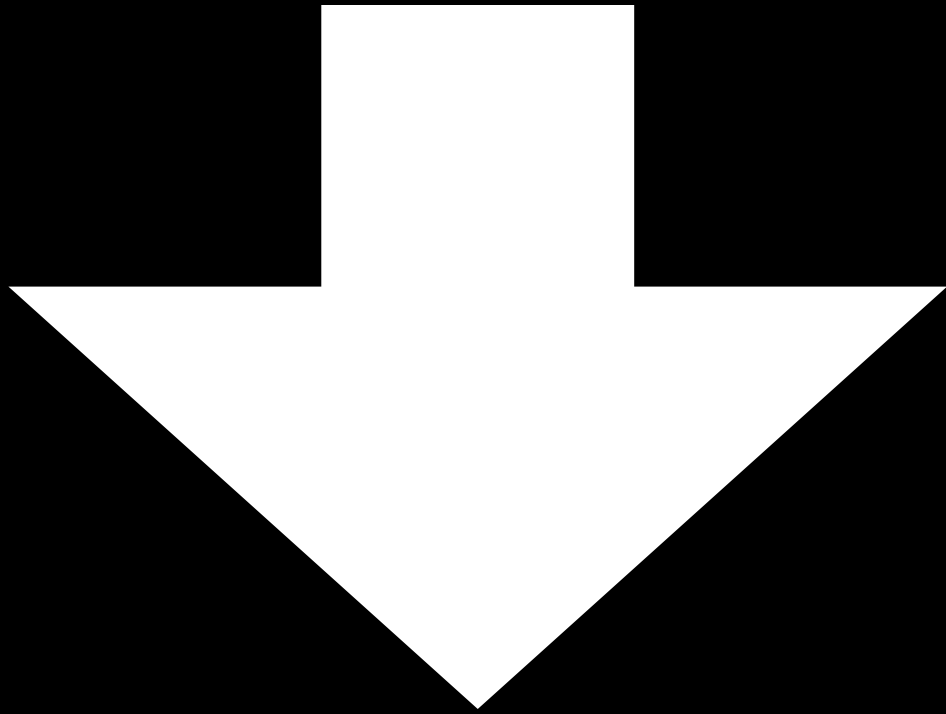


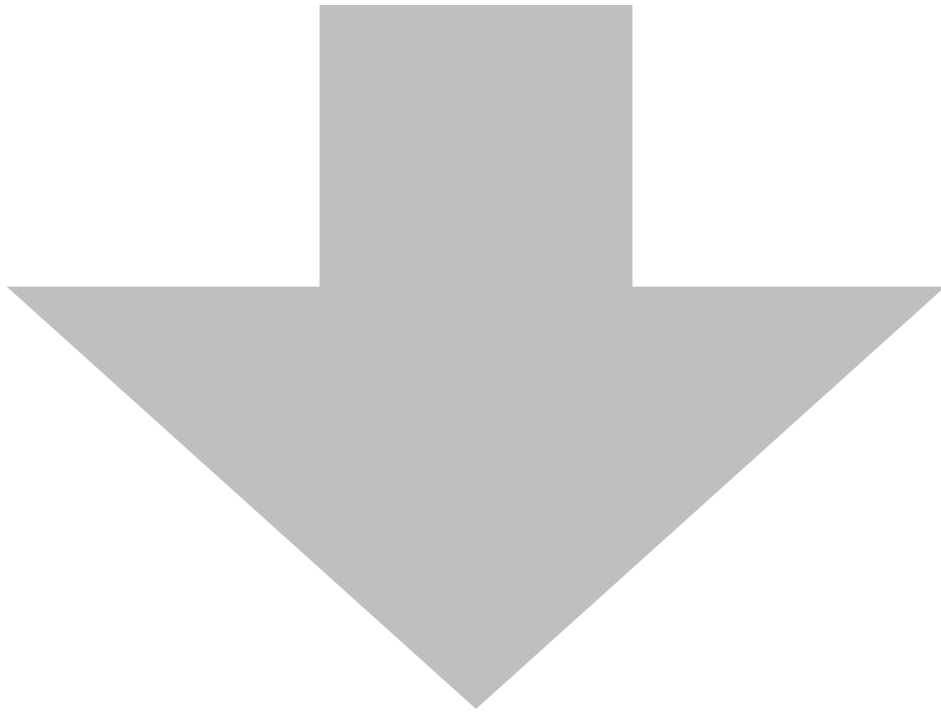
CONFLICT IS AN OPPORTUNITY



PRACTICE BOOK

DANA CASPERSEN

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BOOK

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Each of us is already practicing our approach to conflict. This book offers ways to consciously shape that practice in your daily life.

