

SCORCHED EARTH

MEDIATING WITH **HIGH CONFLICT**
CLIENTS

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GM

High Conflict Clients


- ▶ What is a “high conflict personality?”
- ▶ What is a Personality Disorder?
- ▶ What are my own reactions to the high conflict client?
- ▶ Is it possible to mediate a “fair” settlement with high conflict personalities?



High Conflict Personality Disorders

- ▶ Way of thinking and feeling about oneself and others that negatively impacts all relationships and the way conflict is addressed.
- ▶ Patterns keep repeating but person has blind spots to them. They believe that they are normal and everyone else is screwed up.
- ▶ Lack a clear and coherent sense of identity.
- ▶ **High conflict clients fear exposure and losing control.**





DSM 5 – Axis 2, Cluster B is called the dramatic, emotional, and erratic cluster. It includes:

- ▶ Borderline Personality Disorder.
- ▶ Narcissistic Personality Disorder.
- ▶ Histrionic Personality Disorder.
- ▶ Antisocial Personality Disorder.

Characteristics of the Narcissist

- ▶ Emotional range from A to B.
- ▶ Rigid and uncompromising.
- ▶ Condescending
- ▶ Manipulative
- ▶ Always right – must win!
- ▶ Cannot take responsibility for failure – blames others
- ▶ Difficulty / inability empathizing
- ▶ Specializes in “alternative facts.”



Diagnostic features for NPD - (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

- ▶ Having an exaggerated sense of self-importance
- ▶ Expecting to be recognized as superior even without achievements that warrant it
- ▶ Exaggerating achievements and talents
- ▶ Being preoccupied with fantasies about success, power, brilliance, beauty or the perfect mate
- ▶ Believing that you are superior and can only be understood by or associate with equally special people
- ▶ Lack of empathy for others
- ▶ Lies constantly, deflects blame
- ▶ Huge sense of entitlement
- ▶ Expecting special favors and unquestioning compliance with your expectations
- ▶ Manipulating others to get what you want
- ▶ An inability or unwillingness to recognize the needs and feelings of others
- ▶ Being envious of others and believing others envy you
- ▶ Behaving in an arrogant or haughty manner

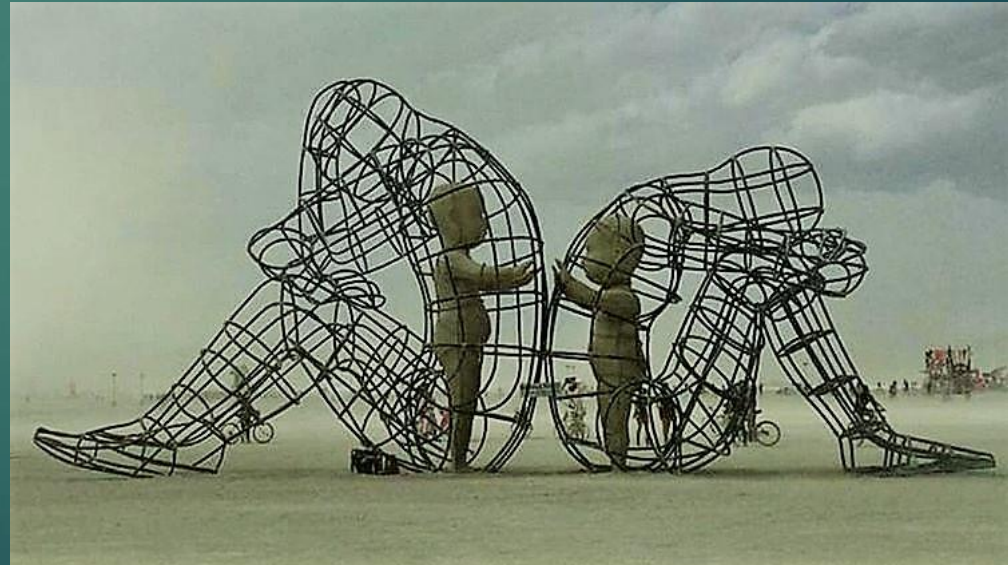
Source: Mayo Clinic

Characteristics of the Narcissist

- ▶ Avoids responsibility
- ▶ Takes credit for other people's work
- ▶ Inability to reflect on own behavior
- ▶ Knows the damage he/she causes, but does not care
- ▶ Underlying emotions: fear of abandonment, rage, grief
- ▶ Idealization and devaluation often make conflict resolution impossible
- ▶ **ZERO empathy**
- ▶ Lack of sense of humor
 - ▶ Often does not understand what is humorous.
 - ▶ Will laugh at others, but will not tolerate anyone laughing at him/her.
- ▶ Never forgives, always seeks revenge
- ▶ Covert/Shy: Identify as caretakers who take care of everyone except themselves.
 - ▶ This cannot be farther from the truth
 - ▶ Fake humility, introverted, deeply hurt by criticism, but full of rage.

