FIERCE INSIGHT INTO 6 LEADING PROBLEMS BUSINESSES FACE TODAY— AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM.
You may think you’re addressing issues in your organization, but your current approach could be nothing more than a Band-Aid.

In this eBook, we offer Fierce insight into six leading business problems, the impact of these problems on your organization, how you can identify them in your workplace, and how to use skillful conversation to solve these challenges.

If you want to put a stop to your costly business losses, you have to address the root problem—ineffective conversations. The quality of your conversations will determine either the success or failure of your organization.
Many businesses are wasting time and money treating the symptoms of their problems instead of the root cause.

Based on conversations we’ve had with Fierce clients over the past 15+ years, we’ve identified some of the leading problems companies are facing in today’s market that are preventing them from growing and achieving maximum potential.

No company is immune to having or developing these problems, and it’s critical to address them head-on before they lead to even bigger issues that are preventable—including significant net losses, damages to company reputation, or in the worst-case scenario, a complete dissolution of your organization.

When companies are faced with challenges, it begs the question: What is the best way to solve them? What approach will actually facilitate change and produce desired outcomes?

Time and time again, we’ve witnessed organizations overcome their hurdles by addressing a single root cause: ineffective or non-existent conversations.

Unfortunately, when quality conversations aren’t happening, it leads to other ailments that entail significant business losses to the bottom line.

For each of the leading problems we’ve identified, we share...

1. The financial impact of the problem.
2. How to identify and diagnose the issue.
3. Fierce insight on addressing the matter.
4. How to take action through conversation.
5. How to develop the conversation skills required to solve these problems.
Where there’s a lack of clarity or understanding, there’s often a loss of time and earnings. Small clarity problems within an organization may seem insignificant at first, but gradually, they lead to bigger problems.
According to Vocoli, a business with 100 employees spends an average of 17 hours each week clarifying communication, translating to an annual cost of over $500,000.

On top of that, an article from Insider cites an About.com survey that found the top three reasons why people do not like their jobs (62% of responses) were communication-related.

It’s easy to see from these numbers alone that clarity matters. All results produced, whether wanted or unwanted, are determined by the quality of conversations taking place in your organization.

When miscommunication occurs frequently, employees and leaders alike become frustrated. It creates confusion and leads to other problems, including turnover and loss of productivity—and ultimately, a resulting loss of time and money.
HOW TO DIAGNOSE THIS PROBLEM

- **Disengagement** – Employees are not participating and absenteeism is high.
- **Power games** – Individuals are competing for control over time, projects, and other people.
- **Lack of follow-through** – Deadlines are missed and goals are unclear.
- **Groupthink** – Teams operate by consensus rather than challenging the status quo.
- **Avoidance** – Difficult conversations, including confrontation, aren’t happening.
- **Lack of skills** – Employees don’t have the conversation skills required to create clarity.
Time and money issues in your organization have one thing in common: *ineffective conversation*. Miscommunication is the root illness infecting your business.

The key solution is establishing a common language. When there is a shared understanding, employees are equipped to gain clarity when they need it.

Miscommunication has a direct and significant impact on employee engagement. The more high-quality conversations happen, the more engaged everyone is. Higher engagement leads to happier, better performing employees.
TAKE ACTION

Address this problem by creating clarity in areas where it’s needed most:

1. **ESTABLISH GOALS**
   If you don’t know what you’re working towards, your daily actions will have little context. If employees and leadership have different goals, or if anyone is unclear of what the intended outcomes are, engagement suffers. Have conversations around expectations with everyone involved.

2. **DEFINE ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**
   Employees need to know where the responsibilities of their role begin and end, and if (and how) those responsibilities might overlap with their coworkers. Effective delegation creates clarity. For example, it’s valuable to know whether an individual owns a certain task or they merely need to weigh in on the matter.

