

From Avoidance to Alignment

Building a feedback-rich
organization

Unwavering Champions for Children & Families



About this session

Most nonprofit cultures don't lack care. They lack candor.

Well-meaning leaders avoid hard conversations to protect relationships, harmony, or mission focus. The cost shows up as unaddressed performance issues, quiet resentment, and turnover that could have been prevented.

This session gives senior leaders, supervisors, team leads, and clinical directors a practical framework for building a culture where honest feedback is treated as an act of care, not a risk to the relationship.



If someone has spinach in their teeth, would you tell them?



Why, or why not?

If someone has spinach in their teeth, would you tell them?

In one study, only 4 of 212 people told the researcher they had an unsightly smudge on their face.

Source: Harvard Business Review, 2022

Learning objectives

Name the three avoidance patterns — silence, sugar-coating, gossip — that block honest feedback in mission-driven teams, and what each one costs the organization.

Practice two models of candor drawn from Crucial Conversations and Conscious Leadership.

Leave with repeatable frameworks and starter scripts to use with your own team in the first week back.



Beliefs that Shape this Presentation

- Lack of candor drains energy
- Lack of feedback inhibits growth
- Kindness and candor can co-exist



Disengagement is
expensive

\$960B–\$1.2T

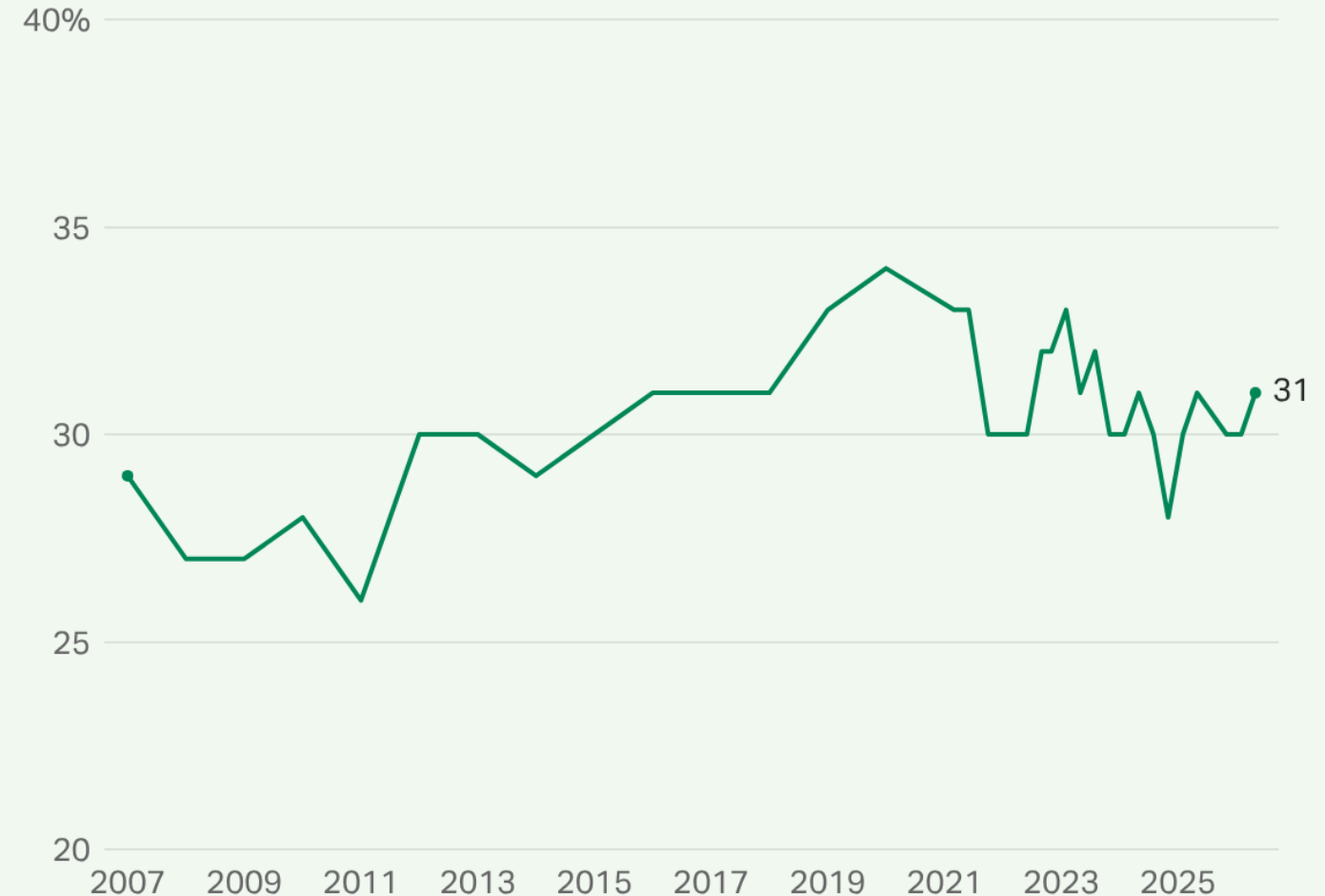
Gallup's estimate of what poor management and lost productivity cost U.S. employers every year.