Characteristics of the Narcissist

- ▶ Name dropper
- ▶ Must be the brightest intellect in the room.
- ▶ Accepts only high status people as peers
- ▶ Condescending
- ▶ Uses verbal and psychological abuse to control
- ▶ Projects image of success
- ▶ Obsesses over perceived slights or attacks
- ▶ Exaggerates and lies constantly about achievements
- ▶ All are designed to hide the self from others.



Conflict is Always Personal

- ▶ Conflict not based on the issue, but who the person is and the pattern of behavior that has developed.
- ▶ Viewed as personal assault
- ▶ Escalates conflict to make it worse, not better
- ▶ Create drama, bullying
- ▶ Threatened by disagreement
- ▶ ALWAYS must win. ALWAYS!!



The Covert (Shy) Narcissist

- ▶ 1. Quiet smugness, superiority.
 - ▶ lack of eye contact, condescending glare, eye-rolling, dismissive gestures, groans and sighs, high distractibility, quick boredom, impolite yawns, and overall inattentiveness; critical and judgmental, focusing on their own conceited views.
- ▶ 2. Self-absorbed.
 - ▶ “Withdrawn self-centeredness,” poor listeners, tend to focus on only what they selfishly want and find agreeable. All else might be labeled as “boring” or “stupid”.
- ▶ 3. Passive-Aggressiveness
 - ▶ Upon receiving a reasonable request from you, they might say “okay,” “yes,” “of course,” or “as you wish,” then either do nothing, or behave however they please. When you inquire why they didn’t follow-through on an arrangement, they may shrug it off with an excuse, or say nonchalantly that their way is better.
- ▶ 4. Lack of Empathy
 - ▶ “You’re sick? But what about driving me to the mall?”
 - ▶ oblivious to, or dismissive of others’ thoughts and feelings. Even when you tell them how their attitudes and actions are generating adverse consequences, their response will be more about themselves. Such is the self-absorption.

Covert (shy) Continued

- ▶ 5. The “Misunderstood Special Person”
 - ▶ “I’m special,” “I’m one-of a kind,” “I’m ahead of my time,” “I’m so unique no one understands me,” and “I’m so smart I’m above everyone else.” Statements such as these reveal common narcissistic tendencies of superiority, grandiosity, and entitlement.
- ▶ 6. Highly Sensitive
 - ▶ “Exquisitely sensitive”. Affronted by any signs of real or perceived slights, and handle criticism poorly. In the face of negative feedback, some introvert narcissists will defend with an increased sense of superior smugness and dismissal (fight), while others will respond with sullen withdraw (flight). Typically, they will not let on how much the negative experience bothers them, and instead use their well-rehearsed aloofness to continue their schema.
- ▶ 7. Impersonal and Difficult Relationships
 - ▶ Inability to genuinely connect with people. Aloofness and/or smugness serve as a defensive mechanism keeping people away, lest the narcissist is exposed for her or his interpersonal inadequacies.

Rigid Thinking

- ▶ My way or the highway
- ▶ Whatever s/he feels at the moment is Truth
- ▶ All or nothing
- ▶ Black or white
- ▶ Will not consider other points of view
- ▶ Compromise means losing



Emotions

- ▶ Unregulated emotions
- ▶ Cannot tolerate distress or failure – must blame others
- ▶ Avoids responsibility for any part of the problem
- ▶ Negative emotions dominate
- ▶ Trusts no one
- ▶ Empathy is feigned, not real
- ▶ Aware of how his behavior affects others, but does not care.
- ▶ Paranoia



Emotions

- ▶ Intense, dramatic and emotional appeals used to manipulate others, making rational conversation and conflict resolution difficult.
- ▶ Can be immensely charming if they see in you something they want.

- Often described as having an emotional range of A to Z... but without the intervening letters.



