

Conflict *without* Casualties

A field guide for leading with
**COMPASSIONATE
ACCOUNTABILITY**

*"Conflict without Casualties fills a gap by showing
leaders at any level how to leverage positive conflict.*

Practical, insightful, challenging, relevant."

*—DAN PINK, author of *To Sell Is Human* and *Drive**

NATE REGIER, PhD

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More Praise for *Conflict without Casualties*

“*Conflict without Casualties* fills a gap by showing leaders at any level how to leverage positive conflict. Practical, insightful, challenging, relevant.”

—Dan Pink, *New York Times* bestselling author

“*Conflict without Casualties* is powerful but in a practical way. Dr. Regier provides a compelling model to demonstrate how the energy created by conflict can be utilized for positive change—for individuals, within relationships, for organizations, and even for world crises. His analysis of the dynamics within the ‘drama triangle’ of persecutor-victim-rescuer clarifies most of the dysfunction seen in workplace relationships. The beauty of the concept, however, blossoms more fully as he describes the positive power created from the ‘compassion cycle’ of openness-resourcefulness-persistence. Thought-provoking yet easy to read and comprehend, this book is highly recommended to anyone interested in transforming the negative cycles in relationships (both work-based and personal) into the energy that will fuel positive growth.”

—Paul White, PhD, coauthor of *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*, *Rising above a Toxic Workplace*, and *Sync or Swim*

“We all know that drama will suck the energy out of your day, your department, and your company, but no one has identified with as much precision as Regier how to eliminate the drama and suffuse the workplace with more creativity, accountability, and productivity than ever. A revolutionary resource!”

—Marshall Goldsmith, international bestselling author or editor of thirty-five books, including *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* and *Triggers*

“Nate Regier takes the old idea that creativity is the hidden purpose behind conflict and opposition in this world and applies it to many practical and important areas of human endeavor. His work with compassionate engagement can help sustain relationships of all kinds.”

—Michael Meade, author of *Fate and Destiny* and *Why the World Doesn't End*

“Who could ever think of conflict as creative? Nate Regier, that's who. In *Conflict without Casualties*, Nate introduces the concept of compassionate accountability—holding someone, including yourself, accountable while preserving one's dignity. His strategies are effective at work and at home—at every level. Don't shy away from conflict; face it with creativity and compassion and watch things change for the better.”

—Ken Blanchard, coauthor of *The New One Minute Manager®* and *Collaboration Begins with You*

Conflict without Casualties is a must-read and offers a simple, powerful model for transforming conflict, drama, and negative energy into compassionate accountability and a stronger, more united team. Conflict can help a team grow when utilized properly. This book shows you how.”

—**Jon Gordon, bestselling author of *The Energy Bus* and *The Carpenter***

“The world needs Next Element’s brilliant model for transforming conflict into productive change. Nate’s book profoundly improved my mindset and gave me the tools to have powerful relationship-building conversations. I recommend it to everyone who wants to live authentically and influence others.”

—**Vicki Halsey, PhD, Vice President, The Ken Blanchard Companies, and author of the bestselling *Brilliance by Design***

“I found *Conflict without Casualties* to be very practical and accurate as a comprehensive approach to conflict—especially workplace conflict. I really enjoyed its thoughtfulness and sensitivity and the author’s personal openness in explaining the development of the theory and steps of Next Element’s compassion cycle. The examples were particularly helpful, and one of the sample quotes gave me words I can use in an upcoming conflict situation.”

—**Bill Eddy, coauthor of *It’s All Your Fault at Work* and President, High Conflict Institute**

“This book is a wonderful and powerful resource. I can see how ORPO can be leveraged in innovation and teams for real breakthroughs—without the casualties!”

—**Chris Donlon, Senior Field Umpire and Grand Final Umpire, Australian Rules Football**

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CASUALTIES

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A Field Guide for Leading with
Compassionate Accountability

NATE REGIER, PhD



BK

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Conflict without Casualties

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*To my parents, who planted and watered the
seeds of compassionate accountability.*

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Acknowledgments

Jon Gordon is a really nice guy! I first heard him speak at the World Leaders Conference in 2015. He is an 11-time *New York Times* best-selling author, leadership coach, and motivational speaker. His message of positive energy and servant leadership resonated with me so I began following his work.

