

GOOD CONFLICT STARTER KIT



To succeed in our current age of conflict, you have to do counterintuitive things. You cannot just do what you've always done. You have to take proactive, strategic actions—which require preparation and practice. This means equipping yourself with new language and skills, with go-to tactics to interrupt escalating conflict and investigate what is *really* going on, through all the noise. Here is a starter kit to help you start to re-imagine conflict for good.

4 Steps of Good Conflict



Identify the high
conflict & **map it.**



Investigate the
understory.



Have the
right fight.



Normalize
good conflict.

From High Conflict to Good Conflict

High Conflict is a trap. It warps our perception and becomes all-consuming. We end up harming the thing we went into the fight to protect.

The best defense against High Conflict?

Cultivate a culture of Good Conflict, on purpose.

From High Conflict  To Good Conflict

Contempt

Anger

Closed

Open

Superiority

Curiosity

Disgust

Sadness

Simplicity

Complexity

Predictability

Surprise

Violence Likely

Violence Unlikely

Fire Starters

Accelerants that lead conflict to explode, including group identities, conflict entrepreneurs, humiliation, and corruption.



Humiliation

A forced and public loss of dignity, pride, or status



Corruption

When institutions cannot be trusted



Binary Group Identities

Us vs. them, Republican vs. Democrat, Black vs. White



Conflict Entrepreneurs

People who exploit conflict for their own ends

15 Good Conflict Questions

Starter Questions

- How did we get here?
- How has this conflict affected you personally?
- What life experiences have shaped your views on this subject?
- What do you think the other group thinks of you or your group?
- What do you wish they understood about you?
- What would you like to understand about them?

15 Good Conflict Questions

Entree Questions

- What would it be like if you woke up tomorrow and this problem was solved? How might you know?

Can you walk me through that day?

- How do you feel, telling that story?
- What is oversimplified about this issue?
- What do you think is the strongest argument for the other side?
- Where do you feel torn?

15 Good Conflict Questions

Dessert Questions

- What would you have said about this issue if I'd asked 10 years ago?
- What's a question nobody's asking, but should?
- How do you decide which information to trust?
- Tell me more.

6 Counterintuitive Moves for Healthy Conflict

- 1** Your intuition may tell you to follow your impulse and improvise. *Don't do this.* Instead: Rehearse.
 (Literally write down what you are going to say and practice it out loud. Maybe ask a trusted friend to play the role of the other person so this rehearsal is more realistic.)
- 2** Your intuition may tell you to play it cool. Never let them see you sweat. *Don't do this.* Instead: Humanize yourself.
 (Be 10% vulnerable. Reveal some of what you are struggling with, what you don't know, what keeps you up at night. The more human you are, the harder you are to dehumanize.)
- 3** Your intuition may tell you to call out bad behavior on social media or in a meeting, right when it happens. *Don't do this.* Instead: Remove the audience.
 (Talk to people privately whenever you can. A one-on-one conversation is ideal. A direct message is better than a post. The smaller the audience, the lower the odds of humiliation.)
- 4** Your intuition may tell you to give up on any conflict entrepreneurs in your life. We get it! *Don't (always) do this.* Instead: Get curious.
 (Many conflict entrepreneurs are hard to marginalize. If so, learn more. What else do they care about, outside of the conflict? Can you redirect some of their energy?*)
- 5** Your intuition may be to ignore anything you and your opponents have in common. *Don't do this.* Instead: Showcase what you share.
 (Highlight the things you both genuinely care about and appreciate. This might feel weird, but if it's authentic, it can boost the magic ratio and make hard conversations easier.)
- 6** Your intuition may be to bury any references to past conflicts when you onboard new employees or bring groups together. *Don't do this.* Instead: Tell stories about good conflict.
 (Immortalize healthy conflicts that have made you or your organization stronger. Stories normalize good conflict, and stories are what people remember.)

To Go Deeper...

Here are some ways we can continue to work together...



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