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Silence or Violence

Recently I was faced with a dilemma that tested whether I believe and practice what I teach. I thought this would be a great opportunity to show you some **Crucial Conversation** tools in action. If you are familiar with the **VitalSmarts Crucial Conversations** course, you may understand where this is going, but either way, it's an important lesson.

The church that my family attends had invited a men's choir to visit on a specific weekend this Summer. As is our custom, we host choir members in our homes and our family was planning to have overnight guests. Ten days before the choir visit, our daughter went into labor with her third child. Within in a few days, my wife headed to Ohio to help the growing family, and you guessed it, I needed to host the overnight guests without my (much) better half. Wanting to make things easier for me, my wife asked that our guests be boys my son's age so I wouldn't need to make too much of a fuss. Well, as it turned out, it wasn't a few boys but a total of five people. A father of three little girls and another gentleman in the choir. A bit stressed about fixing a meal and entertaining on my own, I moved on with the best mindset possible. After all, how tough can it be to host people for one night?

Immediately after the Saturday evening choir program, I met up with one of my house guests, and he informed me that they wanted to stay two nights. All five of them. Now I was really struggling. Not only was my (much) better half four hundred miles away, but I needed to work on training materials Sunday afternoon and evening. How was I going to entertain two adults and three little girls while accomplishing my tasks? So many emotions ran through my head. My heart began to race, my muscles tensed up, and I had a choice to make -- go to silence or violence. Or did I have an alternative?

I needed to start with my heart. What did I want for myself and my guests? Was there a relationship that I wanted to

maintain? Did the work I felt I needed to do really need to get done on a Sunday afternoon and evening. The answer to both of these questions was a definite yes. I wanted to maintain a good relationship with my guests and I most definitely needed to get the work done before Monday morning. My next step was to see if I was making myself a victim, a villain, or telling myself a helpless story. After some careful analysis, I concluded that my assessment was accurate, and I needed to move into a **crucial conversation**.

To start the conversation, I simply shared my facts. I wasn't aware that they planned on staying until Monday and that I would need to go to my office Sunday afternoon to complete and print my training materials. In addition, I would need to spend time Sunday evening prepping for a Monday class. I expressed that I was very sorry and didn't want them to have to return home a day early. Once I had opened the conversation, I needed to get their input, so I asked if they had any ideas. Was there anything they could think of that would work for both of us? After a few minutes of conversation, it was decided that they would entertain themselves Sunday afternoon and evening. All they needed from me was a place to sleep Sunday night, and breakfast on Monday morning.

I know this sounds simple, but in the heat of the moment, I started to think that I only had two choices, keep quiet and have my entire weekend ruined or tell them they couldn't stay which would have ruined not only my weekend but our relationship. With a few simple, crucial conversation skills, we reached a solution that all of us could live with. I got my work done, they stayed until Monday morning, and the relationship is in tact. Next time you are faced with a difficult situation, why not try having a crucial conversation. If this is the first you have heard of **VitalSmarts' Crucial Conversations** course, why not join us for our next class.