3. **ASK QUESTIONS**
   For conversations to be effective, they need to take place frequently and include clarifying questions. We have to be willing to communicate what we’re really thinking and feeling. Frequency is especially important when it comes to giving and requesting feedback. Taking a “when you see it, say it” approach is best—engagement improves when appreciation is out in the open and employees are clear on potential areas they can improve.
NEXT STEPS

Get trained in these Fierce Conversation Programs to save time and money at your organization:

- **fierce. TEAM®**: Shatter silos, increase collaboration, and boost buy-in across your organization.

- **fierce. FEEDBACK®**: Transform your feedback sessions into candid, consistent, two-way conversations that spark lasting change.

- **fierce. DELEGATE®**: Clarify roles, end micromanagement, and put people on a clear path of professional development.
2. TOP TALENT LEAVING

When skilled employees come and go, organizations lose out. Companies are left with open positions, and the process of finding the right fit comes at a significant cost.
The median wage for full-time workers in the US in the fourth quarter of 2017 was $44,564 per year according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and people working in professional, management, or related occupations (i.e., highly-trained employees), earned an average of $64,220 annually.

According to Bersin by Deloitte, turnover costs associated with replacing a highly-trained employee can set a company back as much as twice that individual’s annual salary.

This means that when companies lose employees, it’s costing upwards of over $100k. And this is just the loss associated with one employee leaving the organization. SHRM predicts the average annual turnover rate to be close to 19% for organizations in the US today.

Let’s put these statistics in the context of a fictional small and medium-sized business (SMB) of 250 employees... this would translate to an annual loss of 48 employees and between $4.2-$6.1 million in turnover costs.

Yikes...
HOW TO DIAGNOSE THIS PROBLEM

✅ Confused priorities – There is uncertainty among the team about what to prioritize that will create the greatest impact.

✅ Employee inaction – Initiatives are stalled. Employees are uncertain about where and how to take action.

✅ Unfair workloads – Some employees have an unrealistic workload, while others have too little.

✅ Clashing personalities – Team members feud with one another due to differences in approach or perspective.

✅ Micromanagement – Leaders are distrusting of employees, and as a result, employees lack the autonomy they need to excel.

✅ Lack of recognition – Praise is rarely given, and appreciation is seldom communicated.
If companies want to reduce the massive amounts of money they’re spending on turnover costs, they need to address why talent is leaving and shift their priorities to accommodate employee needs.

Old-school retention tactics such as competitive salary, stock options, and cash bonuses are not necessarily key motivators for keeping top performers anymore. While monetary incentives continue to play a role in career decisions, there are a few factors that are even more important to employees than income.
If you want to reduce turnover costs, retain top employees, and attract talent, you need to prioritize what the incumbent workforce wants most:

1. **PURPOSE & VALUE ALIGNMENT**
   Employees want to be part of the values conversation, and it’s important for engagement. Invite teams to collaborate in this conversation and decide together what you stand for as a company. Reinforce your company’s mission statement through every department strategy, every operational detail, and every customer experience.

2. **FEEDBACK & GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES**
   Job seekers and employees are wanting and asking for development opportunities. If an employee feels their organization is not supporting their personal and professional growth, they’re likely to seek out another organization who will satisfy this need. This desire for development includes a craving for ongoing feedback. Feedback helps us see what we may not see, giving us a clearer sense of how we can grow. Practice giving and receiving feedback in the moment, as situations arise, rather than saving all your thoughts for prescheduled one-on-ones. To support growth, delegate new tasks to individuals that are related to the areas they’ve expressed a desire to grow.

3. **HEALTHY WORKPLACE CULTURE**
   The formula for a positive workplace culture is C=R=C. The conversation is the relationship, the relationship is the culture. The quality of your conversations—knowing what to talk about and how to talk about it effectively—will directly impact your relationships and the quality of your culture.

**TAKE ACTION**

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NEXT STEPS

Get trained in these Fierce Conversation Programs to reduce employee turnover at your company:

- **fierce. DELEGATE®**
  Clarify roles, end micromanagement, and put people on a clear path of professional development.