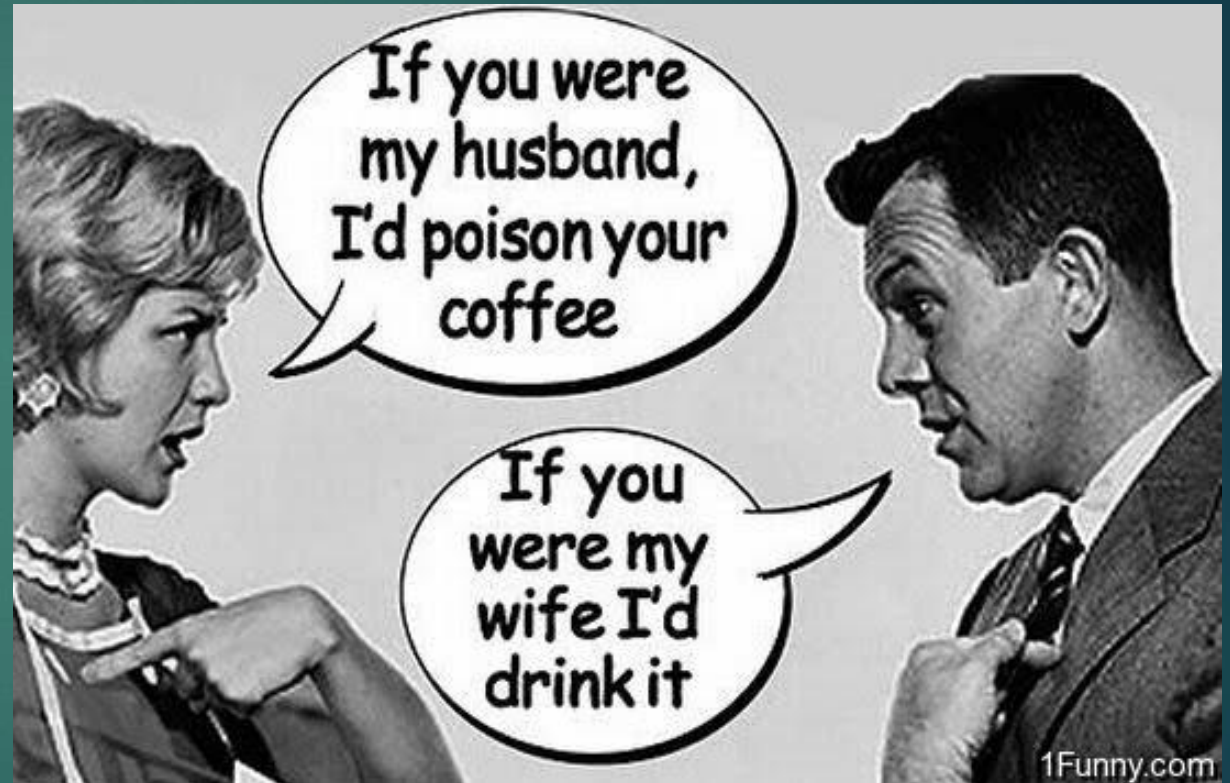
EXPLOSIVE ANGER

- ▶ Anger is hidden, but then explodes
- ▶ Will not admit to anger
- ▶ Used to influence, keep people away, and to maintain or gain control.
- ▶ In relationships, learns all of your most sensitive weak spots, then exploits them to emotionally destroy you.



Actions and Consequences

- ▶ Actions and consequences are not connected.
- ▶ Extreme action follows intense emotion – yelling, disrespect, lying, stalking, threatening.
- ▶ Push others away – don't want to lose control.
- ▶ Blaming leads to feeling stronger and safe.
- ▶ **Then tells you that all of this is for your own good and wants a hug!**



