



T R A I N E R

Trainer Success Story

Intermountain Healthcare



Improving Employee Communication and Job Satisfaction

Steve Terry, Director of IHC University, Intermountain Healthcare

THE SITUATION

Director of IHC University Steve Terry was on a mission. Recent leadership development meetings at IHC headquarters had left him concerned about a potential gap in his employees' ability to hold sensitive and risky conversations with their coworkers.

Terry recognized a need to not only improve core competencies surrounding leadership and core communication skills, but also employee satisfaction. "With very little exception, the number one competency leaders self-diagnosed as an area that needed improvement was their ability to have crucial conversations – conversations where the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong," Terry said. He recognized that the widespread inability to communicate in high-stakes situations boiled down to the leaders' lack of skill and comfort around holding these potentially risky conversations.

The annual IHC employee survey showed similar areas that needed improvement. Across the organization, the survey question that continually returned poor results was, "My manager directly deals with employees who aren't performing."

Reflecting on the results of both the leadership development meetings and the employee survey, Terry realized there were some substantial employee communication issues to tackle. For example, Terry discovered that while many managers noticed physicians behaving in ways that didn't seem correct, they were uncomfortable approaching the physicians about their behavior, and consequently put patients at risk.

"We realized the lack of skill in holding important conversations around accountability issues was not just causing discomfort or impacting employees, it was also directly correlated to the care our patients were receiving," said Terry.

Intermountain Healthcare is a nonprofit health system based in Salt Lake City, Utah, with over 26,000 employees. Serving the healthcare needs of Utah and southeastern Idaho residents, Intermountain's system of 21 hospitals, clinics, health plans and physicians provides excellent medical care at affordable rates.



THE TRAINING COURSE

In an effort to revamp corporate culture and increase accountability, Terry partnered with VitalSmarts. Terry and two other colleagues certified to deliver Crucial Conversations Training to IHC employees. Armed with the high-leverage skills taught in the course, Terry was confident his employees could create a culture of honest and candid communication that not only provided a better working environment, but also cultivated safer healthcare for patients.

Receiving support from headquarters, Terry and his colleagues trained numerous groups of leaders and mid-level managers at the corporate level. Additionally, they discussed crucial conversations principles at leadership meetings and retreats. To introduce the skills throughout the whole organization, they provided hundreds of IHC managers and employees with copies of the book, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. This widespread dissemination led to a cultural acceptance of the material where employees continually referenced and practiced the skills.

As a certified trainer, Terry had the ability to customize the Crucial Conversations Training to best accommodate the time constraints and scheduling demands inherent in a healthcare environment. To tailor their course, IHC administered the Crucial Conversations program through spaced learning delivered in shorter learning sessions and spread over a number of weeks for maximum flexibility with employee schedules. It was also taught within existing work teams and groups. These flexibilities allowed Terry to offer an educational experience that resulted in maximum employee engagement and results.

“Crucial Conversations has given our employees comfort and confidence for dealing with difficult situations.”

— Steve Terry, Director of IHC University Intermountain Healthcare

THE RESULTS

The Crucial Conversations initiative was and continues to be a profound success at Intermountain Healthcare. Not only did the training provide employees with the skills to hold crucial conversations, Terry accomplished his goal of improving core competencies surrounding leadership development and employee satisfaction scores. Terry and his team saw improvements in all twenty-two categories of the annual employee satisfaction survey.

Crucial Conversations also added value to IHC's Eleven Service Standards, which were implemented as an initiative to improve patient satisfaction.

“One of our excellent service standards is ‘Communicate Clearly,’ which is achieved by Crucial Conversations,” Terry said. “Others include ‘Make a Positive First Impression,’ ‘Present Yourself Professionally,’ ‘Be Nice,’ and ‘Treat Everyone with Dignity and Respect.’ Crucial Conversations directly supports our service standards and has

had a profound impact on our patient satisfaction initiative.”

Additionally, employees found wide-reaching value in Crucial Conversations that they had not experienced with any other training program.

“I’ve been through some great training and everything I’ve gained is wonderful, but there has never been anything that has impacted my life like Crucial Conversations,” said one IHC manager, relating how the training not only impacted her work, but also applied to other areas of her life. “Crucial Conversations Training was the best educational experience I have ever been a part of.”

In addition to changing individual lives, Crucial Conversations provided extensive organizational benefits. IHC experienced transference that reached beyond training participants. The language of Crucial Conversations permeated offices, hallways, and the cafeteria. A new, shared vocabulary began to work its way into all levels of the organization, allowing for easy reference, immediate understanding, and a common ground that made employees feel more comfortable speaking up about important issues—including mistakes or rule-breaking violations.

The overall success of the training initiative is apparent in the way employees now handle crucial conversations. Terry says that where previously, employees expressed an inability to hold a crucial conversation with others they now feel comfortable with and competent to step up to and resolve issues directly with one another.

“Crucial Conversations has given employees comfort and confidence for dealing with difficult situations or challenging employees and customer contacts,” said Terry. “For Intermountain Healthcare, Crucial Conversations was the very best solution.”



About VitalSmarts Trainer Certification—VitalSmarts Trainer Certification offers organizations a training delivery option that returns real results in a flexible, cost-effective, and powerful way. Designed to provide people with best practice trainer skills to roll out Crucial Conversations training in their organization, the certification process ensures the high-leverage skills learned in the Crucial Conversations public workshops will have measurable impact across the organization. Those certified to train Crucial Conversations add value by offering customizable, award-winning training that solves the organization's most pressing problems.

About VitalSmarts—An innovator in best practice training and consulting research, VitalSmarts delivers significant improvements to the results companies care about most. For more than 25 years, company principals have researched methods for bringing about systematic and lasting change. Based on this ongoing research, VitalSmarts has helped thousands of organizations, including more than 300 of the Fortune 500, realize quick, hard-hitting results through its award-winning training programs using a method that no other training company yet offers. VitalSmarts training initiatives include: Crucial Conversations® and Crucial Confrontations™. Each delivers a powerful set of influence tools that builds teams, enriches relationships and improves end results. VitalSmarts has two New York Times bestselling books based on this research of the same titles, *Crucial Conversations* and *Crucial Confrontations*. VitalSmarts also offers keynote speaking, on-site consulting, customized development and executive mastery retreats.