- **fierce. FOUNDATIONS®**
  Undo old assumptions, spark new insights, and lay the groundwork for transformation across your organization.

- **fierce. FEEDBACK®**
  Transform your feedback sessions into candid, consistent, two-way conversations that spark change.
Transparency and trust go hand in hand—you can’t have one without the other. And without them, your workplace culture and relationships will suffer.
According to Edelman Trust Barometer, 82% of employees don’t trust their boss to tell the truth.

Honesty in the workplace is a topic that impacts every level of an organization and the top and bottom line of a business. According to Tolero Solutions, 45% of employees say lack of trust in leadership is the biggest issue impacting their work performance. That’s huge.

A Fierce survey of more than 1,400 executives and employees found an overwhelming—but not surprising—99% of professionals preferred a workplace where coworkers discuss issues truthfully.

A study from Corporate Executive Board found that organizations who rated highly in the area of open communication delivered a 10-year TSR (total shareholder return) of 7.9% compared to 2.1% at less-communicative organizations. Great Place to Work has found that high-trust companies financially outperform the S&P 500 by a factor of three—that’s right, your organization could be missing out on 3X its potential revenue!

At our fictional SMB of 250 employees, hypothetical net earnings of $10 million could grow to $30 million if there is an increase in transparency and open communication.
HOW TO DIAGNOSE THIS PROBLEM

- **Dishonesty** – Leaders tell white lies, and employees don’t have enough trust in leadership to share their personal truth.

- **Closed doors** – Employees are treated like outsiders. There is not an open line of communication between leaders, executives, and employees.

- **Poor participation** – Employees are reluctant to participate in social activities or contribute ideas to process improvements.

- **Silos** – Teams and departments are reluctant to intermingle. Conversation and cross-collaboration are happening rarely or not at all.

- **Rapid changes** – Decisions are being made from the top without seeking input first, leaving employees with a feeling of instability and uncertainty.

- **Personal agendas** – Decisions are being made in the best interest of certain individuals rather than the company as a whole.
Truth is (*pun intended*), we can be truthful in a way that opens doors, enriches the relationship, and encourages the conversation to move forward in a meaningful way.

Lies and secrets break trust, while honesty and transparency build trust. And when trust is created, it leads to a heightened sense of security and better employee performance.
TAKE ACTION

Here’s what you need to prioritize to increase transparency and create a culture of trust:

1 **SHARE YOUR EMOTIONS**
   Revealing what you really think and feel is necessary for building trust. Clarifying your expectations, expressing your desires, providing and receiving feedback, and being vulnerable when the opportunity arises are all part of being transparent and authentic.

2 **MAKE FINANCES ACCESSIBLE**
   Monthly, quarterly, and yearly disclosures regarding spend, profit, and where money is allocated gives employees a clear picture of company financial goals and how their daily efforts are creating an impact. It’s also important as a leader to be open to questions (and to answering them honestly) when it comes to pay rates, raises, bonuses, and profit sharing.

3 **BE CLEAR WITH INTENTIONS**
   Within an organization, values, goals, and mission statements must be clearly communicated and defined. Otherwise, individuals who are part of the larger entity won’t be able to clearly determine whether they are truthfully aligned with the organization’s intentions.

Does your team tell you the truth?  Or just what they think you want to hear?
NEXT STEPS

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Transform feedback into candid, consistent, two-way conversations that spark lasting change.

**fierce. FOUNDATIONS®**

Undo old assumptions, spark new insights, and lay the groundwork for transformation across your organization.

**fierce. CONFRONT®**

Have straight-up conversations that shift attitudes, reduce tension, and enrich relationships.
Even if a company has an established mission and clear sense of purpose, do employees feel connected to this purpose? The mission has to be integrated into operations, and leaders need to know how to communicate it effectively.
Values, mission, and purpose are becoming increasingly more important than external rewards in the decision-making process in today’s competitive job market. In fact, a high salary is the least important aspect of a job to both men and women, whereas holding a job with purpose is the most important aspect, according to Pew Research Center.

