any format. All submissions must include the writer's e-mail address (for verification, not publication). We don't promise publication, and all submissions become the property of VitalSMARTS, L.C.

The deadline for submissions is Friday, March 30.



WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Public Workshops

Crucial Conversations

- 4/10-11 [New York, NY](#)
- 4/17-18 [Miami, FL](#)
- 4/17-18 [Portland, OR](#)
- 4/24-25 [Irvine, CA](#)

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Crucial Confrontations

- 3/27-28 [Miami, FL](#)
- 4/3-4 [Irvine, CA](#)
- 4/10-11 [Atlanta, GA](#)

[More](#)

Web Seminars

Crucial Conversations

- 3/20, 11:00-12:00 PM MT [Crucial Competencies for Healthcare Leaders](#)
- 4/18, 11:00-11:30 AM MT [Flawless Execution for Project Management](#)
- 5/16, 11:00-11:30 AM MT [Flawless Execution for IT](#)
- 6/20, 11:00-11:30 AM MT

conversations. When it comes to dealing with abuse from a person in a position of power—and over the phone to boot—the challenge goes up because you're now dealing with more subtle behaviors that you only hear and can't see.

With phone conversations, tone, pacing, volume, and other factors take center stage while body language, facial expressions, and other visual elements no longer play a role. That means when you're providing information to others about what happened, or giving feedback directly to the person, you have to take special care to point out the exact verbal elements that led you to the conclusions you reached. To you, the physicians' words and tone communicated insult, abuse, and sarcasm, but you'll have to explain exactly what they did if you expect them or others to act on your conclusion.

You said the physician's supervisor tried to downplay the incident by suggesting that the person was having a bad day. My guess is that the supervisor is not feeling the full force of the abuse because you're short-cutting the description of what took place. You might think that labeling the interaction as abusive or insulting would be enough to capture others' attention, but you're likely to get more of a reaction if you replay the interaction in detail.

Next time you're poorly treated by someone and you choose to talk to the person's supervisor, come with written and dated notes. Write down the exact words. For example, say you record the following:

"And then he said, 'I figured that someone with your experience wouldn't be such a bumbling idiot. Keep it up and I'll have your head on a platter. Do you hear me? Keep it up and it'll be your job!'"

When you read aloud the exact words of this clearly abusive interaction, it's hard to simply dismiss the interaction as being trivial or to conclude that you were being far too sensitive.

Should you choose to talk directly to the offending party, the same rules apply. Start by sharing your detailed description of what took place along with how it came across to you. Allow the details to carry the weight of your argument. Nobody is going to defend his or her right (or for that matter, their subordinate's right) to call you a bumbling idiot or to threaten to hand you your head on a platter.

Make sure you separate facts from conclusions. Start with the facts—the exact words, tone of voice, volume etc. Then tentatively share your conclusion. You're beginning to think that the other person doesn't care how it makes you feel, or worse still, that he or she is using harsh and insulting words to intimidate you. Let the person know that it makes you feel disrespected, and that you really want to have a working relationship where you both feel supported and able to talk through problems.

In any case, please continue to demand that you be treated with dignity and respect. Everyone deserves it no matter the circumstances—and the more people speak their minds, the more likely it is the word will get out in your organization that being upset never gives anyone permission to be insulting

[Flawless Execution for Six](#)

[Sigma](#)

Crucial Confrontations

- 3/21, 11:00-12:15 PM MT

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Register today for an event by clicking on one of the links above.

For questions, contact us toll free at 1-800-449-5989.

CONTACT US

Questions, feedback, or information you would like to see in the newsletter? E-mail us at editor@vital-smarts.com.

Submit your Q&A question [online](#) to the authors of *Crucial Conversations* and *Crucial Confrontations*.

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or abusive.

Good luck in the future,
Kerry



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