

Transforming Fear and Conflict at
Home, at Work, and in the World

DANGEROUS



LOVE

CHAD FORD |

Foreword by The Arbinger Institute, Authors of
the international bestseller *The Anatomy of Peace*

DANGEROUS LOVE

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at Work, and in the World

CHAD FORD



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Dangerous Love

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To Amanda, Makena, TK, Emmy Skye,
Summer, and Linda Lou

Thank you for teaching me how to
love dangerously again.
I will love you that way too. Forever.

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He aha te mea nui o te ao?

He tāngata! He tāngata! He tāngata!

What is the most important thing in the world?

It is people! It is people! It is people!

—MĀORI PROVERB

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FOREWORD

Over a decade ago, I received a phone call out of the blue from Chad Ford. We had never met, although I was aware of Chad from his work at ESPN. I'm a big basketball fan, and I knew Chad as one of ESPN's key NBA analysts. I didn't know until that phone call that his true passion in life was not sports but conflict. Chad had just arrived home in Hawaii following a challenging conflict resolution experience in the Middle East. The delicate negotiation he had been engaged to conduct had ended in success, but this surprised even him. Until the final few minutes of the negotiation, the entire effort had been an abysmal failure.

As he drove to the airport in Tel Aviv to board his flight home, Chad replayed the experience in his mind. Try as he might, he couldn't explain what had turned a certain failure into sudden success. So when he boarded his flight, Chad was both exhilarated and perplexed—happy about the result but troubled that he had no idea how to replicate it. During that flight, he discovered the understanding he was seeking. It came in the form of a book that one of his students had given him prior to the trip—*The Anatomy of Peace* by the Arbing Institute.

Chad pulled the book from his bag after the flight had lifted off from Tel Aviv. By the time he landed in Honolulu, the book had transformed his understanding of

conflict—including his perception of the negotiation he had just completed. It illuminated for Chad the poorly understood foundational underpinnings of conflict and helped him see, step-by-step, what had happened during his negotiation—how he actually had been making matters worse in the beginning and why everything suddenly turned for the better. He couldn't wait to talk to someone at Arbinger about his experience and to learn more about our work. I was the fortunate person who was able to talk with Chad that day.

Conflict professionals like Chad know a secret: sometimes their work helps and sometimes it doesn't, and often they don't know why. Armed with various theories and tools, they sift through their knowledge and skill sets hoping to find something that will help. When they find the right mix, "Sometimes," they say, "magic happens." But magic cuts both ways—both for and against. Even when unexplained good fortune smiles in one's direction, if it remains in the realm of magic, there is no reliable way to plan practical and effective change efforts; everything is left to hope and chance. For Chad, the discovery of Arbinger's work was the end to his confusion about why some approaches work while others don't. It illuminated how to build conflict resolution approaches that work.

In the years since our initial conversation, Chad has become a trusted colleague and one of my dearest friends. He and I have worked together to develop Arbinger's conflict approaches and offerings, and I've told many people over these years that Chad Ford, armed with an understanding of Arbinger's principles, is one of the best conflict resolution professionals on the planet. All my experience with Chad over these years solidifies that belief.

If I had to describe *Dangerous Love* in one sentence, I would say that it is the book version of being with Chad in person. Because that is so, I can confidently say that you will find this to be an interesting, meaningful, and moving read. From an Arbinger perspective, *Dangerous Love* is a deep and practical exploration of what we at Arbinger call “the most important move.” Which means that in addition to enjoying the read, I also believe in the foundational importance of the book’s message.

May you have the willingness and courage to feel and apply dangerous love.

Jim Ferrell

Managing Partner and Author

The Arbinger Institute

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS DANGEROUS LOVE?

One way to define conflict is “our inability to collaboratively solve problems with other people.”

Whom are you in conflict with right now? Whom are you struggling to solve a problem with? A family member? A friend? A coworker? A neighbor? An organization or a political party? All of the above?

We can handle conflict in basically one of two ways: constructively or destructively.

When we engage in constructive conflict, we can find freedom from the negativity of contention. We can find justice and mercy, unlock creativity, develop inner strength and calm, strengthen our personal and social relationships, and solve deep-rooted problems in our lives. We can even find peace—in our personal lives, our relationships with others, the organizations we work in, and the communities we live in.

Unfortunately, most of our experiences with conflict don’t look that way at all. They look more like destructive

conflict. In destructive conflict, contention runs rampant. Justice and mercy are nowhere to be found. Our options feel limited. We feel weak and anxious. Broken relationships, dysfunctional workplaces, and divided communities and nations are left behind in the rubble.

Which type of conflict are you in at the moment? Are you feeling frustrated? Irritated? Angry? Confused? Trapped? Hopeless? Does a solution to the conflict seem hopelessly out of reach? Have you given up on finding peace with those you are in conflict with? Or are you still swinging away, hoping that you'll land the blow that helps them come to their senses?

