



Understanding & Managing High Conflict People

People for People
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The Continuum

Effective Problem Solving	Situational Difficulties	High Conflict People	
←		→	→
<i>Normal Range of Response</i>		<i>High Conflict Behaviors</i>	<i>Personality Disorders</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ← Work long hours ← Hardship ← Divorce ← Job Loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often rigid/uncompromising • Unable to self reflect • Difficulty with empathy • Blames others • Avoids responsibility • Jumps to conclusions • Defensive • Cannot handle criticism • Demands special treatment • Creates ongoing drama • Manipulative behaviors • Frequent anger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narcissistic • Borderline • Histrionic • Anti-social • Paranoid • Avoidant 	



High-Conflict People

- All-or-Nothing thinking
- Unmanaged Emotions
- Extreme Behaviors
- Preoccupation with Blaming Others
- Difficulty Accepting and Healing Loss
- Emotions Dominate Thinking
- Depends on Others to Solve Problems
- May have Personality Disorders (PDs)

HIGH CONFLICT

Core Issues of PDs:
#1: LACK OF SELF-AWARENESS

People with personality disorders lack awareness of:

- Why they are the way they are
- How they contribute to own problems
- How to change

-- Aaron Beck (1990)
Cognitive Therapy of Personality Disorders

- Why they feel upset right now
- How they affect other people
- What skills they have that *do work*

They don't gain insights from feedback.

HIGH CONFLICT

Core Issues of PDs:
#2: LACK OF CHANGE

When person loses "flexible adaptation" & takes a "non-reflective stance" in social interactions:

1. Behavior becomes rigidly patterned
2. This causes significant social impairment
3. Which causes significant internal distress
4. This rigid behavior **evokes responses in others** which "validate" their inflexible beliefs

-- Efrain Bleiberg (2001) *Treating Personality Disorders in Children and Adolescents*

HIGH CONFLICT

Responding to
#2: LACK OF CHANGE

We often need do opposite of what's evoked in us.

Resist fight, flight or freeze urges.

Resist disliking a person or being charmed too easily.



Core Issues of PDs: #3: Externalizing Responsibility

“High Conflict People” (HCPs) externalize by focusing on specific person or group – their “Target of Blame” This leads them into intense conflict in relationships, the workplace and sometimes litigation against that individual or group:

“He’s the cause of all of my problems. Once he’s out of my life, everything will be fine.”

“I had to hit her, after what she said to me.”



Disclaimer

- This seminar does not train you to diagnose personalities.
- It may be harmful to tell someone that you believe that they have personality problems or a high conflict personality.
- Just develop your Private Working Theory
 - Private (Don’t tell the person you think this)
 - Working (Use it in adapting your approach)
 - Theory (Accept that you may be wrong)

5 High Conflict Personality Disorders

- “I’m Very Superior” (Narcissistic) Personalities
Demanding and demeaning, self-absorbed
- “Love you, Hate you” (Borderline) Personalities
Overly friendly, then angry, sudden mood swings
- “You’ll Betray Me” (Paranoid) Personalities
Suspicious, expects conspiracies, counter-attacks first
- “Con Artists” (Antisocial) Personalities
Breaks rules & laws, deceptive, enjoys hurting others
- “Always Dramatic” (Histrionic) Personalities
Superficial, helpless, exaggerates, center of attention

**Prevalence of Personality Disorders
(NIH Study 2001-05)**

National Institutes of Health study of over 35,000 people had following results for 5 "high conflict" personality disorders:

- Narcissistic = 6.2%
- Borderline = 5.9%
- Paranoid = 4.4%
- Antisocial = 3.6%
- Histrionic = 1.8%

All have substantial overlap with other personality disorders, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and suicide

---Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 7/2004, 4/2008 & 7/2008

**Prevalence of Personality Disorders
(NIH Study by Age Groups)**

- Narcissistic = 6.2%
65+=3.2 45-64=5.6 30-44=7.1 20-29 = 9.4
- Borderline = 5.9%
65+=2.0 45-64=5.5 30-44=7.0 20-29 = 9.3
- Paranoid = 4.4%
65+=1.8 45-64=3.6 30-44=5.0 18-29 = 6.8
- Antisocial = 3.6%
65+=0.6 45-64=2.8 30-44=4.2 18-29 = 6.2
- Histrionic = 1.8%
65+=0.6 45-64=1.2 30-44=1.8 18-29 = 3.8

