GOOD CONFLICT TOOLKIT

Purpose: To unwind "us vs. them" narratives, build trust, challenge stereotypes, locate hope, and communicate effectively to open people up to different ways of thinking about themselves, other people, and what divides us.
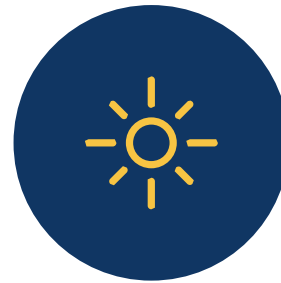
4 Steps of
Good Conflict Journalism

1

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

2

Investigate the **understory**.

3

Illuminate the (real) issue through your reporting.

4

Infuse good conflict **into the community**.

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From High Conflict to Good Conflict

Every great story has conflict! The goal is not to get rid of conflict. The goal is to make conflict fascinating–and useful. To do that, Good Conflict journalism helps people and communities shift away from the trap of High Conflict — into the realm of Good Conflict.

From High Conflict ———— To Good Conflict

From High Conflict	To Good Conflict
Contempt	Anger
Closed	Open
Superiority	Curiosity
Disgust	Sadness
Simplicity	Complexity
Predictability	Surprise
Violence Likely	Violence Unlikely

GOOD CONFLICT

Fire **Starters**

Accelerants that Spark High Conflict.

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

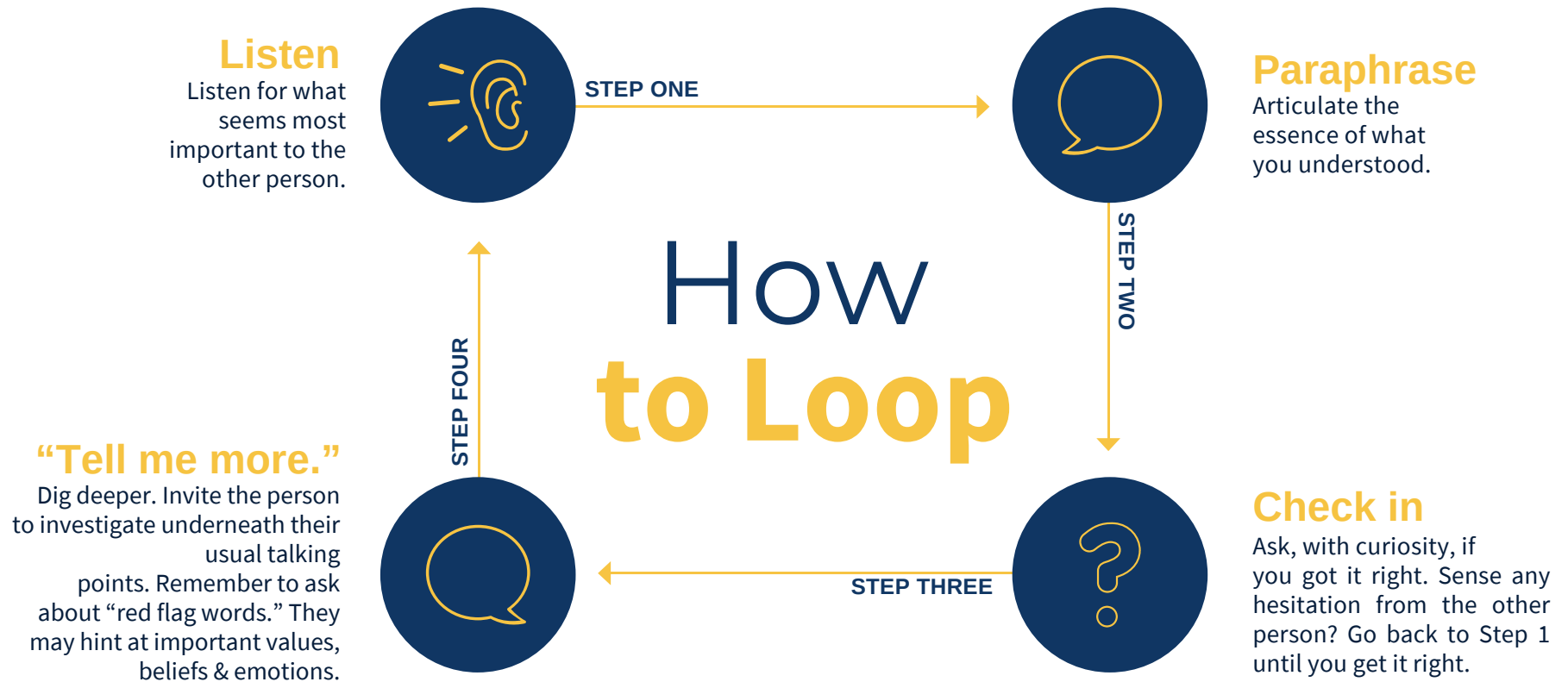GOOD CONFLICT

How to **Map** a Conflict

1. Identify all the obvious groups or people engaged in the conflict.

2. Add the **less obvious** groups or people influencing the conflict.

3. Include anyone who might be **interrupting** the conflict in a positive way. The legal system? Faith leaders? Trusted 3rd parties?

4. Identify any **Fire Starters** affecting the conflict:
a. *Humiliation* (Does anyone feel disrespected, whether they should or not?)
b. *Corruption* (Is any institution not trusted to do what it should?)
c. *Binary Group Identities* (What are the Us vs. Them categories here?)
d. *Conflict Entrepreneurs* (Is anyone exploiting the conflict for their own ends?)

