



HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Good Conflict is friction that can be serious and intense but leads somewhere useful. It does not collapse into dehumanization. Also known as healthy conflict.

High Conflict (HC) is a conflict that becomes self-perpetuating and all-consuming, in which almost everyone ends up worse off. Typically, an us-versus-them conflict.

▶ **Paradox No. 1 of HC:** we are animated by high conflict, and we are also haunted by it. We want it to end, and we want it to continue.

▶ **Paradox No. 2 of HC:** no one will change in the ways you want them to until they believe you understand and accept them for who they are right now (and sometimes not even then).

Power of Binary is the dangerous reduction of realities or choices into just two. For example: Black and White, good and evil, and Democrat and Republican.

What is High Conflict?

Conflicts are inevitable in life. With friends, family members, co-workers, and strangers, conflicts will arise, and understanding what conflict is and how it presents will inform how we navigate through them. *High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out* by Amanda Ripley provides helpful language and action steps for recognizing and preventing high conflict.

GOOD VERSUS HIGH CONFLICT (APPENDIX I AND II)

Good Conflict	High Conflict
Humility	Certainty
Fluidity	Rigidity
Many different emotions	Same emotions
Complexity	Simplicity
Novelty	Predictability
Passion	Righteousness
Spikes in stress hormones, followed by recovery	Chronic stress hormones, rumination, sleep disturbances
Curiosity	Assumption
Questions	Advocacy
All sides want to find solutions	One or all sides do not want to find a solution. They want to fight.
Feelings of sadness when bad things happen to other side	Feelings of happiness when bad things happen to other side
Non-zero sum thinking	Zero-sum thinking
Violence unlikely	Violence more likely

Indicators that you engaged in High Conflict:

Language To Look For	Actions To Watch For
<p>“Whenever you hear language that seems disproportionate to the conflict, pay attention. A high conflict exceeds itself” (p. 234).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do people use sweeping, grandiose, or violent language?2. Are rumors, myths, or conspiracy theories present?	<p>“High conflicts tend to erupt in places with low trust. When there is low trust, it is very hard to create a consensus about the facts” (p. 237).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do other people withdraw from the conflict, leading to the appearance of just two binary extremes.2. Does the conflict seem to have its own momentum?

If the answer is yes to **five or more** of the questions below, you are likely engaged in high conflict.

1. Do you lose sleep thinking about this conflict?
2. Do you feel good when something bad happens to the other person or side, even if it doesn't directly benefit you?
3. If the other side were to do something you actually agreed with, some small act, would it feel very uncomfortable to acknowledge this out loud?
4. Does it feel like the other side is brain-washed, like a cult member, beyond the reach of moral reasoning?
5. Do you ever feel stuck? Like your brain keeps spinning, ruminating over the same grievances, over and over again, without ever uncovering any new insights?
6. When you talk about the conflict with people who agree with you, do you say the same over and over...
7. ... and leave the conversation feeling slightly worse than when you started talking?
8. Has someone who knows you very well told you they don't recognize you anymore?
9. Do you ever find yourself defending your own side by pointing out that the other side does the same thing—or worse?
10. Do you see different people on the other side as essentially interchangeable? If your conflict is with just one other person, is it hard to conjure a visual of that person as the small child they once were, even if you try?
11. Do you use words like “always,” “good,” “bad,” “us” and “them,” or “war” when you talk about the conflict?
12. Do you find it hard to remember the last time you felt genuine curiosity about the other side's thoughts, intentions, or actions?

PREVENTING HIGH CONFLICT (APPENDIX III)

1. **Investigate the Understory:** What is the root cause/story underneath the conflict.
2. **Reduce the Binary:** Avoid putting people into unnecessary groupings. Create traditions and routines that “scramble the groups.” It is important to note that separating people into binary groups may be necessary based on the needs of the involved parties; however, groups should not stay here. Movement toward positive intergroup relations supports the mitigation of conflict.

3. Marginalize the Fire Starters: Fire starters are people who delight in conflict and attempt to bond with others who share their disdain of another person or group of people. Create distance from them when possible.

4. Buy Time and Make Space: Establish ritual for conflict. Spend time away from the person, collect your thoughts, and schedule a time to come back together to re-engage the topic.

5. Complicate the Narrative: “Be suspicious of simple stories.” Stories are more complicated than how they are often communicated. Instead, be curious. Getting curious about people you disagree with can make conflict healthier.

CITATIONS

Ripley, A. (2023). *High conflict: Why we get trapped and how we get out*. Simon & Schuster.