The Conflict Trap

Amanda Ripley

Photo by Zachary DeBottis via Pexels
How prevalent is high conflict?

45%

Americans stopped talking to someone about politics because of something they said

How prevalent is high conflict?

62%

say they have political views they’re afraid to share
How prevalent is high conflict?

54% Americans see each other as the biggest threat

- Economic forces: 20%
- Natural disasters: 17%
- Foreign threats: 8%

High Conflict

A conflict that becomes self-perpetuating and all-consuming, in which almost everyone ends up worse off.

Typically an us-versus-them conflict.
**Good Conflict vs. High Conflict**

- Surprise
- Fluidity
- Many different emotions
- Complexity
- Humility
- Passion
- Spikes in stress hormones
- Violence unlikely

- Predictability
- Rigidity
- Same emotions
- Simplicity
- Certainty
- Righteousness
- Chronic stress
- Violence more likely

[Credit: Sean Patrick Forrest]
Into Conflict…

Conflict Entrepreneur

People, companies or media outlets who inflame conflict to find meaning, power or profit
Into Conflict...

Humiliation = A forced and public degradation; an unjustified loss of dignity, pride or status

Into Conflict...

False Binary = The dangerous reduction of realities or choices into just two
Good Conflict…

Half of what most people want in conflict (and life) is to be heard & understood
Most people never feel heard & understood

Looping Exercise

The Goal:

To understand.

By listening better—in ways people can see.
Looping Exercise

Ground Rules

Commit to listening...not debating, fixing, agreeing or even sympathizing.

Keep these conversations confidential, please.
Looping Exercise

Round 1:

Describe a conflict you’ve had with a constituent.

What was the conflict about?
What was its impact on you?

Discuss what that felt like from each person’s perspective.

What was hard about looping, if anything? How did it feel to be looped?
Looping Exercise

Round 2: *Switch Places*

Describe a conflict you’ve had with a constituent.

What was the conflict about?
What was its impact on you?

Discuss what that felt like from each person’s perspective.

What was hard about looping, if anything? How did it feel to be looped?
Questions to Ask in Conflict

• What is oversimplified about this issue?
• How has this conflict affected your life?
• What do you think the other side thinks of you?
• What would it be like for you if you got what you wanted?
• Tell me more.

High Conflict

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