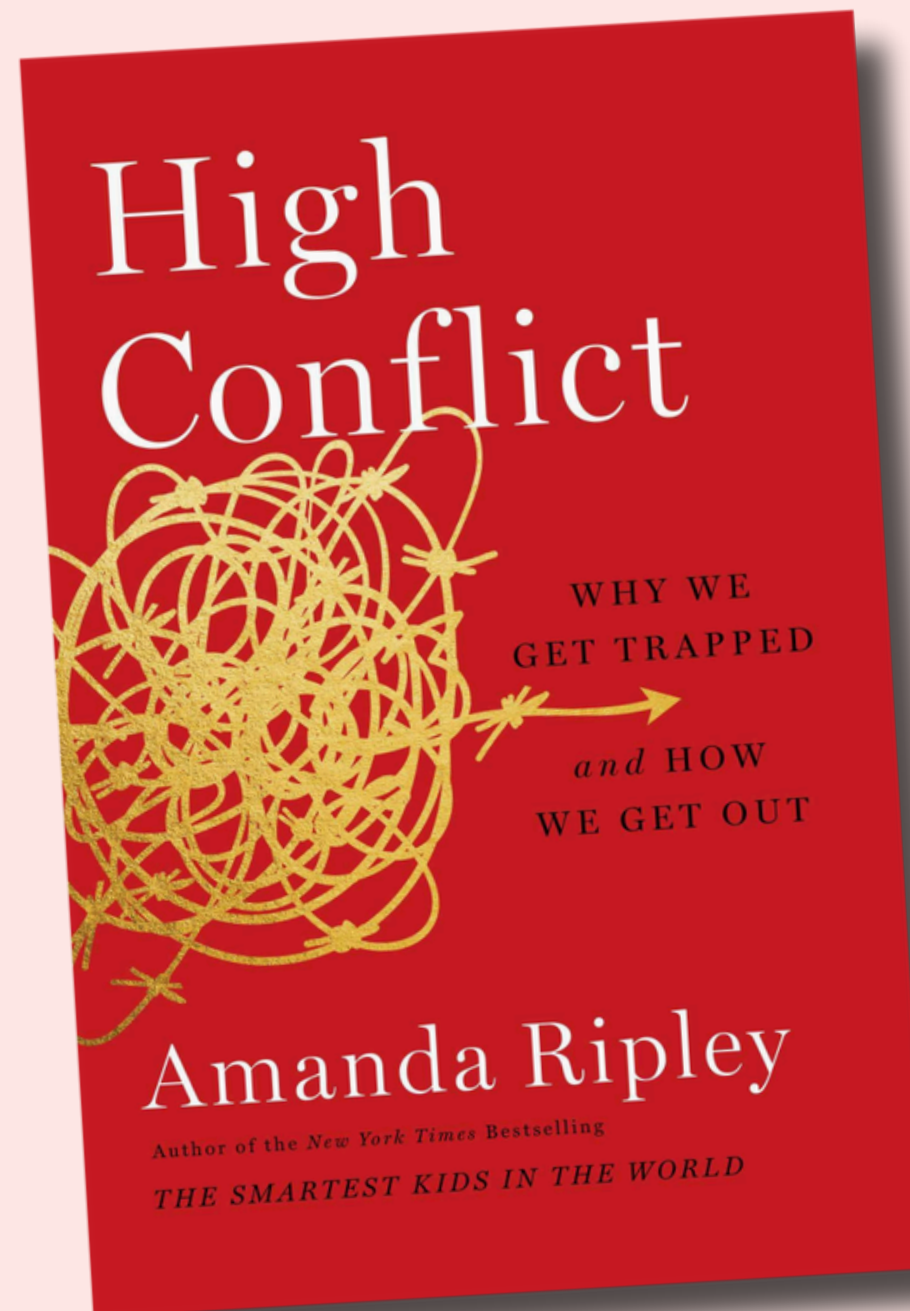


NOTES ON





High conflict hijacks us with the illusion of certainty and moral righteousness—unlike healthy conflict, which fuels growth.