The more I worked on this book, the more I became convinced that it needed legs. It needed the best chance possible to succeed. So I reached out to Jon on the remote chance that he'd give me a few minutes to bounce around ideas, brainstorm title concepts, and lend me some of his tremendous positive energy. If you've ever taken the risk of asking for what you want, you will understand how I felt. Within a few hours I got a message back from Ann Carlson, Jon's delightful "VP of Details." By the way, that's the coolest title I've seen in a long time! Ann referred me to Jon's podcast on book publishing and offered to set up a call with him after I'd listened to the recording. I was thrilled!

I listened to Jon's podcast and it was just what I needed; inspirational, informative, and actionable. It helped me discern this one very important thing: This is the book I was meant to write, the book I want my kids to read because it is who I am and what I stand for. I passionately want to share this message and these tools with the world.

Jon took my call and it was terrific. He was supportive, affirming, helpful, and open. At the time of my call with Jon, I still didn't have a title for the book, and was anxious about it. Jon brainstormed with me and reassured me to be patient. "Don't try too hard," he said. "If you have faith it will come." And it did. Thank you Jon, for your inspiration and help. You may never know how

big an impact a phone call or text can make in a person's life. It made a huge difference for me. Thank you.

Every day I am grateful for my wonderful team at Next Element. It truly is an amazing laboratory for developing, testing, and living what we teach. Every day I am challenged to live into a better version of myself. Every day I am touched by the genuine love my teammates have for each other. Every day I am amazed by their passion for making a difference in people's lives. Thank you for inspiring me, pushing me, and giving me permission to write this book!

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Thank you Marian Sandmaier, our editor. I love your perspective and the elegant care you took with this manuscript.

Innovation and discovery don't happen in a vacuum. The concepts in this book have been evolving for nearly a decade within multiple relationships worldwide. Without our clients, who have generously given their time and resources to experiment with our methods for compassionate accountability, we would have no idea whether they work. Likewise, our network of certified trainers have provided invaluable feedback and dialogue to help refine our theory and methodology.

Nowhere are the casualties of negative conflict more personal than with family. And nowhere does the power of compassionate accountability make a more profound impact. I am amazed by the daily, positive impact the concepts in this book have in my personal life. I am delighted for a family that supports me in doing what I love. My deepest gratitude goes to my unbelievable wife, Julie, and our three daughters, Asha, Emily and Lauren. Thank you for being patient with me when I stumble, for graciously letting me tell stories about you when I'm at work, and most of all, for believing in me. When life gets crazy and work seems to become too important, I remind myself of this quote from Jon Gordon, "I don't want to be a big household name. I want to be a big name in my household."

CONFLICT
without
CASUALTIES

Introduction

It was January 2012 and I was sitting on a plane with my wife, Julie, heading to Costa Rica to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. Little did I know that the book I was reading on the plane would help crystalize a model that my team and I at Next Element had been working on for nearly a decade. That day the seeds for this book were planted. *Conflict Without Casualties* is the manual for our guiding mission: to transform negative drama into compassionate accountability. For readers who are curious about the book that triggered my inspiration, and the process of discovering and developing the Cycle of Compassion, Chapter 5 is just for you.

I grew up the son of missionary parents in Africa. I've been asked a thousand times if I will become a missionary and if I ever want to return to Africa to follow in their footsteps. I haven't felt that calling, yet I have always believed I could be a missionary wherever I am. Guiding a company that teaches and coaches leaders to use positive conflict to create is a humbling and rewarding mission. I am grateful for this opportunity to fulfill my calling. This book is my journey and my message.

During the final stages of writing this book I struggled with how to really make this project something special. Having already written and self-published my first book, I'd already conquered my biggest fear—that nobody would care about what I wrote. A lot of people liked it. I've been blogging regularly for several years now, and that's helped me work on some other key issues: getting over worrying about other people's approval, finding my voice, and deciding what message I want to share with the world. The process of writing this book started more as a task to be accomplished, since we wanted a comprehensive

reference book to support our Leading Out of Drama® training system. But the more I wrote, the more excited I became.

I believe that the misuse of conflict energy is the biggest crisis facing our world and that we haven't even begun to harness the creative potential of conflict. When people embrace the fullest meaning of compassion as a process of "struggling with" others in creative conflict, they can transform lives, companies, and the world.