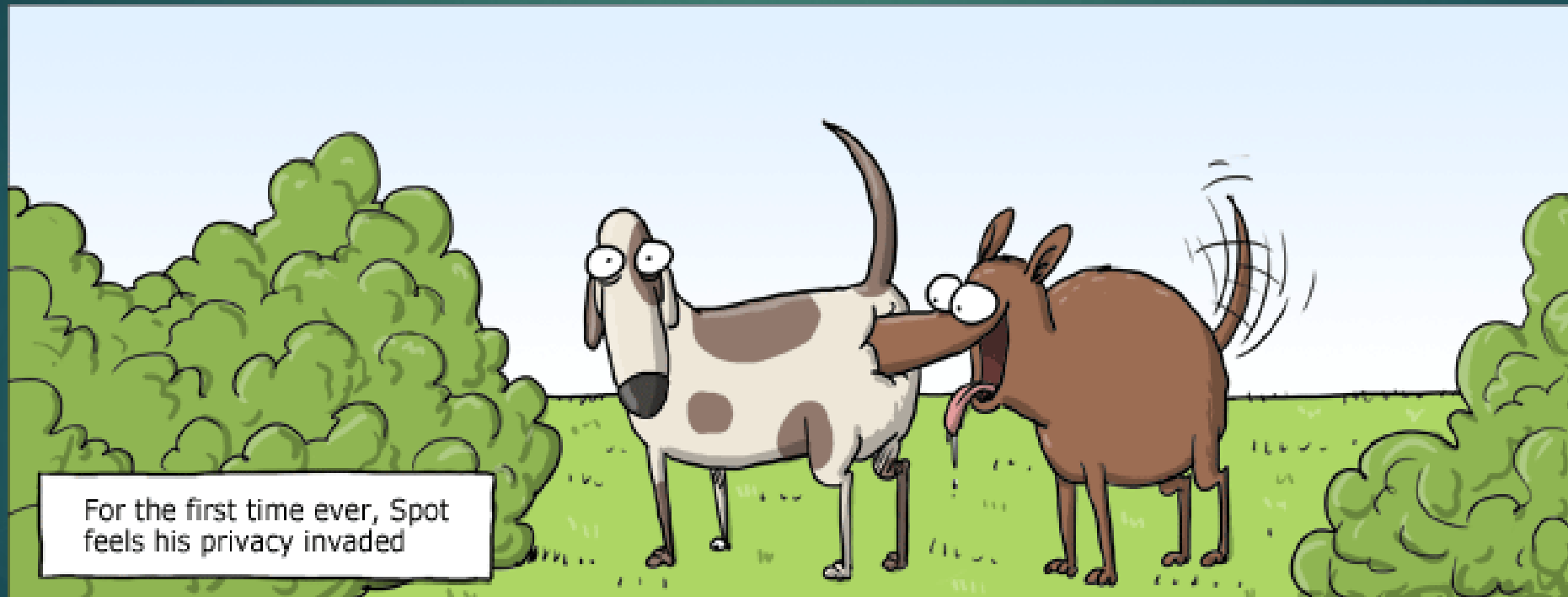
Actions

- ▶ Does NOT change behavior even after negative results.
- ▶ Lies – constantly
- ▶ Never forgives, always brings up the past.
- ▶ Seeks to punish anyone who hurts them.
- ▶ Wants to dictate solutions, not solve problems with others.



Boundary Violations

- ▶ The high conflict individual routinely violates common boundaries as a means of intimidation and control.



High Conflict People in...Conflict

- ▶ Tend to be emotionally disengaged until it is safe to explode on someone else.
- ▶ Self-defeating patterns continue in spite of continued negative results.



The Mediator

How they view you:

- ▶ Feared. You have authority that can adversely affect them
- ▶ Uncertain. They do not know how to control you.
- ▶ Disdain. Barely disguised hatred
- ▶ Threat

Probable interactions:

- ▶ Attempts to ingratiate by flattering you.
- ▶ They will try various ways to manipulate.
- ▶ Refuse to engage
- ▶ Rage

The Narcissist in Mediation

- ▶ Outrageous demands.
- ▶ Refuse to consider offers that do not meet their demands.
- ▶ Refuse to respond.
- ▶ Respond to a question not asked.

Effective Counters

- Stroke their grandiosity
- Confront in private: What is it that you really need today?
- Reality testing in private, never in public.
- Be clear: you want to help them, but they must help you. This creates a “partnership” – but be careful not to be pulled in to the fantasy.

They **MUST** see the settlement as a win!

A small
church in
Indiana...



Mediator Guidelines

- ▶ DO NOT say or insinuate anything negative about their personalities – this backfires and escalates rage.
- ▶ Show empathy, listen deeply, demonstrate respect to lower defenses and make room to develop trust.
- ▶ Respond to any verbal assault with genuine curiosity
- ▶ Never correct or challenge them in front of others.



Mediator Guidelines

- ▶ Do not react to their emotions – this distracts from the issue and leads to more blame.
- ▶ Their emotions are often used to manipulate others.
- ▶ Think like a detective – just the facts.