As you work with the exercises in this book, I invite you to think of conflict broadly, as a state of potentially productive friction that can arise internally, with other people, or with systemic or organizational forces. Consider how, in each conflict, the tensions of that friction contain a proposal for constructive change.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK:

Each chapter in the book is aligned with and builds on the corresponding chapter in the book *Conflict Is an Opportunity*.¹ I recommend reading and working with *Conflict Is an Opportunity* before beginning work with this practice book.

The chapters and exercises in this book can be accessed in the order that makes sense for you. You might work your way through chapter by chapter, or scan the table of contents to find a topic that resonates for your current situation. In all cases, reading the corresponding chapter of *Conflict Is an Opportunity* and doing the practice section there first will enable you to work with the exercises in this book most effectively.

The exercises are intended to be used with your real-life conflict experiences rather than hypothetical examples. Working with your own experiences will bring in the complexity and richness of situation that enables deeper practice. In preparation, consider creating a list of conflicts that you have experienced to have on hand as material for your practice. Each exercise in the book invites you to work with a specific conflict, and it can be helpful to have a variety to choose from, including small, passing tensions, situations of ongoing disagreement, or larger instances of conflict that still dwell in your mind.

MAPS:

The maps at the beginning of this book offer ways to bring the exercises together into a larger flow. Each map contains references to material that will support the actions mentioned. Let these references guide you to chapters in this practice book and the corresponding chapters in *Conflict Is an Opportunity*. The maps can also be helpful as shortcut reminders as you prepare for a difficult conversation or collaboration, or as you reflect on the actions that you would like to take in a conflict situation.

PRACTICES:

I invite you to work with the exercises in this book as dancers work with their daily practice—not trying to master a particular set of movements but instead building an adaptable approach and an increasingly fluid response to complex and changing environments. Think of the exercises as actions that can be returned to again and again in relation to the changing circumstances of your life, becoming more fluent and connected with each return.

As the ideas and mindset that we practice the most will be our default in challenging moments, see these exercises as tools to build the way of thinking that you want to access in difficult times.

GROUPS:

The exercises are intended for use by individuals or groups. Each exercise is followed by a short guide for group work. Teachers wishing to offer these exercises in their classes may also find the group guide useful.

YOUR EXPERIENCE:

You will be invited throughout to reflect on your own experience. These reflections will include both physical and mental actions, as they are intertwined in our thinking process.

The body registers experience in subtle and profound ways. Increasing an awareness of your physical sensations can be a powerful tool for grounding yourself in stressful situations and recognizing your reactions, needs, and interests. This awareness of the body's experience strengthens the capacity to examine our relationship to the environment and other people, and to make decisions that are in line with underlying needs.

The mental actions that you will be invited to work with will include paying conscious attention to what and how you are thinking. As you work, let your attention extend to both your habits of thought and the impact of your thinking on your mindset and spirit—the feeling of your mind.

If you notice thoughts arising that you see as counterproductive, let yourself be curious about those thoughts and the needs to which they are connected. With a kind regard for yourself, explore your habits of thought, recognizing that they are not permanent and they are not you. You always have the power to shape your thinking habits through what you choose to practice on a daily basis.

CONSTRUCTIVE CHANGE:

I invite you to think of this work as a form of research and to create internal and external practice environments of curiosity and compassion. When useful, share these practices with friends, family, students, or colleagues. Think of the exercises and the overall practice they support as ways to connect and collectively build constructive conflict cultures where people, relationships, organizations, and communities can thrive.