5. Are you or your **organization** on this map? What about other organizations?

6. Put a ✓ next to the map elements you already know.

7. Put a ✳ next to the people or groups you haven't heard much from yet.

8. Consider (*just consider*) showing the map to other people in the conflict and in your community and asking what you might be missing.

GOOD CONFLICT

COMMON
UNDERSTORIES

Every conflict has the thing it seems to be about--and the thing it's really about. Usually, the understory features one or two of these deeper concerns:

- POWER & CONTROL
- CLOSENESS & CARE
- RESPECT & RECOGNITION
- STRESS & OVERWHELM

How to Loop

Listen
Listen for what seems most important to the other person.

STEP ONE

Paraphrase
Articulate the essence of what you understood.

STEP TWO

"Tell me more."
Dig deeper. Invite the person to investigate underneath their usual talking points. Remember to ask about "red flag words." They may hint at important values, beliefs & emotions.

STEP FOUR

STEP THREE

Check in
Ask, with curiosity, if you got it right. Sense any hesitation from the other person? Go back to Step 1 until you get it right.

The Scoop on Looping

Looping is a communication technique that transforms how we listen and connect with others. Used by conflict mediators and psychologists, looping gets beneath talking points. By proving we are trying to understand one another, looping builds trust, creates clarity, and invokes curiosity–even amidst profound disagreement.

SOURCE: Looping is a technique developed by Gary Friedman and Jack Himmelstein of The Center for Understanding in Conflict.

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www.TheGoodConflict.com

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?

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?

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.

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Good Conflict **Story Checklist**

Use this handy checklist to tell high-impact stories from a Good Conflict lens. Each step will help you illuminate the conflict you're covering in surprising and useful ways–rather than just inflaming it. Good Conflict reporting builds conflict fluency and resilience in the communities we serve.

- ☐ **Create a conflict map.** Be sure to include any "fire starters."

- ☐ Pick an angle that **has not been well-covered.**

- ☐ Interview subjects who **break binary narratives:**

  - *An unsure source.*

  - *A changed source.*

  - *A "misfit" source.*

- ☐ Interview **sources from opposing sides together** when possible.

- ☐ **Loop your sources & ask revealing questions** to find the understory.

- ☐ In the story, **tease the reveal of the understory** the way you'd set up a mystery: *"It looks like the conflict is about…, but is that really it?"*

- ☐ **Illuminate the conflict** in your story by:

  - *Using data to disrupt binary narratives.*

  - *Rightsizing voices & problems using proportionality [who, what, when —and out of how many?]*

  - *Widening the lens by exploring the history of the conflict in your town—or a comparable conflict far away.*

- ☐ **Debrief with sources** & the public after your story is released.

- ☐ **Build conflict resilience in your community** through radical engagement (think: "magic ratio").

GOOD CONFLICT

Glossary of Terms

Binary group identities: The dangerous reduction of realities or choices into just two. For example: Black and White, good and evil, Democrat and Republican.

Conflict entrepreneurs: People who exploit high conflict for their own ends.

Conflict map: A tool for identifying accelerants of conflict and generating good-conflict story ideas.

Contact theory: The idea that people from different groups will, under certain conditions, tend to become less prejudiced toward one another after spending time together. Good-conflict journalism offers contact by proxy (through storytelling) or in real life, through joint interviews or facilitated community gatherings.

Fire starters: Accelerants that lead conflict to explode in violence, including group identities, conflict entrepreneurs, humiliation, and corruption.

Good conflict: Friction that can be serious and intense but leads somewhere useful. Does not collapse into dehumanization. Also known as healthy conflict.

Good conflict journalism: Conflict coverage that illuminates, rather than inflames. Usually reduces false binaries, reveals a hidden understory, and sparks understanding, agency, dignity or hope.

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

Glossary of Terms

High conflict journalism: Coverage that inflames or amplifies an existing intractable conflict. Typically characterized by us-versus- them framing, repetition of clichéd talking points or superficial grievances, and zero-sum thinking.

Humiliation: A forced and public degradation; an unjustified loss of dignity, pride, or status. Can lead to high conflict and violence.

Looping: An iterative, four-step active listening technique in which the person listening reflects back what the person talking seems to have said— and checks to see if the summary was right. (Developed by mediators Gary Friedman and Jack Himmelstein and detailed in their book *Challenging Conflict*.)

Magic ratio: When the number of everyday positive interactions between people significantly outweighs the number of negative, creating a buffer that helps keep conflict healthy. (In marriage, for example, the magic ratio is 5 to 1, according to research by psychologists Julie and John Gottman.)

Paradox of High Conflict: Any intuitive thing you do to end the conflict will make it worse. You must do counterintuitive things, with care.

Telling: The use of superficial shortcuts (like clothing or hair color) to quickly figure out who belongs to which group in a given conflict. A term used in Northern Ireland.

Understory: The thing the conflict is really about, underneath the usual talking points. The most interesting and unexplored part of a conflict story.

Do you have any questions?

To learn more about our resources, go to **TheGoodConflict.com**.

Also, be sure to check out our **How To Guide** for navigating divisive topics through local TV news stories.

Please let us know if you have any questions or ideas when going through this toolkit.

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