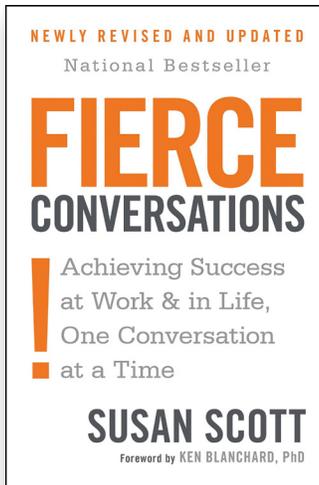


# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Susan Scott

*Susan Scott's firm, Fierce Inc., is an internationally recognized leader in cultural transformation and executive education. Previously, Scott ran think tanks for executives through TEC Worldwide for thirteen years.*

## Fierce Conversations

### THE NUTSHELL

The Berkley Publishing Group 2004

### Introduction

A fierce conversation is one in which we come out from behind ourselves into the conversation and make it real. It could go well or it could be a little bumpy, but at least you will have taken the plunge. You will have said at least one thing today that was real for you. Something will have been set in motion, and you will have grown from that moment.

### Principle 1: Master the Courage to Interrogate Reality

What each of us believes to be true simply reflects our views about reality. We are more likely to discover the truth we most need to understand today by demonstrating that everyone has a place at the corporate table. While each of us may know a better way for the company to do something, none of us knows more than the sum of everyone's ideas. People learn to think when we interrogate multiple realities. Real thinking occurs only when everyone is engaged in exploring differing viewpoints.

### Principle 2: Come Out from Behind Yourself into the Conversation and Make It Real

To discover who you are, you need to have a conversation with yourself. Write down how you feel about yourself, your life, and your worth. Next, write your personal stump speech by answering four questions: Where

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am going? Why am I going there? Who is going with me? How will I get there? You cannot come out from behind yourselves into conversations with others and make them real until you know who you are and what you intend to do with your life.

## **Principle 3: Be Here, Prepared to Be Nowhere Else**

Hearing people's words is only the beginning. Do you also hear their fears? their intentions? their aspirations? When we listen beyond words for intent, clarity and character emerge. You can draw others out with good questions and incredible listening on your part. Come into the conversation with empty hands. Bring nothing but yourself and come prepared to be nowhere else.

## **Principle 4: Tackle Your Toughest Challenge Today**

Fierce conversations cannot be dependent on how others respond. In other words, if you know something must change, then know that it is you who must change it. Your job is to extend the invitation. What if the invitation is declined? Extend it again and again. My experience is that when the invitation is extended with grace and skill, it will be accepted, even by those you have almost given up on. When we confront behavior with courage and skill, we are offering a gift. Of course, it goes both ways. While it may be difficult to hear what others have to say about us, there is likely to be a vein of gold worth mining.

## **Principle 5: Obey Your Instincts**

If we approach a conversation with the assumption that we know where it is going and what we need to say, we assume that logic is running the show. Things are not that simple. A fierce conversation is more original and varied in its choices. The heart, the guardian of intuition with its unsettling intentions, is the boss; its commands are ours to obey. Obeying our instincts and offering them up to a colleague or loved one allows both of us to know things we could not know otherwise. Together, we begin to see what this conversation wants to be about, and where it wants to go, and how to make it pulsingly real.

## **Principle 6: Take Responsibility for Your Emotional Wake**

Something you might not even remember saying may have had a devastating impact on someone looking to you for guidance and approval. By the same token, something you said years ago may have encouraged and inspired someone who is grateful to you to this day. Everything each of us says leaves an emotional wake. Positive or negative. If you create a mess, either single-handedly or in partnership with someone, do not bolt when things get emotional. Some topics of conversation are dicey, at best. But if you started it or you caused it, stay to the finish, even if the finish isn't what you had envisioned ahead of time. "I was wrong. I'm sorry." These are important words that too often remain lodged in our throats, even when we know they are desperately needed.

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## **Principle 7: Let Silence Do the Heavy Lifting**

Talking does not a conversation make. Words in the air are not guaranteed to accomplish anything useful. Important conversations require moments of silence during which we may reflect on what someone has said and consider our responses before opening our mouths. Our knee-jerk responses may not reflect our highest and best thoughts.

## **Conclusion: Embracing the Principles**

While the principles of fierce conversations may be impossible to live up to every day in every conversation, they are certainly something to shoot for, for your organization's sake, for the sake of your personal relationships, and most important, for your own sake. Don't be hard on yourself if you stumble from time to time. Don't let a failed conversation keep you from trying again. Hang on and hang in. Take it one conversation at a time, one day at a time.