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19	Which sources of power are available in this conflict? Which are being used and endorsed?	-
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MAPS

MAP 1 / WHEN PREPARING FOR A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

- 1 Actively step into a mindset of curiosity (ch. 6) and a willingness to listen (ch. 5).
- 2 Clarify for yourself the topic that you would like to discuss (chs. 7, 9). Be clear on your goal in having this conversation (chs. 10, 12).
- 3 Avoid letting your attention get stuck on attack and defense or clinging to strategies. Instead, focus your attention on identifying and connecting to the needs, interests, and emotions of yourself and the other person in relationship to the topic. If emotions are high, continue to see them as signals from and pathways to needs and interests, not as an endpoint in themselves (ch. 1). Have a real intention to find out what matters to the other person (ch. 5).
- 4 Prepare to respond rather than react to the thoughts and actions of the other person. Stay with yourself. (Ch. 4)
- 5 Think about the question that has arisen between you and the other person. Be prepared to adapt the question as you learn more about what matters to them (ch. 10). Information from all sides is necessary to have a question that resonates (ch. 8).
- 6 Maintain a mindset of looking for productive ways forward, even when it's difficult. (Chs. 12, 13)
- 7 Clarify the request you would like to make of the other person. Stay primarily connected to your interests behind the request so that if they don't agree to the request, there are other pathways to consider. Be ready to learn what request the other person might want to make of you (ch. 3). Prepare to respond to their request from the level of interests rather than with a counterstrategy or attack (chs. 1, 11). See requests as investigative tools toward understanding.

MAP 2 / WHEN BEGINNING A PROJECT OR COLLABORATION

- 1 Clarify roles and responsibilities. Be specific. (Ch. 15)
- 2 Clarify which decision-making processes will be used. Be specific. (Ch. 15)
- 3 Clarify who will be responsible for making which decisions. Be specific. (Ch. 15)
- 4 Clarify whether feedback will be offered and received during the process. If so, find out which feedback mechanisms will work for people on both the offering and receiving sides of the feedback. (Chs. 14, 15)
- 5 Normalize the idea of conflict occurring as a potentially productive element of the collaboration (ch. 20). Discuss how you will handle conflicts that arise. What kind of conflict culture do you want to create together? How\when will topics be raised and addressed? Discuss what triggers your worst selves and what helps each of you respond constructively in moments of stress. (Chs. 14, 18)
- 6 Discuss any concerns that people have going into the project and the interests behind those concerns (ch. 1). Let those discussions help shape a process and environment that supports people and their work together (chs. 15, 20).
- 7 During discussions to develop and realize plans as you move into the project, keep a focus on the interests behind any strategy so that there is space for movement and the integration of ideas. (Chs. 1, 17)

MAP 3 / WHEN YOU FEEL STRESSED IN A CONFLICT

- 1 Identify and connect with your emotions. Breathe them in, seeing them as signals from your needs. Breathe out slowly with a sense of spaciousness. Repeat as needed to ground yourself. With a compassionate and curious mind, name your needs. (Ch. 1)
- 2 Address your needs. If your needs are unlikely to be met in your conflict situation, rest with that and plan to meet them elsewhere (ch. 1). If your needs could be met in the situation, formulate a clear request (avoid just complaining) and make the request of the right person (ch. 3).
- 3 Examine where your attention is primarily focused in the situation. If you are stuck on strategies, attack, or defense, bring your attention back to the level of interests: your own and that of others. (Ch. 1)
- 4 Clarify your goal. What is this conflict about for you? (Chs. 7, 9)
- 5 Identify the decisions that are yours to make in the situation. (Ch. 2)
- 6 Expand your sense of where your power lies in the situation. Think of this not as a weapon but as a resource to help enable a constructive pathway forward. (Ch. 19, and the section "Power Sources" in the back of *Conflict Is an Opportunity*)
- 7 Step away from punishment and reward as strategies (chs. 11, 18). Consciously step into a mindset of curiosity (ch. 6). Focus on the question between you and the other person (ch. 10). Imagine pathways forward that could enable needs and interests to be met to a sufficient degree on all sides (chs. 16, 20).