Source: Wigert & Harter, Re-Engineering Performance Management, Gallup, 2017

U.S. Managers and Employees Would Benefit From More Frequent Progress Conversations

In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.

— % Strongly agree



Source: Gallup, January 2026

GALLUP®

Recognizing the challenge



Take two minutes. List every feedback conversation you are avoiding.

You will not have to share anything you don't want to with anyone.



What is at risk?

We avoid the uncomfortable conversation when one of these feels threatened.

Safety

Control

Approval

Connection



Common avoidance patterns

SILENCE

Withholding your experience, thoughts, and feelings about an issue.

SUGAR-COATING

Not saying all you have to say, or downplaying the issue.

GOSSIP

Releasing your discomfort by talking to others about it.



What avoidance costs?

Unresolved tension creates distance.

Cost: diminished trust.

People don't get the input they need to grow.

Cost: underperformance and stalled development.

Energy drains sideways instead of into the work.

Cost: fatigue, distraction, burnout.

Bottom Line: Lack of feedback and candor drains energy, reduces trust, and is a factor in underperformance.



Building blocks for a feedback-rich environment



What feedback is, and what it is for

Feedback is...

- Data. Information about the impact of a decision or action, and what happened as a result.
- A way to take responsibility for how you experience others.
- A tool for growth.
- Offered so the other person can choose what to do with it.
- Sometimes a gift the giver pays for in discomfort.

Its purpose...

- Growth, for the person and for the team.
- Trust. The relationship gets stronger, not thinner.
- Better outcomes for those we serve.

NOTE: Feedback is not giving direction. There can be feedback involved in giving direction.



100% Responsibility (no more and no less)

I commit to taking full responsibility for the circumstances of my life, and for my physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

I commit to support others to take full responsibility for their lives.

I commit to blaming others and myself for what is wrong in the world.

I commit to being a victim, a villain, or a hero, and to taking more or less than 100% responsibility.



Fact and story



Fact and Story

FACT

- What a video camera would have recorded
- Factual and objective
- Binary. Reality.

STORY

- Opinions
- Beliefs
- Judgments and interpretations
- Motivations and assumptions



Candor is telling the “truth” in a way the other person can take in.

Candor is...

