

Crucial Conversations Training Rebuilds Corporate Culture at Indian Television Provider



INDUSTRY: TELEVISION

Tata Sky is a satellite television provider that has redefined the television viewing experience for thousands of families across India. The service aims to empower the Indian viewer with choice, control and convenience through its wide array of programming choices and interactive features offered in DVD quality picture and CD quality sound. The company is a joint venture between the Tata Group and the STAR Group and operates under the Sky brand owned by British Sky Broadcasting.

PROBLEM

Tata Sky was booming and racing to keep up. The company, a combination of Indian behemoth Tata Group and Britain's Sky television brand, was the second firm in India to offer direct-to-home satellite television and other services. After two years of rapid expansion, management wanted more speed, but bureaucracy and conflict were limiting efficiency.

"Because we are neither simply entertainment nor telecom nor consumer household, we have people with backgrounds in different industries and very different working styles," said Charanjit Lehal, senior training manager. "Nobody was speaking the same (figurative) language, and it was affecting efficiency—we could see a pattern of meeting after meeting, and quick decisions were not being made."

Executives observed the following types of behaviors:

- People avoided each other instead of confronting problems.
- Employees returned from meetings with other functions complaining about the list of unrealistic projects they were being asked to accomplish.
- Team problems were being escalated to high-level executives rather than being resolved at an earlier stage.

Top executives requested evaluations on all 120 managers in the company. They were assessed on fourteen competencies, and the one that was found lacking was "communicating productively." Many managers responded that they had "no inclination to communicate," and could not dialogue effectively.

"We decided to attack this gap with a constructive measure," Lehal said. "We knew we wanted a new intervention—the only concern was that we choose the right one."

THE TRAINING COURSE

After perusing dozens of training courses, Tata Sky learning and development team led by Bhaskar Bhattacharya, vice president of learning and development, piloted three different workshops conducted by external trainers. Based on feedback and results, they chose to move forward with VitalSmarts Crucial Conversations Training in May 2008.

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Lehal found the skills taught in the course were clear. The tests and exercises were effective at engaging participants. He also liked how the action items required by the course helped each participant customize the principles to their specific needs. Based on the course's value, Lehal was able to secure executive approval by demonstrating how the results would lead to a return on investment.

In addition to the results and the skills, Lehal found the training integrated seamlessly across cultures. There was no cultural confusion between the American-based course and Tata Sky's Indian employees.

"Dialogue is a necessity for any conversation," Lehal said. "The core content of the course has universal application."

He acknowledged that, speaking generally, Americans may be direct in conversations while people from eastern cultures may build more background before coming to a main point.

"While techniques differ, we still need to get on the table what you are trying to say and what I am trying to say, and that is what this course teaches," he said.

Lehal's experience was that with sufficient preparation cultural differences did not present significant challenges.

Based on advice from a VitalSmarts master trainer, he also surveyed participants before they attended the course and built real-life examples for use in the course from their anonymous responses. This ensured they saw immediate application to their work environment.

Lehal conducted two-day workshops at each of Tata Sky's four regional offices, focusing on the customer service function before moving to other functions. About eighty managers completed the workshop in 2008, with many more scheduled for 2009.

RESULTS

Tata Sky is seeing the change in behavior they hoped for after boosting its managers' communications skills.

"This course is breaking down passive or aggressive cultures that had been found in various divisions," Lehal said. "It's become a very successful culture-building intervention."

Some results from the training:

- Two teams had been struggling to cooperate. One reported that the other had been "moving to silence" and withholding their point of view, but is now "stepping up to crucial conversations."
- One manager told Lehal when she came into the training that she was looking for a new job because she was being made a scapegoat in her team. She was in "complete silence mode" and avoiding the issue. After the training she talked to her supervisor about it and is still with the company.
- The head of a service function was so impressed by the word-of-mouth on the course among his managers that he asked Lehal to conduct it for his senior team of general managers and vice-presidents.
- On a personal level, employees have shared with Lehal that the course has helped them sort out communication problems with their parents left behind when Tata Sky moved them to a new city. Or with their teenagers—certainly a challenge that transcends culture.

Following are testimonials e-mailed after the course:

- "I could relate the program the very next day at the office. On Friday during a conversation with the team, I could make out the 'silence' shown by one person

and this tool helped me engage him into meaningful dialogue."

- "I feel [my] team has bonded once again."
- "I put crucial conversations skills in to motion the very next day, and it has certainly helped clear the air."

When asked whether he would recommend Crucial Conversations, Lehal was somewhat surprised by the question: "What other workshop offers so much skill development? Such excellent audiovisuals? With so much of the course absolutely interactive? And is so well structured in terms of the workbook, videos, exercises, self-testing, and post-training? All of these things I've recommended to my peers at other organizations."

Moving forward with Crucial Conversations at Tata Sky, Lehal is focusing next on intact teams from human resources, IT, supply chain, finance, and more.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE:

- Eliminated passive aggressive behaviors in various divisions
- Reunited divided teams
- Increased dialogue among employees

About Crucial Conversations® Training—Whenever you're not getting the results you're looking for, it's likely that a crucial conversation is keeping you stuck. Whether it's a problem with poor quality, slow time-to-market, declining customer satisfaction, or a strained relationship, if you can't talk honestly, you can expect poor results.

This award-winning training infuses classroom time with original video clips and examples. Course pacing is active and engaging, with structured rehearsals and intense class participation. The Crucial Conversations course delivers a powerful set of influence tools that builds teams, enriches relationships, and improves end results. Participants acquire the skills that help them step up to and handle high-stakes issues.

About VitalSmarts—VitalSmarts is an innovator in corporate training and organizational performance. The company is home to the award-winning Crucial Conversations® Training and *New York Times* bestselling book of the same title, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*. VitalSmarts has been ranked five times by *Inc.* magazine as one of the fastest growing companies in America and has trained more than 500,000 people worldwide. www.vitalsmarts.com