If you are feeling any of these ways toward any of these people, I wrote this book for you.

Conflict is always going to be with us—relationships are funny that way. Knowing how to transform destructive conflict into constructive conflict is critical to our personal, professional, and societal well-being. Yet, by and large, we are terrible at it.

Relationship researcher John Gottman writes that the inability of couples to talk about and work through their problems is the single biggest indicator of marital unhappiness. Sixty-nine percent of conflict in relationships is about ongoing, seemingly unsolvable problems.¹

A Stanford University study of CEOs in 2013 found that the skill set CEOs felt they needed most was conflict resolution.² And in a world that is increasingly becoming divided by political and social fissures, a 2018 Pew Research Center study found that young people are increasingly jaded about our ability to live together. The study found that they were much less likely to believe that people will help those in need, work together to solve community problems, and treat others with respect.³

What keeps us from mastering the art of conflict transformation?

Fear.

Conflict feels dangerous for most people. We flee from it if we can. If we can't run, we either give in or prepare for war. We build walls to protect us from the impending harm—emotional and physical—we fear is coming.

Fear of conflict plagues our personal, professional, and societal relationships: fear of conflict itself, fear of the people we are in conflict with, fear of pain, fear of not being loved or seen the way we want to be seen, fear that we are woefully unprepared and ill-equipped to handle the problems that beset us. When we let that fear of conflict, and the people we are in it with, take hold, our ability to actually solve the problems that underlie our disputes diminish dramatically.

What if we could transform our fear of conflict by learning how to love the people we are in conflict with through the conflict?

Yes, *love*. I think it's *the* crucial word in transforming conflict.

I know *love* is an odd word to pair with *conflict*, let alone the pairing of the words *dangerous* and *love*. Many people hear the word *love* and think "soft." However, I'm not talking about romantic love, nor the type of love that actually means "like." That's easy love.

We all want to live and work with people who love us and whom we like—people who are fun to be around, understand our brilliance, agree with our ideas and dreams, see our potential, and help us on our journey to become the incredible people we ultimately know we can be. But when conflict enters our relationships, easy love makes a run for it.

Love becomes a lot more challenging when the people we live and work with don't love us back, or when we don't

like them, they don't get us or they drive us nuts, they don't believe in our ideas and dreams, or, even worse, they get in the way of our journey.

Here's the paradox that makes conflict feel dangerous: when conflict comes, our instincts are to run or fight—to stop loving.

To transform conflict, we need to turn toward others, put down our physical and emotional weapons, and really love the people we are in conflict with. I call that sort of love *dangerous love*—a love that overcomes fear in the face of conflict.

Nothing is “safe” in dangerous love. Dangerous love requires more than courage; it demands fearlessness. It is scary. It takes risks. Dangerous love transforms conflict by calling upon us to let go of our self-preservation instinct inspired by fear (“What will happen to me if I let down my walls and help the person I'm in conflict with?”) and embrace us-preservation (“What will happen to us if I don't?”).⁴ It calls upon us to be vulnerable enough to open ourselves up with no guarantee that the person or people on the other side of the conflict will do the same. It asks us to be the first to turn toward the people we are in conflict with.

Dangerous love is a love that allows us to see the humanity of others so clearly that their needs and desires matter as much to us as our own, regardless of how they see us. It is the opposite of easy love. It is choosing love over fear in the face of conflict. It is choosing we over me.

Dangerous love is remarkably effective in transforming our conflicts because it creates space for us to truly see the people we are struggling with. When dangerous love takes hold, our views—of ourselves, others, and the conflict itself—transform. We no longer see enemies or others. We see us.

That is the level of care and concern toward the people we are in conflict with needed to solve the most difficult, intractable challenges we face in life. That is the type of love needed to mend relationships in our families, overcome gridlock in the workplace, solve for deep polarization in our communities and countries, and collaboratively engage in problem-solving with our adversaries internationally.

I have come to believe that dangerous love is the only way that we can transform destructive conflict into constructive conflict.

IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

This is a book for everyday people who struggle to deal with their own conflicts at home, at work, or in their communities or nations.

It is filled with the lessons I've learned as a mediator, facilitator, and college professor over the past fifteen years. My work with the Arbinger Institute as a consultant and facilitator has been especially impactful. Arbinger's work has been foundational in my view of conflict and conflict transformation and forms the basis for many of the key concepts in *Dangerous Love*.

If you have read *Leadership and Self-Deception*, *The Anatomy of Peace*, or *The Outward Mindset*, this book will give you a new way to look at key concepts from Arbinger, such as seeing people as people, outward mindset, self-deception, collusion, and the most important move, through the lens of conflict transformation. If you are new to Arbinger's ideas or conflict resolution and peacebuilding theories in general, the book will serve as both a primer and a road map to helping us overcome our fear of conflict and the people we are in conflict with.