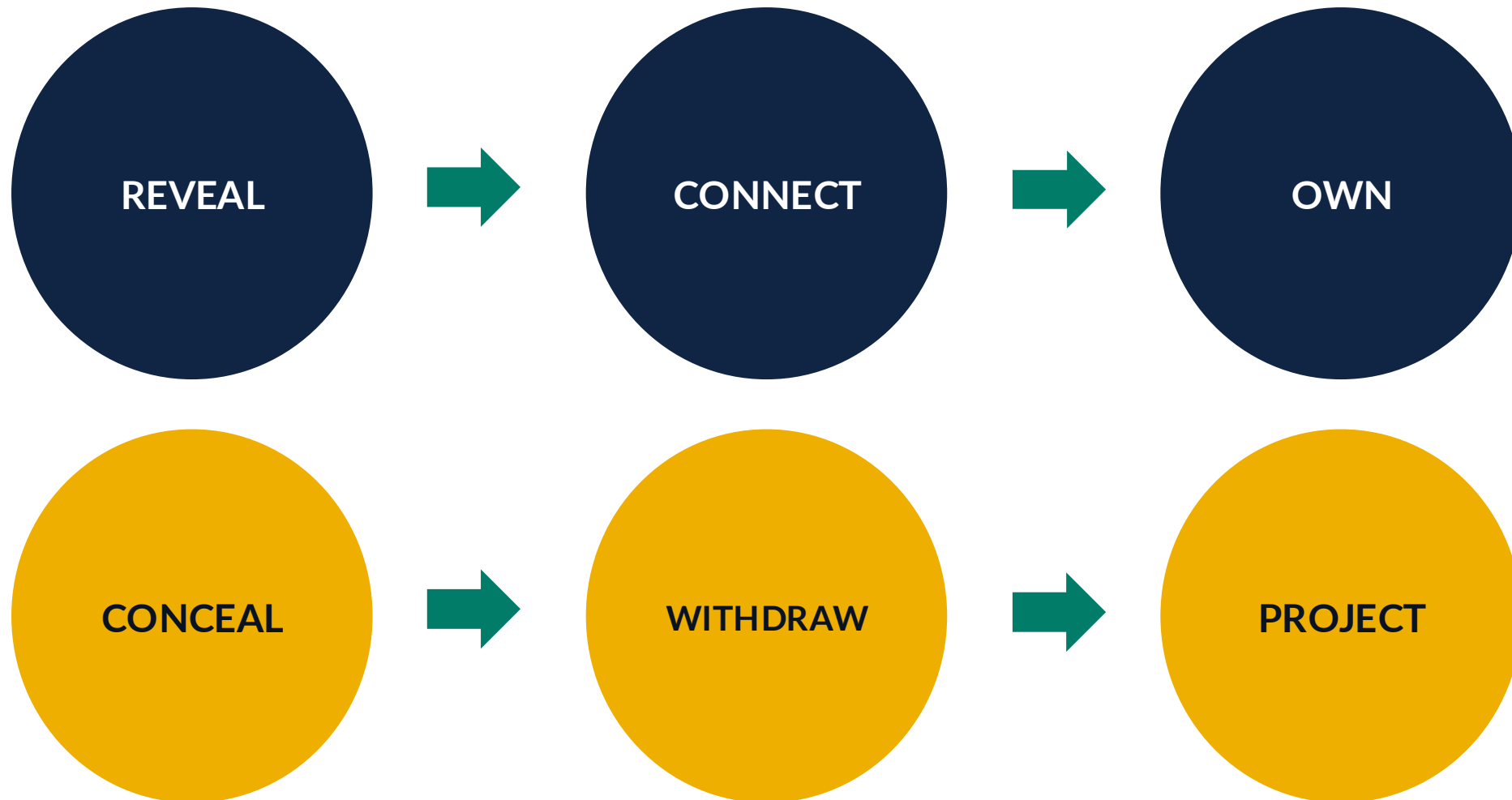
- Direct
- Specific and clear
- Timely
- Vulnerable
- A way to build trust

Candor is not...

- Bluntness for its own sake
- Venting
- Saved up and stockpiled
- Unloading on someone



Revealing and concealing



Conscious Candor

ASK

If I were to reveal everything about myself on this issue, what would I say?

NOTICE

The gap between what I am thinking and what I am saying out loud.

WELCOME FEARS

If I reveal, what am I afraid of? Is it control, connection, or security?

What does it cost me not to reveal? Am I willing to reveal?

If yes: let go of being right, focus on being known, and speak your truth with an open heart.



Tools and Practice



How to give feedback

Be specific

Name the behavior *and* the moment. Not “you’re dismissive” but “in Tuesday’s meeting you cut me off twice.”

Speak unarguably

Say what you observed and what you felt. Those cannot be argued with. Your story about why can.

Eat your own projections

Ask first: how might this also be true of me?