A Deloitte survey found that 60% of millennials shared that a “sense of purpose is part of the reason they chose their current employer.”

Recent studies by Bain & Company found that inspired employees who feel a sense of purpose are 125% more productive than satisfied employees and 56% more productive than employees who are engaged but not necessarily connected to greater meaning in what they do.

Unfortunately, according to The Energy Project, 50% of employees lack a level of meaning and significance at work.

At our fictional SMB, 125 out of its 250 employees would be lacking a sense of meaning and inspiration, which means over half of its workforce would be falling short of their full productivity potential.
HOW TO DIAGNOSE THIS PROBLEM

✔ Absence of company identity – Company values are either not established or not integrated into daily functions.

✔ Frequent conflicts & tension – Leaders and employees are often on different pages.

✔ Low motivation – Employees are disengaged and unenthusiastic about opportunities.

✔ Negativity – Employees have a pessimistic outlook and are problem- rather than solution-oriented.

✔ Inconsistent or unclear goals – The purpose and direction of the company is not made an influential factor in the creation of every goal.

✔ Lack of belonging – Individuals are not aware of their value as a contributor.
Profit and purpose don’t have to be mutually exclusive. In fact, many organizations have discovered that profit exists so we can fulfill our purpose. It starts with holding your employees able to achieve sustainable results and empowering them to work towards their purpose.

Offering external rewards and expecting employees to be more productive in return isn’t going to cut it. Employees need to be emotionally connected to the why behind what they do. It needs to start with the mission of the company.

FIERCE INSIGHT ON HOW TO CURE THIS PROBLEM
TAKE ACTION

Here’s how to align behaviors with purpose and create more intention:

1  HOLD ONE-ON-ONES WITH YOUR TEAM MEMBERS
   Create an environment of curiosity where you explore the feelings of team members and their alignment with the purpose of the organization. Don’t get defensive. Ask them about their ideas. What would make them feel more connected? Is there something that needs to be discussed? How can they contribute to solutions?

2  WRITE A STUMP SPEECH WITH YOUR TEAM
   A stump speech helps you clarify where you want to go and how you are going to get there. It sets the groundwork for the future by exploring the different perspectives of team members. To write a stump speech, answer the following questions:

   • Where are you going?
   • Why are you going there?
   • Who is going with you?
   • How are you going to get there?

   Once completed and you begin to carry out the actions of your intentions, you can go back and discuss as a team what has changed over time.

3  FIND YOUR OWN CONNECTION WITH PURPOSE
   Leaders with integrity bring all of who they are to their work, and the positive effects are felt by everyone around them. It’s critical for leaders to tap into what matters to them. People can spot leadership integrity outages from miles away. To lead with purpose, you have to know what your purpose is and give it your all.
Get trained in these Fierce Conversation Programs to help your team find purpose at work:

**NEXT STEPS**

**fierce. COACH®**
Uncover solutions, prompt action, and unblock professional paths.

**fierce. GENERATIONS®**
Undo age-related silos, increase inclusion, and create a competitive advantage for your business.

**fierce. TEAM®**
Shatter silos, increase collaboration, and boost buy-in across your organization.
A small amount of “positive stress” can boost productivity by giving us an incentive to do our best. However, too much stress weighs heavily on morale, reducing our productivity and leading to a workplace culture that won’t attract or retain talent.
THE IMPACT ON BUSINESSES TODAY

If you’re in a leadership role, it’s important to stay vigilant about managing not only your own stress but maintaining an awareness of employee stress levels within your organization. According to the American Institute of Stress, 1 million employees miss work each day due to stress.

Here are some other startling statistics that illustrate why organizations need to be mindful of managing stress:

- 73% of Americans are stressed to some degree at work (Harris Interactive).
- 40% of workers reported their job was very or extremely stressful (The American Institute of Stress).

Let’s put these statistics in the context of our 250-person SMB:

- 183 of 250 employees are stressed at work.
- 100 of those workers are very or extremely stressed.