Healthy vs High Conflict

Conflict can bring a healthy and important heat that helps us clarify and improve things while keeping our dignity intact.

However, 'high conflict' can be hard to recognize. It becomes self-perpetuating and all consuming. It can lead us into a trance where we end up harming ourselves, our loved ones and what we are fighting for.

This leads all involved to be worse off.



Anatomy of High Conflict

1. **Understory:** the hidden dynamics and emotional drivers behind escalation.
2. **Binary thinking:** Us vs. them simplifies nuance into rigid categories. Emotionally fuels division.
3. **Idiot-Driver Reflex:** “Context for me but not for thee” makes you the hero and the other party the villain.
4. **Conflict entrepreneurs or fire-starters:** individuals who stoke tension for attention or power.
5. **Humiliation:** “Humiliation is the nuclear bomb of emotions”



Idiot Driver Reflex

“Context for me, but not for thee”

When make mistakes, we naturally take into account all the details that led us to do what we did, all the circumstances and context.

When we consider other’s behavior, by contrast, we tend to reflexively blame their inherent moral failings, and shut out relevant context.

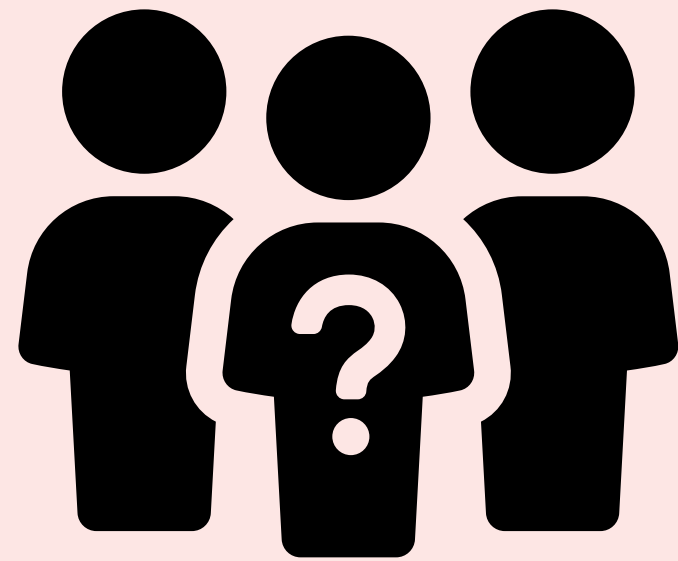
Conflict Entrepreneurs draw on absolutist language that tends to make people more attached to conflict and less flexible.



“Grandiose language is one way conflict entrepreneurs manipulate our emotions. It clarifies everything, washing away important details, energizing us to fight, to sacrifice, to ignore costs.”

ASK THE QUESTION:

“WHO DOES THIS SERVE?”