The Clearing Conversation:

INTRO:

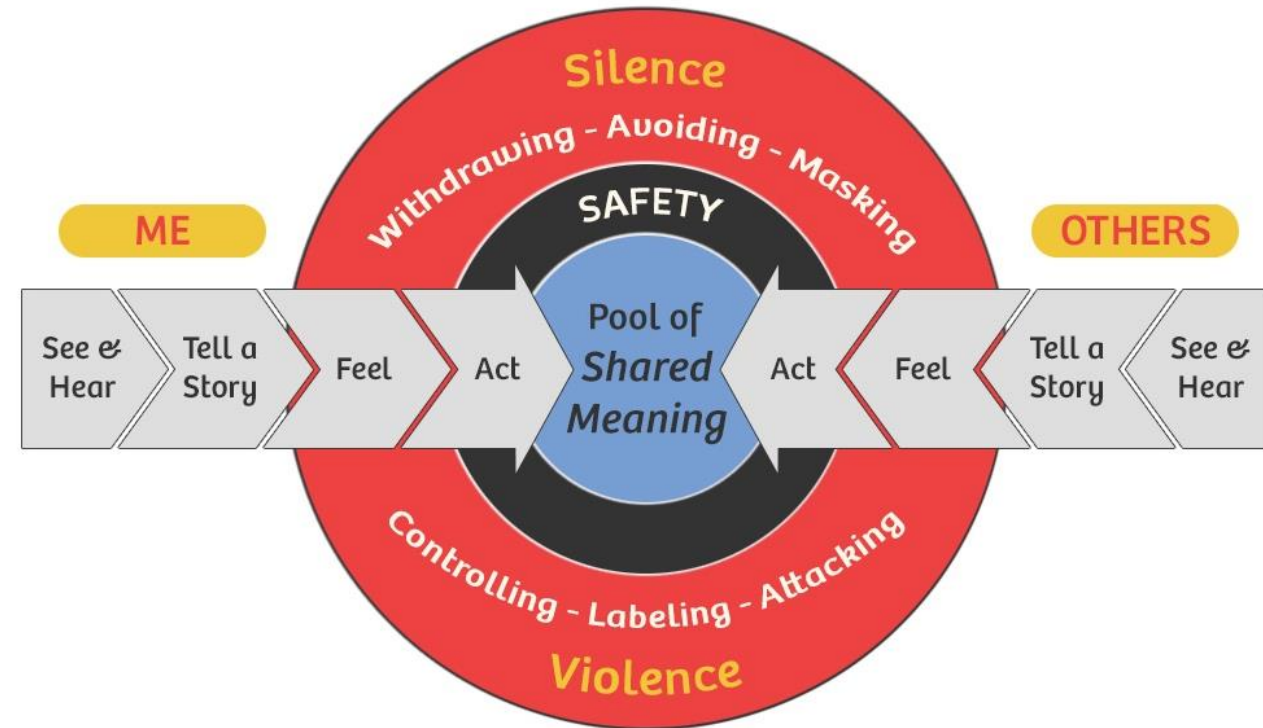
"I have an issue I'd like to clear with you. Is now a good time? If not now, when? I want clear, open lines of communication, because this relationship matters to me."

- 1. The specific FACTS are...**
recordable facts, not judgments.
- 2. A STORY I make up about you, me, or the group is...**
- 3. My FEELING is...** angry, sad, scared, creative, joyful.
- 4. I specifically WANT...** not a demand, a way to be known.
- 5. How I CREATED this disconnection with you is...**
- 6. PROJECTION:** the part of me I see in this that I have an aversion or a connection to is...