In our first book, *Beyond Drama: Transcending Energy Vampires*, co-authored with my good friend and Next Element founding partner, Jeff King, we covered the key concept of Drama and Compassion at a fairly basic level. I'm so grateful for the many lives impacted by *Beyond Drama*. From Australia to Romania to Canada, our first book has helped expose the dynamics and nuances of drama and reframe the conversation around how to deal with it. *Conflict Without Casualties* represents a significant evolution of our team's thinking and practice around positive conflict.

I wrote this book because my company and I are on a mission: a mission to help people shift the balance of negative energy in the world by using conflict to create. For a decade we have successfully taught change agents such as top executives, parents, managers, teachers, and clergy to engage in conflict in a new way. We have developed a model and suite of tools to transform the energy of conflict into a creative force. These tools allow people to stop fearing conflict and start leaning into conflict for positive results.

I've always had a problem with the notion of conflict reduction, management, or mediation. All of these concepts imply that conflict is something to be lessened or eradicated, as if it's fundamentally a bad thing. I'm not surprised that many people would view conflict this way. The casualties of conflict are everywhere you look: divisive political rhetoric, religious polarization, and global ideological warfare abounds. Everywhere you look, conflict is generating casualties. Why wouldn't people want to avoid or control it?

I've seen the casualties firsthand. In high school, I lived in Botswana during the reign of apartheid in South Africa. I've witnessed police raids, murders of innocent political refugees, and car bombs that left a million pieces of flesh, metal, and clothing impaled on the thorns of an acacia tree. As a licensed clinical psychologist I've worked with victims of domestic violence who fear for their own lives and the lives of their children. I've mediated conflicts between divorcing parents and feuding executives who want nothing more than to destroy the other person's life and spirit. I've coached pastors who were pushed

out of their congregations by corrupt bishops who abused their authority. I've been framed and fired from a job. I'm no stranger to destructive conflict.

Through it all, I've had the good fortune to have parents, mentors, and friends who believed there had to be a better way. They didn't reject conflict; they just knew there was a better way to use it. I listened and learned from them. I understood that eliminating the casualties of conflict cannot happen by repressing the conflict and just "being nice." It happens by stewarding the energy inherent in conflict to make something positive, even amazing. At Next Element, we've developed a method for doing this. It's called Compassionate Accountability.

You *can* engage in conflict without casualties. We have spent a decade teaching, coaching, and advising thousands of people on how to do this—refining and improving our methods over time. From Fortune 500 executives to pastors of the smallest rural churches, the concepts in this book have made a profound difference in how people walk bravely into the battlefield of conflict while preserving the dignity of all involved. If you believe that conflict can have a positive purpose, then learning how to use it well can significantly change your personal and professional relationships and the cultures in which you work.

Transformative communication involves the ability to engage in positive conflict, with compassion, to achieve results that benefit the greatest number of people. *Conflict Without Casualties* is a detailed, actionable, down-to-earth manual for how to practice compassionate accountability. If you are a change agent looking for powerful tools to leverage conflict to catalyze change, this book is for you. If you are a mediator looking for tools to break an impasse, this book is for you. If you are a manager who avoids conflict because you want to keep the peace, this book is for you. If you are a parent who has high standards for your children and can't seem to bring up the subject without alienating them, this book is for you. If you are a CEO who wants a higher level of accountability from your people while preserving their dignity, this book is for you. If you are tired of the negative drain of drama and want a set of tools for leading yourself and others out of drama, this book is for you.

Negative conflict, manifested as workplace drama, costs the U.S. economy more than \$350 billion per year in the currency of broken relationships, dysfunctional teams, morale and engagement problems, and failure to thrive. Part one of this book, "Conflict With Casualties: Drama Is Killing Us," invites readers into an incisive exploration of the dynamics, motives, behaviors, costs and consequences of negative conflict through the lens of Karpman's Drama

Triangle. A day in the life of persons working at Drama Corp exposes the answers to questions like: What are the insidious ways drama manifests in the workplace? What are the basic principles of gossip? What do drama-based cultures look like? What happens when people try to help when under the influence of drama? Why do people keep acting this way when it hurts themselves and others?