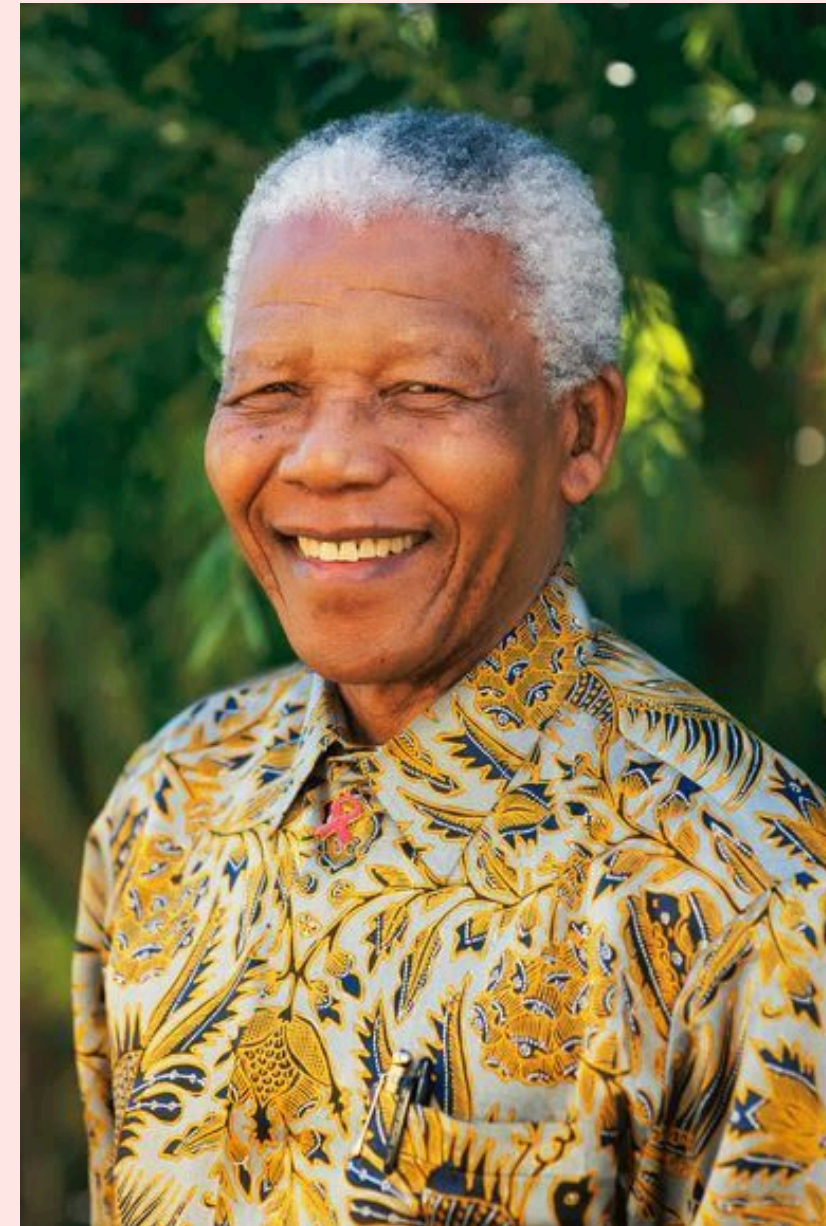
Does your emotion or position serve the firestarter, or another party who is moving you further away from what matters most?

Does your emotion or position actually serve the people or cause that matters most, moving toward something better?

“There is nobody more dangerous than one who has been humiliated, even when you humiliate him rightly.”



Nelson Mandela





Ways to get out of 'high conflict....



How Listening and Curiosity Help

- **Active Listening / Looping:** capture the essence of what is said and ask if your summary was correct.
- **Slows conversations, defuses emotion, and surfaces deeper truths.**
- **Reframing and humanizing:** Seeing opponents as complex people, not caricatures.



More Strategies to Exit High Conflict

Investigate Understory: Uncover real motivations and emotional triggers. Listen to what might be important and valid about them.

Reduce binaries: Recognize shared goals and identities.

Marginalize fire starters: Stop amplifying conflict entrepreneurs.

Buy time & make space: Pause escalation, give everyone space to reconsider.

Complicate the narrative: Add nuance to stories; avoid hero/villain framing.

Interrupting “High Conflict” patterns takes self-awareness, deep breaths and intention

In his head, he’d ask himself three questions:

Does it need to be said?

If the answer was yes, then he’d ask himself:

does it need to be said by me?

And if still yes: Does it need to be said by me right now?

It was surprising how often the answer was No.”

- **Resist binaries**
- **Don't give in to the idiot-driver reflex**
- **Resist conflict entrepreneurs or firestarters**
- **Ask “Who is this serving”**
- **In talking with someone from the other side, “loop” “reflect” “hit the bullseye” – you will understand things you didn't before (even if you don't agree**

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

**AND GET TO KNOW STORIES AND PEOPLE
YOU ARE NOT FAMILIAR WITH.**



WHEN ENCOUNTERING YOUR “GO TO” SOURCES:

**SUSPEND YOUR BELIEF AND
ACCESS CRITICAL THINKING**

WHEN ENCOUNTERING SOURCES YOU USUALLY DISMISS:

**SUSPEND YOUR DISBELIEF
AND ACCESS COMPASSION**