Gender of Personality Disorders

- Narcissistic =
___% Male to ___ % Female
- Borderline =
___% Male to ___ % Female
- Paranoid =
___% Male to ___ % Female
- Antisocial =
___% Male to ___ % Female
- Histrionic =
___% Male to ___ % Female

2 Hemispheres of Brain (approx.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Left Hemisphere</u>• “Logical Brain”• Generally Conscious• Language• Thinks in words• Planning• Examines Details• Rational analysis• Systematic Solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Right Hemisphere</u>• “Relationship Brain”• Generally Unconscious• Observes relationships• Thinks in pictures• Creativity, Art, Intuition• Non-verbal Skills• Facial recognition & cues• Gut feelings |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positive Emotions
Calm, contentment, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negative Emotions
Hurt, anger, fear, etc. |

Corpus Callosum

- The “bridge” wiring between the hemispheres.
- Aids in the flow of information back and forth.
More flow is better.
- It’s smaller in repeatedly abused children.
- It’s smaller in adults with borderline personality disorder (possibly the result of abuse in childhood).
- Some people get stuck in rt. brain upset emotions; can’t access their left brain problem-solving skills.

Mirror Neurons

- Recent discovery in brain research
 - Neurons in our brains automatically “mirror” activities we watch, to prepare to do the same
 - Emotions are mirrored: smiles, sadness, anger
 - Empathy may be a mirroring activity
 - You can over-ride mirroring and act opposite (respond to anger with empathy; sadness with hope; upset emotions with problem-solving)
- *Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others*, Iaconboni (2008)



4 Key Skills for Managing HCPs

The CARS Method

1. **CONNECTING** with E.A.R.
2. **ANALYZING** options and dilemmas
3. **RESPONDING** to misinformation
4. **SETTING LIMITS** on behavior

Take a R.A.D. Approach

- Just recognize potential patterns and adapt your approach accordingly. Don't try to change them. Change what *you* do:

Recognize a possible High Conflict Personality
(These methods can work with anyone)

Adapt your approach accordingly
(Avoid focusing on the past, insight or emotions)

Deliver your C.A.R.S. response

1. CONNECTING with E.A.R. Statements

Example: "I can **understand** your frustration – this is a very important decision in your life. Don't worry, I will pay full **attention** to your concerns about this issue and any proposals you want to make. I have a lot of **respect** for your commitment to solving this problem, and I look forward to solving it too.

Fears and EARs for HCPs

Their Fears

- Being abandoned
- Being seen as inferior
- Being ignored
- Being dominated
- Being taken advantage of

Possible EAR Responses

- I'll listen
- I want to help you
- I respect your efforts
- I'll pay attention
- I'll work with you on this
- I understand this can be frustrating/confusing

Cautions about E.A.R.

- Avoid believing or agreeing with content
- Avoid volunteering to "fix it" for them (in an effort to calm down their emotions)
- Be honest about empathy and respect (find something you truly believe)
- Keep an arms-length relationship
- You don't have to listen forever
- Don't have to use these words or any words

2. ANALYZING Options (Give them a Choice)

- **In high-conflict situations, don't focus on feelings.** You won't resolve their emotional issues. Just acknowledge their frustrations. Talk to the right brain.

Focus the upset person on a choice:

- The goal is to get the upset person focused on problem-solving, away from his or her emotions.
- This puts responsibility on the person to help solve the problem; puts responsibility on the person for making the choice.
- It gives them some power, when they feel powerless.

**2. ANALYZING Options
(Make a List)**

Emphasize client's role and abilities to make decisions:

Have client write a list of options

Writing and reading lists activate the brain's rational thinking skills in deciding which choice to make
(Which side of the brain focuses on writing?)

2. Analyze a List of Options

Approach this process by:

- #1) Brainstorm several possible options – write them down
- #2) Check yourself For High Conflict Thinking – remember you are human too. We refer to #1 And #2 as the Santa steps – “Making a list and checking it twice!!
- #3) Select an option and analyze it carefully.

2. Analyze a List of Options

- Is this option realistic and practical to execute?
- Will this option effectively resolve the problem or at least manage it successfully?
- Does this option require the buy-in of anyone else and can I count on their assistance?
 - Don't take their cooperation for granted. Check it out!

2. Analyze a List of Options

- What are the Pros and Cons of this option?
 - Be specific and ask yourself how important to me is each of these pros and cons.
 - Rating 3 = very important
 - Rating 2 = somewhat important
 - Rating 1 = not important & can be a useful exercise.
- What are the most likely “what if’s” and how will I respond?
- Is there anything else I must do or find out to ensure the success of this option?