A vast majority of leaders mistakenly assume conflict is the problem. They try to minimize the casualties by either avoiding conflict or controlling, mediating, or managing it. While this may reduce their stress, it also compromises the positive, creative potential in conflict. There's a better way. The second part of this book teaches readers about Next Element's proprietary model, the Compassion Cycle, a researched and tested framework for resisting the negative pull of drama, making healthier choices and using positive conflict to lead others down a better path. The Next Element team has trained thousands of leaders in these concepts and the positive results are profound. Readers will meet Juanita, the head of marketing at Compassion Corp, a leader who shows us how to apply compassionate accountability in her workplace relationships. Readers will be guided through step-by-step applications, and see multiple examples and case studies to show how the concepts can work in their lives.

The more powerful the tool, the more important the stewardship of that tool. Part three is the user's manual, the nitty-gritty rules and formulas for effectively putting compassionate accountability to work every day. This is where readers really gain confidence and understanding for how to take the concepts off the page and into their most important relationships.

Conflict Without Casualties is packed with user-friendly principles, personal stories, real-life examples and case studies, provocative questions for discussion, and easy-to-follow strategies to begin building your compassionate accountability skill set. The book is designed to be used in a variety of personal and professional growth settings. Are you working through the book on your own or with a coach? We've developed specific personal reflection and development questions at the end of the book. Would you like to use it as a book study or centerpiece of a team-development program? A companion discussion guide for just that purpose can be purchased separately. A glossary will help readers keep track of new concepts and definitions.

Any great learning quest involves a solid assessment of your current state. We've developed the *Drama Resilience Assessment (DRA™)*, an online assessment to gain insight into your drama tendencies and compassion potentials. Go to

next-element.com/conflict-without-casualties to complete one free assessment and receive your results. Use these results to add context and value to your book study, team-building efforts, or coaching program. If you complete the DRA™ for individual purposes, you will only be allowed to rate yourself and receive a basic profile report. If you complete the DRA™ as part of a professional training or coaching program, you may have the opportunity to rate your team or another individual and receive a more comprehensive profile report. Do you want to measure change in your compassionate accountability? Take the DRA™ again and compare your results.

Some readers may wish for specific applications of compassionate accountability to topics like meetings, strategic planning, leading change, or supervisor-employee performance conversations. I can assure you that this book has plenty of tips you can apply in any of these situations. You won't see a chapter with any of these titles, because I've chosen to keep this book focused on the theory and methods of compassionate accountability: the essential toolkit. The principles are applicable in so many settings that it would be difficult to narrow it down to just a few.

Do you want to take your skills to the next level and become a part of our worldwide professional network? Leading Out of Drama (LOD®) is our system for comprehensive training, skill-building, and coaching for compassionate accountability. Visit our website or call Next Element to find out more about professional certification programs or to find a certified LOD® professional near you.

Enough introduction. Let's begin.

PART 1

CONFLICT WITH CASUALTIES

Drama Is Killing Us



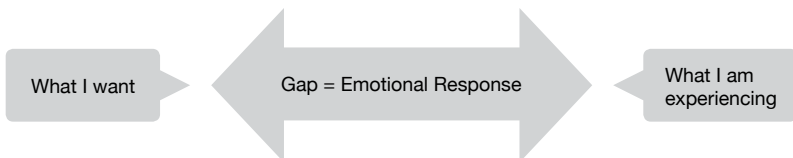
Conflict

THE BIG BANG OF COMMUNICATION

“A problem only exists if there is a difference between what is actually happening and what you desire to be happening.”

—Ken Blanchard

At the most basic level, conflict is a gap between what we want and what we are experiencing at any given moment. Conflict is everywhere. I want my latte in my hands before 7:50 a.m. so I can get to work on time, and the line is long at Starbucks. I want my team to come together around our strategic vision, and they have lot of questions. I want to feel rested tomorrow, and I also want to stay up tonight to watch three episodes of my favorite show on Netflix. I want to be recognized for my hard work on a project, and my client criticizes it. I want to feel settled about a decision, and my gut clenches whenever I think of it. I want to feel confident that my sales team will positively represent our brand in front of customers, and they question each other’s integrity. I want to feel safe in my house, and I am afraid because two families in my neighborhood have been victims of recent break-ins.



What happens when conflict occurs? Where do you feel it? Does your heart rate soar? What about your stomach? Does it churn or tighten up? Perhaps your hands get cold and clammy or your neck gets hot. Does your hair stand up on the back of your neck? Maybe you notice racing thoughts or extreme emotions. Some people shut down. Some people lash out. Some people have learned to take it in stride. But for most of us, conflict is stressful. The more conflict we experience, the bigger the emotional, physical, and psychological toll it takes on us.