MAP 4 / WHEN YOU ARE IN A CONFLICT THAT HAS GONE BADLY

- 1 Pause. Ground yourself. Take a mental (and maybe physical) step back. This may be for 2 breaths, 2 days, or 2 weeks (or more). (Ch. 6)
- 2 Check if you are making things worse. If you are, stop. If you are in attack or defense mode, take several breaths, exhaling slowly. (Ch. 4) Then actively shift into a curious mindset (ch. 6).
- 3 Refocus your attention on what matters. Connect to your needs and interests and loosen the grip you have on any particular strategy. Even if you're angry or hurt, direct your attention to the needs and interests of the other person as well (ch. 1).
- 4 If you feel hurt, note which needs underlie that feeling. Take responsibility for your own needs and feelings (ch. 1). If you're finding it hard to take positive action because of the strength of those needs and feelings, clarify a request you would like to make of the other person in regard to that issue (ch. 3). Differentiate between the original topic of the conflict, secondary conflicts that might arise, and the topic of communication styles, so that you are not trying to address one issue through another (chs. 4, 9).
- 5 Clarify your intention. Abandon covert intentions to prove yourself right and the other person wrong. (Chs. 7, 12) When you're ready, ask them if they would be willing to try again and if they have concerns about the conversation. Let them know what you regret about how it went last time (from the perspective of your own actions) and what matters to you in the conflict—your feelings, needs, interests, and request. Ask what matters to them—what they are thinking, feeling, and needing at this point. (Ch. 1) Ask them if there is anything that they think you're missing. Listen to them (ch. 5). Take a breath. Identify the real question between you. Address it. (Ch. 10)

- 6 After the conflict, be curious about what happened. Especially in ongoing relationships, notice if there are destructive patterns that repeat (ch. 14). With compassion for yourself and others, consider what keeps those patterns in place and what constructive changes the conflict or the pattern could be proposing (ch. 20). Discuss with the other person, if possible. If not, notice which decisions are yours to make in productively anticipating and responding to conflict in the future. (Ch. 2)
- 7 While the six points above are always useful to consider, there may be times when it's helpful to respond with a simple gesture when things have gone badly in a conflict, by saying something like:

"Let me try that again, here's what I'm really trying to say, here's what matters to me."

Or

"I think I'm missing something here. What the most important thing for you in this?"

It's almost never too late to shift your course when you have the sense that things have gotten off track in a conflict. If people sense that your intention is to understand and not to attack, they are more likely to shift with you.

