The 7 principles of Fierce Conversations

1. Master the courage to interrogate reality
2. Come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real
3. Be here, prepared to be nowhere else
4. Tackle your toughest challenge today
5. Obey your instincts
6. Take responsibility for your emotional wake
7. Let silence do the heavy lifting
4 purposes to fierce conversations

• 1. Interrogate reality
• 2. Provoke learning
• 3. Tackle tough challenges
• 4. Enrich relationships
Definition

• A fierce conversation is one in which we come out from behind ourselves into the conversation and make it real.
Principle 1: Master the courage to interrogate reality

- If I were guaranteed honest responses to any 3 questions, whom would I question and what would I ask?
- Fierce conversations often do take time. The problem is, anything else takes longer.
- The sequence in interrogating reality is:
  - 1. Make a proposal
  - 2. Check for understanding
  - 3. Check for agreement
• Remove the word ‘but’ from your vocabulary, and replace it with the word ‘and’

• Most people are shocked to discover how many times they use the word ‘but’ every day
• The answers are in this room. If they aren’t, we have the wrong people. You are the right people. You have the answers.

• We have the ability to strengthen or weaken our immune systems. It has less to do with a healthy diet or an exercise regime, and more to do with the degree of integrity with which we live our lives.

• Integrity requires alignment of our values and our actions

• If your behaviour contradicts your actions, your body knows
• As a leader, you get what you tolerate. People do not repeat behaviour unless it is rewarded.

• “Hire attitude. Train skills.”
  (Peter Schutz, former president of Porsche)
The Big Questions that define your ideal future

- Where am I going?
- Why am I going there?
- Who is going with me?
- How am I going to get there?
- Am I realising my full potential?
- Am I fully extended in my capabilities?
- Is there value and fulfilment in my work today?
- What unmet needs am I moved and positioned to meet?
Principle 2: Come out from behind yourself into the conversations and make it real

- Woody Allen’s first rule of enlightenment: Show Up!
- Authenticity is not something you have. It’s something you choose
- What are you pretending not to know?
- It is better to fail at your own life than to succeed at someone else’s. (Andre Gide)
- The truth will set you free - but first it may thoroughly irritate you!
Principle 3: Be here, prepared to be nowhere else

- Our work, our r’ships, and our lives succeed or fail one conversation at a time. While no single conversation is guaranteed to transform a company, a r’ship, or a life, any single conversation can. Speak and listen as if this is the most important conversation you will ever have with this person. It could be.
• If you or someone else feels that a conversation is needed, it is
• When taking part in a conversation, I recommend ‘soft eyes’
• Who did the most talking? ‘Me’ is the wrong answer
• The great secret of conversation: Questions only.
• When you ask a group to listen to a speaker, request that:
  – One-third listen for content
  – One-third listen for emotion
  – One-third listen for intent
• If your employees believe their job is to do what you tell them, you’re sunk
• During the coming week, focus on one conversation at a time. Just one at a time. And be there, in each of those conversations, prepared to be nowhere else
Principle 4: Take your toughest challenge today

- The problem named is the problem solved
- The following process can be used whenever an issue needs to be raised by a team member
- Make sure that each team member is provided with a written copy before the start of the meeting
Preparing an issue for group discussion

• 1. The issue is:
  – Get to the heart of the problem in 1 or 2 sentences.

• 2. It is significant because:
  – What’s at stake? What’s the future impact if the issue is not resolved?

• 3. My ideal outcome is:
  – What specific results do I want?
• 4. Relevant background info:
  – Summarise with bullet points. What’s the issue’s current status?

• 5. What have I done up to this point?
  – What have I done so far? What options are worth considering?
  – 6. The help I want from the group is:
    – Alternative solutions? clarification of consequences? where to find more info?
The 5 common errors when confronting poor behaviour

• 1. So, how’s it going?
  – This is an age-old lead-in to bad news. Instead, just start with the issue

• 2. The Oreo Cookie (non-US version? The cream biscuit)
  – The ‘nice’ start, followed by the criticism, and then a ‘nice’ wrap-up

• 3. Too many pillows
  – Tell it as it is. If you soften the message too much, the other person won’t get the message
• 4. Writing the script
  – Don’t pre-judge what the other person will say. You’ll get caught out when events turn dramatically

• 5. Machine Gun Nelly
  – You blaze away (maybe because you’re nervous) and go completely on the offensive. This can cause serious rifts in a r’ship.
Challenging Conversations

- On a scale of 1 to 10 (at what level would YOU like to be confronted? 10 being told straight, no holds barred)
- Most people say 8 or 9
- Here is a process for confronting on a difficult issue
- You have 60 secs to give your perspective by using the following process
- This statement must be well-prepared in advance
Confronting Process

• 1. Name the issue
• 2. Select a specific example that illustrates the behaviour or situation you want to change
• 3. Describe your emotions about the issue
• 4. Clarify what is at stake
• 5. Identify your contributions to this problem
• 6. Indicate your wish to resolve the issue
• 7. Invite your partner to respond
Principle 5: Obey your instincts

- There are things our gut knows long before our intellect catches on
- What did you think but not say?
- Left column: Private thoughts
- Right column: Public thoughts
- Put them side by side, and compare what you’re prepared to say
- We are guaranteed to offend others when we present our impressions and interpretations as the truth
Principle 6: Take responsibility for your emotional wake

• An emotional wake is what you remember after I’m gone. What you feel. The aftermath, aftertaste, or afterglow

• Our emotional wake determines the story that is told about each of us in the organisation

• The conversation is not about the relationship. The conversation IS the relationship.
Being human is hard!

• Pay attention. We show one another who we are every minute of the day.

• Complete the conversation
Principle 7: Let silence do the heavy lifting

• The best leaders talk with people, not at them
• 8 out of 10 sales proposals fail; and 50% of those fail because we spend too much time talking about ourselves or the features of the product
• Silence makes us nervous. So do innovation, change and genius
• The more emotionally loaded the subject, the more silence is required
• There are insights and emotions that can find you in no other way than through and within silence
• What’s your favourite sound? Silence.
• Never mistake talking for conversation
Questions for one-to-one

• What has become clear since last we met?
• What is the area that, if you made an improvement, would give you and others the greatest return on time, energy and dollars invested?
• What is currently impossible to do that, if it were possible, would change everything?
• What are you trying to make happen in the next 3 months?
• What’s the most important decision you’re facing? What’s keeping you from making it?
• What topic are you hoping I won’t bring up?
• What area under your responsibility are you most satisfied with? Least satisfied with?
• What part of your responsibilities are you avoiding right now?
• Who are your strongest employees? What are you doing to ensure that they’re happy and motivated?
• Who are your weakest employees? What is your plan for them?
• What conversations are you avoiding right now?
• What do you wish you had more time to do?
• If you were hired to consult with our company / business / school, what would you advise?