2. Analyze a List of Options

- Determine a time table and steps for each piece of the process
- How do my values and personal preferences align with this option?

Go for it!! Execute your plan!

2. ANALYZING Options (Make a Proposal)

Teach employees to make proposals:

Any concern about the past can be turned into a proposal about the future.

Proposals usually contain:

WHO does WHAT, WHEN and WHERE

If they get stuck blaming each other or talking too much about the past, then simply ask:

“So, what’s your proposal?”

3-Steps for Making Proposals

- 1. Propose:** WHO will do WHAT, WHEN and WHERE
- 2. Ask questions:** The other person then asks questions about the proposal, such as:
"What's your picture of what this would look like, if I agreed to do it?"
"What to you see me doing in more detail?"
- 3. Respond:** Other person then responds with:
"Yes." "No." Or: "I'll think about it."
And if you say "No," then you make a new proposal.

Help analyze "What's Important" to each of them

- HCPs quickly react negatively to each other's proposals:
"That's a ridiculous idea!" "I'll never agree with that?"
- As a manager or mediator, take your time asking the proposer to say more about their proposal, so you can deconstruct their proposals if they can't reach agreement.
- Tell the responder to wait a couple minutes while you really understand the other's proposal. *"I want to understand the details so I can help you find solutions."*
- Then, let the other respond. If no agreement, ask for new proposals. If still no agreement, tell them what you saw was **important** to each of them (their **interests**).

3. RESPONDING to Misinformation (Maintain a Healthy Skepticism)

- Remain skeptical of the accuracy of the person's information. There may be many cognitive distortions.
- Let them know that you will never know the full story. It is *possible* the extreme statements they are making are true ("**You might be right!**") and *possibly* not true.
- Next steps can still be taken and decisions can still be made about the future.

It's Their Dilemma

- Keep the burden of solving problems on the employee. No matter how badly they want you to do it.
- Tell them **“You have a dilemma. How do YOU want to resolve it?”**
- Then, if they can't think of options, you could suggest several, based on your knowledge.
- Be a role model of comfort with ambivalence.

Teach BIFF Responses

Brief: Keep it brief. Long explanations and arguments trigger upsets for HCPs.

Informative: Focus on straight information, not arguments, opinions, emotions or defending yourself (you don't need to)

Friendly: Have a friendly greeting (such as “Thanks for responding to my request”); close with a friendly comment (such as “Have a good weekend”).

Firm: Have your response end the conversation. Or give two choices on an issue and ask for a reply by a certain date.

See article: *BIFF at Work*



There's no “1 right way” to write a BIFF Response

It depends on:

1. The BIFF writer
2. The BIFF reader
3. The Situation

Different responses could be good BIFF responses, even though they may be quite different – as long as they are **Brief, Informative, Friendly** and **Firm**.

HIGH CONFLICT

**Coaching for BIFF Responses:
 10 Questions**

1. Is it Brief?
2. Is it Informative?
3. Is it Friendly?
4. Is it Firm?
5. Does it contain any Advice?
6. Does it contain any Admonishments?
7. Does it contain any Apologies?
8. How do you think the other person will respond?
9. Is there anything you would take out, add or change?
10. Would you like to hear my thoughts about it?

(After your thoughts, emphasize: "Its up to you!")

**4. SETTING LIMITS
 on High Conflict Behavior**

- HCPs need limits because they can't stop themselves
- With HCPs, focus on **external reasons** for new behavior (rather than focusing on negative feedback about past behavior):
 - "Our policies require us to ..."
 - "The law requires me to ..."
 - "I understand, but someone else might misunderstand your intentions with that action..."
 - "Choose your battles..."
- Coordinate with HR

**4. Setting Limits (con't)
 Educate About Consequences**

- HCPs do not connect realistic CONSEQUENCES to their own ACTIONS, especially fear-based actions.
- They feel like they are in a fight for survival, which blinds them to realities.
- Their life experiences may have taught them different consequences than most.
- They can be educated by a caring person.

Summary of CARS Method

1. **CONNECTING:** Respond with Empathy, Attention and/or Respect (E.A.R.)
2. **ANALYZING:** Analyze problem, select option and work with HCP to create and execute plan or proposal
3. **RESPONDING:** Use BIFF (Be Brief, Informative, Friendly and Firm)
4. **SETTING LIMITS:** Don't make it personal. Use policies, procedures, rules and regulations.