CONFLICT GENERATES ENERGY

Before evaluating whether conflict is good or bad, or how we should respond to it, it's important to recognize that conflict generates energy. That energy shows up in a variety of ways. It could show up in racing thoughts and fantasies about what to do next. It could show up in increased heartbeat and flushed face caused by increased cortisol levels in the bloodstream. It could show up as an overwhelming desire to fight back or run away.

Conflict generates energy, pure and simple. And conflict is unavoidable. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that conflict is part of the grand design of the universe. I'm convinced that conflict is a necessary part of our human experience. Humans are created to be different from each other. Because of this we will inevitably have different needs, wants, and pursuits. When these come into contact with each other, conflict occurs.

Conflict is energy. Conflict is unavoidable. The only real question is: what will you do with the energy created by conflict? How *will* you spend it?

WHEN CONFLICT COMES KNOCKING, HOW DO YOU STRUGGLE?

Our experience working in thousands of interpersonal conflict situations shows that when conflict occurs, human beings struggle. We spend the energy struggling. That struggle seems to take one of two forms: we either struggle against or we struggle with.

Struggling *against* is a process of opposition and destruction. It's about taking sides, forming camps, viewing the struggle as a win-lose proposition, and adopting an adversarial attitude toward resolving the discrepancy between what we want and what we're getting. Struggling against is everywhere. It's in politics and religion. On the news. On social media. Look no further than a typical Facebook post to see self-righteous, moralistic, opinionated, and dogmatic attitudes that create and maintain polarized "us vs. them" struggles.

Struggling *with* is a process of mutuality and creation. It's about seeing the solution as a two-way street, viewing the struggle as an opportunity for a win-win outcome, and adopting an attitude of shared responsibility for resolving the discrepancy between what we want and what we are experiencing.

“The purpose of conflict is to create.”

—Michael Meade

A friend of mine, the poet, psychologist, mythologist, and musician Michael Meade, says “the purpose of conflict is to create.” Wow, that's a strong statement! I agree. If conflict is inevitable and it generates energy, and if creating something new requires energy, then all the pieces are in place. The determining factor is whether the energy of conflict will be used productively to create, or destructively to tear down. That choice is up to us. Each one of us has the power to transform the energy of conflict into a creative force.

This notion of conflict is quite different from what I was taught in school, and even what I see in most leadership literature. Conventional wisdom says that conflict is supposed to be managed, reduced, or controlled. Why? Because most people are accustomed to struggling *against* during conflict. When we ask people what's the first thing that comes to mind when they think of conflict, they nearly always use phrases like, “very stressful,” “people get hurt,” “nothing good comes out of it,” “I avoid it if I can,” or “I gotta win.” We rarely hear an enthusiastic endorsement of conflict as a creative force. We also rarely meet a leader who has mastered the art of positive, generative conflict.

DRAMA AND COMPASSION

Two critical concepts in this book, and in our entire philosophy of transformative communication, are Drama and Compassion. You will see these themes repeated, expanded and applied throughout this book and our work at Next Element.

Drama is the result of mismanaging the energy of conflict. It diverts energy towards the pursuit of self-justification, one of the strongest human urges and one that almost always gets us into trouble.

The word compassion originates from the Latin root meaning “co-suffering.” Com means “with” or “together” or “alongside.” Passion means suffering or struggling. Together, these reveal a process of struggling with others.

Compassion is the result of people taking ownership of their feelings, thoughts and behaviors, and choosing to spend the energy of conflict pursuing effective solutions that preserve the dignity of all involved. Compassion is more than care and concern for others. It's about the willingness to get in the trenches and struggle together as an equal with others.

The greatest change agents in history, those who have made the biggest positive difference, have practiced this kind of compassion. From Gandhi to Mandela, Mother Theresa to Martin Luther King, each has struggled *with* instead of *against*. The next chapter unpacks the dynamics, behaviors, and consequences of drama, which is what happens when people struggle against themselves and each other.

Appendix A is a Personal Development Guide, that is geared specifically for those who would like to go deeper with the concepts from each chapter. Use this guide in your personal development, with your coach or counselor, or with a trusted friend or mentor. The guide is organized by chapter number and title so you can easily find the applicable items.

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