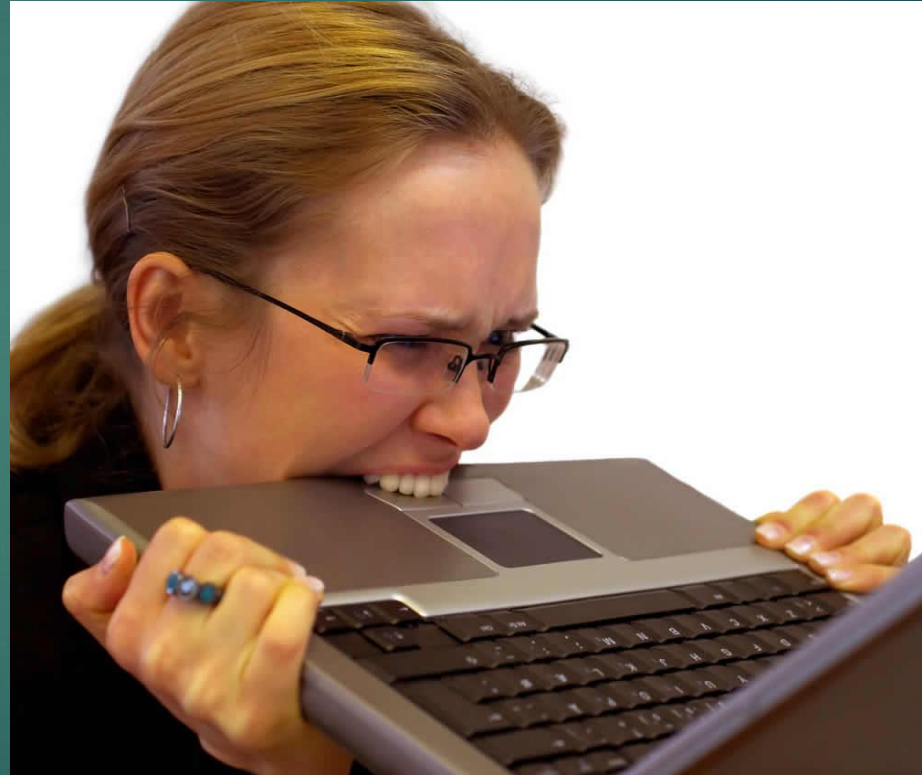
Mediator Guidelines

- ▶ Choose your battles carefully. High conflict people like to fight and the drama it creates.
- ▶ Be aware of your own emotional triggers and develop better coping mechanisms.
- ▶ Set a structure and expectations for talking: no yelling, name calling, interrupting.



Guidelines

- ▶ Keep emotions from escalating.
- ▶ To bring them down: Talk lower and slower.
- ▶ “I understand your frustration.”
- ▶ “I am paying close attention to how you are feeling.”
- ▶ “Can you tell me more about that?”
- ▶ “Can you help me understand why this is so important to you?”



Boundaries

- ▶ Establish boundaries. If a boundary is violated, be calm but firm, and don't bend.
- ▶ Repeat the expectations and revisit the rules.
- ▶ Do not ignore the behavior – that causes feelings of abandonment and escalates emotional responses.



Guidelines

- ▶ Disengage from the drama and manage your own thoughts – take a time out, concentrate on your reaction.
- ▶ Do reality testing. Narcissists live in a different reality where they are the only important thing.
 - ▶ Praise and quiet coaching are effective.
- ▶ They are not overly good at reading body language, so be certain to verbalize.

NO.
**IS A COMPLETE
SENTENCE.**

ANNE LAMOTT

Guidelines - Caucus

- ▶ Ask what is the most important issue to be resolved, and what resolution would look like.
- ▶ Do not be shocked by high demands. They tend to believe that they deserve much for doing little.
- ▶ Be honest but diplomatic.

Diplomacy is the art of telling people to go to hell in such a way that they ask for directions.

Winston Churchill

meetville.com

Conflict Goals

- ▶ The narcissist will have unrealistically high goals based on what he believes about the other person and the value of perceived damage to the narcissist.
- ▶ Setting realistic goals in caucus elicits more constructive dialogue, though not necessarily resolving the conflict or “pinning the sin” on someone.



What they fear:

Borderline: an unconscious and extreme fear of abandonment – which causes people to abandon them.

Narcissist: an unconscious and extreme fear of being inferior or helpless. This drives extreme efforts to be seen as superior and to insult or demean others. Pushes people away to protect oneself – which tends to push others to seeing the narcissist as inferior.

Histrionic: an unconscious and extreme fear of being ignored. This drives them to constant be dramatic and intense – which pushes people away and to ignore them.

What they fear

Antisocial: an unconscious and extreme fear of being dominated by others. This drives extreme efforts to dominate, manipulate, deceive and harm others – which tends to get them locked up.

Paranoid (common to all 4 Cluster B mental diseases): an unconscious and extreme fear of betrayal by those close to them. This drives them to assume plots and conspiracies, so they hold unwarranted grudges and attack others first to protect themselves – which pushes people to fear being direct with them and to find ways to get rid of them.

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- ▶ ***Let Us Prey: The Plague of Narcissist Pastors and What We Can Do About It.*** Cascade Books. 2017
- ▶ ***The Road Home: A Guided Journey to Forgiveness and Reconciliation.*** Cascade Books. 2013