If this example doesn’t illustrate the impact, here’s another way to look at it: According to Highbeam Research, 6.5 million sick days are taken every year as a result of stress, costing the United States $200 billion annually.

And it’s directly affecting work quality and productivity: Multi-Health Systems reports that 53% of Americans say stress dampens their productivity in the workplace, and according to The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, workers experiencing high levels of stress may be more liable to commit errors in their work.

High levels of workplace stress are leading to increased absenteeism, health problems, job dissatisfaction, and loss of company revenue.
HOW TO DIAGNOSE THIS PROBLEM

- **Indecision** – There’s talk about potential improvements but little action being taken.
- **Ineffective planning** – Deadlines are missed, and project timelines are poorly forecasted.
- **Demoralization** – Managers lead with fear-based tactics such as using punishments or taking away privileges for not meeting expectations.

- **Hostility** – People are frequently frustrated with their work and each other.
- **Weak relationships** – Conflicts are left unresolved, and people are intentionally avoiding one another.
- **Limited resources** – Employees don’t have the resources or support they need to meet expectations.
Nothing is more conducive to stress than a fear-based culture. Leaders need to focus on creating a culture of psychological safety where employees feel comfortable discussing stress with their leaders and ways to mitigate it.

If employees anticipate some form of punishment or feel they have no wiggle room to experiment or make mistakes, culture, innovation, and creativity will suffer—and stress levels will rise. As a leader, you have to be willing to allow employees, and yourself, to fail. Failure is part of taking risks, and it’s an important part of how we as humans learn and grow.
Here’s how you can improve your workplace culture, reduce stress, and boost productivity all at the same time:

1. **DELIVER WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT**
   Organizations with the best cultures and least amount of stress take employee requests into strong consideration and understand strong relationships are paramount to success. The best cultures take employee needs and desires, both physical and emotional, into account—leadership expresses appreciation, provides and requests ongoing feedback, grants autonomy, and listens with curiosity.

2. **ASSESS WORKLOADS & EMPLOYEE CAPACITY**
   Approximately 46% of employee stress is caused by excessive workloads. This is a pervasive problem in many organizations, and one that needs to be addressed. Excessive workloads can cause issues among all levels of an organization—burdening leadership, teams, and individual employees.

3. **MAKE ROOM FOR WHITESPACE**
   Juliet Funt, founder of WhiteSpace at Work, shares that WhiteSpace is a strategic pause between activities that allows for thoughtful reflection. Make WhiteSpace a part of your organization’s culture. Communicate its value and encourage employees to implement it into their work day.

Are the tasks you’re assigning helping your team grow? Or are they just creating stress?
NEXT STEPS

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Just because people are putting in time and effort doesn’t mean they’re producing results. Precious time is being lost in meetings, and teams are missing out on opportunities for more collaboration.
Team meetings can be authentic and energizing...or fake and draining.

According to Industry Week, $37 billion is lost annually due to unproductive meetings.

Lucid Meetings research reports that 55 million meetings occur per day. For average workers, that means eight meetings per week. For managers, 12 per week. Meetings range from mission critical for completion of a project or milestone to completely useless. And let's be honest—with so many hours in meetings, it can be easy to go into autopilot mode and not meet our production goals.

Thinking about our fictional SMB, let's say 25 out of 250 employees are in management positions, and we'll estimate that these meetings last an hour.

- Managers would be spending a collective total of approximately 300 company hours per week in meetings.
- Employees would be spending a collective total of approximately 1,800 hours per week in meetings.
- As a company, approximately 2,100 hours a week would be spent in meetings.

If you’re a connected leader, chances are you meet with your team weekly or bi-weekly to touch base and talk shop. While the details of the meeting will vary from leader to leader, the goal is usually the same—share ideas, innovate, and strategize.