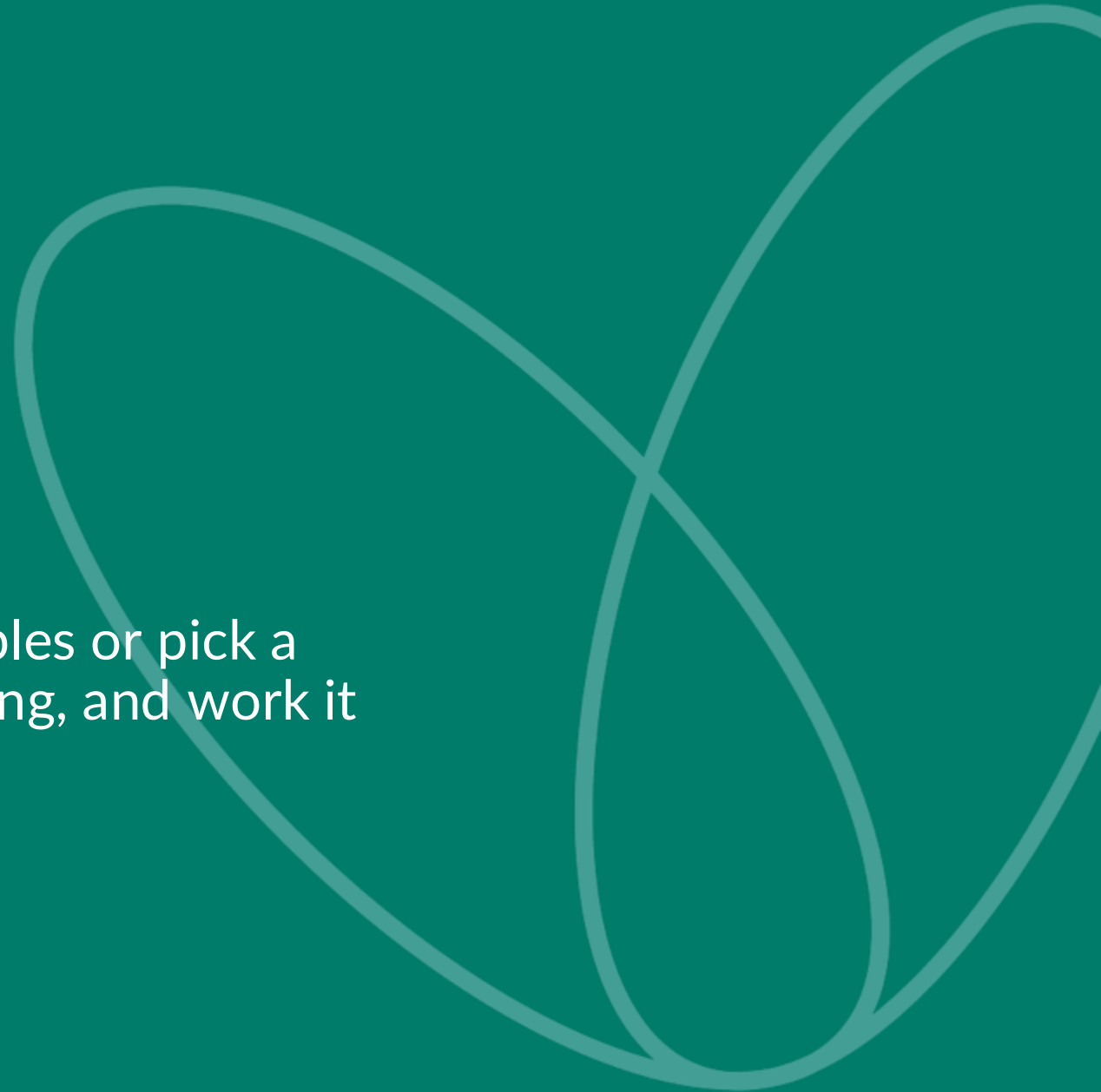
The Crucial Conversations model

- **Share the facts.** Start with the least controversial, most objective elements.
- **Tell your story.** Explain how you interpret those facts, without attacking.
- **Ask for other paths.** Invite the other person to share their view and their feelings.
- **Talk tentatively.** State opinions as ideas, not absolute truths.
- **Encourage testing.** Welcome differing views and challenge your own assumptions.



Your turn

Pair up. Use one of the provided examples or pick a real conversation you have been avoiding, and work it through with one of the two models.



Thank you!

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References & Resources

- Conscious Leadership Group Resources:
 - <https://conscious.is/resources/>
- Crucial Conversations Resources:
 - <https://cruciallearning.com/resource-center/#all>



BONUS: How to receive feedback

- 1. See it as a gift.**
Someone paid a cost to give you this. Start there.
- 2. Ask how this is an ally to your growth.**
Assume there is something in it before you decide there isn't.
- 3. Don't ask "is this true?" Ask "how is this true?"**
The first question hunts for an exit. The second one finds the 10%.

