

*Fierce Conversations:
Achieving Success at Work and in Life,
One Conversation at a Time*
by Susan Scott

Reviewed by
Kendra Simonetto SD 35

*"Be brave enough to start
a conversation that matters."*

~Margaret Wheatley

*"As school leaders, we know
relationships are built one authentic
conversation at time. So, how do
we ensure that we are not shying
away from the most important
conversations in our lives?"*

I want to be truly honest... I have been the administrator who, at times, leaned away from difficult conversations. I have happily nestled into my comforting cocoon of avoidance when I knew confrontation was looming. I have sugar-coated my message to make it more palatable to staff members, I have repeatedly let my fear put off hard conversations that needed to happen yesterday and I have permitted silence to seep into the tiny fractures of a relationship only to have it result in a giant crevasse beyond repair. I have learned the hard way that avoiding real conversations can damage relationships.

As school leaders, we know relationships are built one authentic conversation at time. So, how do we ensure that we are not shying away from the most important conversations in our lives? How do we assure ourselves that we truly are brave enough to engage in these Fierce Conversations?

Susan Scott, the author of *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time*, provides leaders with the very tools we need within our roles to help us engage in the most necessary of conversations. In reviewing this

book, I do feel compelled to dive into Scott's definition of "fierce", as at first blush it can be misinterpreted as aggressive or confrontational. In contrast, Scott addresses her choice terminology head-on and notes that, "a Fierce Conversation is one in which we come out from behind ourselves, into the conversation, and make it real". As Scott metaphorizes so perfectly, "the conversation IS the relationship" and there are four objectives in engaging in fierce conversations. Leaders must have conversations that Interrogate Reality, Provoke Learning, Tackle Tough Challenges, and Enrich Relationships. In reading this book I am reminded to constantly ask myself: What conversations am I having that are not producing the results I want? What conversations am I NOT having, at work and in my personal life, because I feel uncomfortable, nervous, fearful, or vulnerable?

In her book, Scott walks us through the 7 Main Principles within the Foundations of Fierce Conversations. Her book is organized clearly and is easy to read. She incorporates real-life scenarios into her teachings and provides readers with possible assignment tasks and reflections that help them to apply their learning in their lives. One of the

greatest gifts Scott gives are her words; the book is overflowing with noteworthy phrases and quotes that deeply resonate.

Here are some of my key take-aways and quotations within the Foundations:

o Master the Courage to Interrogate Reality

- Beach-ball Reality: Everyone owns a piece of the truth about reality.
- Make a proposal, check for understanding, and check for agreement.
- Conduct an Integrity Scan (personally and within your school).
- Mineral Rights Conversation Model: questions to drill down and increase clarity, improve understanding and impetus for change.
- Questions are much more effective than answers in provoking learning.

o Come Out from Behind Yourself, Into the Conversation, and Make it Real

- If your answer is “I don’t know”... What would it be if you did know?
- All conversations are with myself and sometimes they involve other people.

o Be Here, Prepared to Be Nowhere Else

- Decision Tree Model: Root, Trunk, Branch, and Leaf Decisions for delegating responsibility.
- If you, or someone else, feels that a conversation is needed... it is.

Start a Conversation
With your Colleagues
as a Princip(ed) reviewer!

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"Questions are much more effective than answers in provoking learning."

~ Susan Scott

- Soft eyes and ears in conversations; come into the conversation with empty hands. Bring nothing but yourself.

o Tackle Your Toughest Challenge Today

- The problem named is the problem solved
~ Pat Murray
- Confrontation Conversations: Come straight at the issue. Get straight to the point. All confrontation is a search for the truth.

o Obey Your Instincts

- There are things our gut knows long before our intellect catches on.
- Your confusion is an asset; in fact, your search for clarity may blaze a path for others.
- What are you pretending not to know?

o Take Responsibility for Your Emotional Wake

- An emotional wake is what you remember after I'm gone.

*"If your answer is 'I don't know' ...
What would it be if you did know?"*

~ Susan Scott

- Check in frequently with others to see what kinds of wake you are creating.
- For each of us, the challenge is to reconcile being real and doing no harm.

o Let Silence Do the Heavy Lifting

- The more emotionally loaded the subject, the more silence is required.
- Use silence to slow down a conversation so that you can discover what the conversation really wants to be about.

I am grateful to the SD35 District Leadership Team for introducing all Langley administrators to this book, and for supporting our ongoing work with *Fierce Conversations*. Scott's book is not one that you will read once and place on the shelf. Rather, it is a book that serves as a leaders' toolkit to help us "come out from behind ourselves", and get real with one another and overcome barriers. This book is the go-to guide you will revisit again and again to prepare for, navigate, and enrich the conversations you know you need to have... with bravery.