However, when speaking with our clients, it's common to hear that hosting meaningful meetings can be tough. Typically the conversations stay surface level. The key to a productive “Modern Meeting” is to understand that it’s about collaboration, not consensus.
HOW TO DIAGNOSE THIS PROBLEM

- **Challenges with expectations** – Expectations are unclear or unrealistic for both leaders and employees.
- **Pointless meetings** – Employees are disengaged, and nothing is accomplished. They may leave meetings with even less clarity than they had before.
- **Project delays** – There’s a lack of clarifying conversations to move projects forward.
- **Lack of ROI** – There’s no return on investments in both product and skill development.
- **Lack of innovation** – Nothing new is being brought to the table. There’s a lack of collaborative team conversation, and leaders are not requesting input from their teams.
- **Ineffective leadership** – Leaders don’t have the skills necessary to support their teams and produce results.
According to a Forbes survey of over 750 business executives, face-to-face meetings build stronger, more meaningful business relationships, enhance ability to read body language, and increase the ability for complex strategic thinking.

As a leader, it is your duty to understand all of the perspectives that need to be heard before making final decisions. Team meetings are a powerful way to work together where everyone can roll up their sleeves and really collaborate.
TAKE ACTION

Here’s how you can make the conversations within your meetings more robust and deliberate:

1. **NOT ALL AGENDAS ARE CREATED EQUAL**
   While there may be some logistical details that need to be covered in your meetings, they shouldn’t be presented to the group in the same way as an idea that needs real creative thought around it. In our Fierce Team® Program, we use a preparation form that breaks out what the issue is, why it’s significant, the ideal outcome, and what help is needed from the group. No matter what model you use, make sure to ask questions and share information in a way that gets the creative juices flowing so your team can share their fully-informed perspectives on the topic. Speak to the heart of the issue quickly to leave more time for conversation.

2. **WHAT ELSE?**
   If you’re running the meeting, then your purpose is to facilitate the conversation. This means that you should probe for understanding and provoke the learning of others by asking them, “What else?” On any given topic, a good rule of thumb is to ask “what else” at least three times. Every time you ask, you have the opportunity to go deeper in the conversation.

3. **LEAVE ROOM FOR EVERYONE**
   As the leader of this meeting, you should leave space for others who don’t speak up as often to share their opinions by asking them directly for their perspectives. If doing this is not common in your culture, communicate that you don’t mean to pick on these quieter team members—let them know that you’re asking because you really want to hear their perspectives, and you value their opinions. Keep in mind that some individuals may need more time to process their ideas than others.
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If your organization is experiencing any of the problems above and they’re left unaddressed, it will come at a significant cost to the business.

Leaders—it’s not too late to tackle these tough challenges and cure your organization of what ails it. Shift priorities and begin having the conversations that will strengthen relationships, improve culture, and produce results.

As Fierce Founder and CEO Susan Scott wrote in her book *Fierce Conversations*, “Our careers, our companies, our relationships, and our very lives succeed or fail, gradually then suddenly, one conversation at a time.”
GET TRAINED.

Solve your business problems with Fierce. Whether you have minutes, hours, or days, we work with your schedule to best set you and your team up for continued success.

Here’s how it’s done:

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**
60 minutes
In just one hour, our founder and CEO or one of our Master Facilitators will inspire your company to revolutionize its way of communicating. A great way to jump start a conference, retreat, or team-building session.

[Book a speaker](#)

**IN-PERSON WORKSHOP**
2 days
In this training, we teach your team how to communicate effectively. Hire one of our Master Facilitators to teach your team how to have conversations that get the results you’re looking for.

[Schedule a workshop](#)

**VIRTUAL WORKSHOP**
2 hours
Whether your workforce is in Mumbai or Memphis, teach your team how to have conversations that matter with this instructor-led, online training designed to best solve your communication problems.

[Schedule a workshop](#)

**TRAINER CERTIFICATION**
4 days
Renowned for its rigor and results, certify one—or several—of your employees in Fierce to embed conversational expertise directly within your organization.

[Get certified](#)
READY TO GET STARTED?
CALL 206.787.1100 OR BOOK A MEETING WITH A MEMBER OF OUR TEAM TODAY.