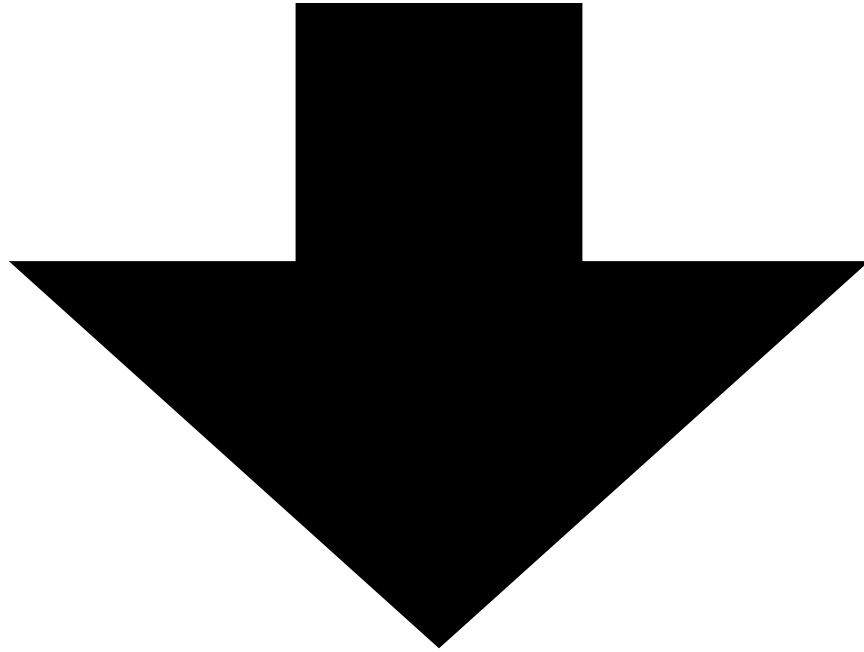
MAP 5 /WHEN IN A REPETITIVE CONFLICT

- 1 Note what tends to trigger the conflict. When does it typically happen? (Chs. 7, 16)
- 2 Note the pattern of the conflict: What tends to happen or not happen when the conflict appears? What is the typical outcome of the conflict? What aspect of the conflict leaves it simmering? What is the impact on your relationship? (Chs. 1, 15)
- 3 Examine your own habit of reaction in the conflict. Consider the internal and external impact of your habitual reaction and whether you would like to respond in alternative ways instead. (Chs. 2, 4)
- 4 Consider the needs and interests (yours and those of others) that are active in the conflict and differentiate them from strategies (ch. 1). Clarify any request that you might want to make of the other person. Be curious about any request they might want to make of you (ch. 3).
- 5 Reflect on what has remained unspoken in the conflict and what would be useful to bring to light (chs. 4, 14). On your own, practice naming what has been unspoken, avoiding any subtle or overt attack in your naming (chs. 9, 18).
- 6 Bring up the topic of the conflict with the right person or people at a relatively low-stress moment. Name the trigger and pattern that you observed, possibly also noting your own habit of reaction. (Ch. 9) Name your concerns about the impact of the repetitive conflict and your wishes for constructive change (ch. 20). If the time seems right, name the unspoken points that you think would be useful to acknowledge. Talk about your needs and interests, and inquire about theirs. Make any request that you might want to and ask if they have a request as well.

- 7 Plan for the future (chs. 12, 13). If possible, work together to consider what constructive changes the conflict could be proposing (ch. 20). Examine the real question that lies between you and consider how to address it in a way that meets needs on each side to a sufficient degree (ch. 10). When possible, inquire together what will help you each respond constructively if the conflict appears again. Make a concrete plan of action and be prepared to adapt it as needed. (Chs. 4, 11, 15) See conflict as an opportunity for developing greater understanding and finding productive ways forward. (Chs. 12, 20)

PRACTICES

1/ WHAT AM I PAYING ATTENTION TO?

**READ:**

The corresponding chapter in *Conflict Is an Opportunity*, reviewing the descriptions of needs, interests, and requests, and engage with the practice section.

EXPAND YOUR PRACTICE:

Directing your attention consciously.

Practice 1: Identify where attention is and is not being focused. Consciously direct your attention.

Practice 2: Observe yourself and your environment. Silently practice.

IDENTIFY WHERE ATTENTION IS AND IS NOT BEING FOCUSED. CONSCIOUSLY DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION.

FIRST:

Identify where attention is and is not being focused.

Choose a conflict or difficult conversation that you have experienced or witnessed and ask yourself: :

1. *What were the needs, interests, and emotions of each person involved?*
2. *Where was attention primarily focused in that situation, both my own and that of others? (For example, attack \ defense \ demands \ punishment \ strategies \ emotions \ needs \ interests \ requests.)*
3. *What was the impact of that direction of attention?*
4. *If the focus was on strategies, did the strategies reflect and support the needs and interests of those involved?*
5. *Were there important elements that were not being focused on?*
6. *Are there directions in which I'd like to focus my attention more consciously going forward?*

Write down or draw your responses to the questions.

FINALLY:

Consciously direct your attention.

As an experiment, place yourself mentally in the same conflict situation and let yourself feel the tensions of its dynamic. Notice the sensations in your body. Notice what you are thinking and how your mind feels.

Then, bring to awareness a direction in which you'd like to focus your attention more consciously. Thinking of your conflict situation, turn your mind—as if you were turning your body—to focus your attention in the direction that you've chosen. Let yourself feel that new dynamic for a moment. Ask yourself:

Ask yourself:

7. *What changes as I direct my attention more consciously in that way?*
8. *What do I notice happens in my body?*
9. *How is my thinking impacted?*
10. *What would help me focus my attention in that direction more often?*

Reflect on the questions and your responses.

GROUP:

Individually, do the practice above, and then in pairs or as a group discuss points that stand out for you with each question.

OBSERVE YOURSELF AND YOUR ENVIRONMENT. SILENTLY PRACTICE.

FIRST:

Observe and name the needs, interests, and emotions.

Over the next few days, observe yourself and your environment. Practice (silently) naming the needs, interests, and emotions of yourself and the people around you. If you don't know what the needs, interests, and emotions of the others might be, guess (silently) with the intention to understand.

Examine what you come up with to see if there is any attack, opinion, strategy, or defense that has snuck into your naming. If so, remove it and try again.

FINALLY:

Name the requests.

Once you think you have a clear sense of people's needs and interests (yours and those of others), consider what requests people might want to make based on those needs and interests. When appropriate, check in with others to see if you are understanding correctly what they are thinking and feeling, where their interests lie, and what their requests might be.

GROUP:

Individually, do the practice above, and then discuss in pairs or as a group.