

High Conflict People

How to Recognize & Manage HCPs

Dr. Amir Reza Talaie. • Anjni Chandwani, B.A., M.C.P.M.
Dr. E.M. (Ted) Vokes. • Adrian Deschamps B.A., E.S.

519-980-8998 • e.m.vokes@vokesassociates.com
www.vokesassociates.com • www.twitter.com/TedVokes



University
of Windsor

Department of Psychology



Centre for Executive and
Professional Education
at the University of Windsor

Odette School of Business

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

1



HCP Lab Objectives:

- HCP's and their impact on Team (& Family) Cultures
- Identifying High Conflict Personalities in the workplace (and beyond)
- Ways of managing High Conflict-Oriented Individuals
- Tips for dealing with a High Conflict leader / peer / employee / family member
- Do's and Don'ts for working with and managing HCP's

Based on the seminal work of
Bill Eddy of the High Conflict Institute



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

2

So, what exactly constitutes a High Conflict Person?

- High Conflict People (HCPs) are those who demonstrate a pattern of recognizable behaviours that increase conflict rather than reducing or resolving it.
- Typically, this pattern is persistent and effects the vast majority of relationships they form and hold throughout their lives. Although not all are characterized by conflict.
- For them it is not the content or substance of the 'issue' that increases the conflict; rather it is their behaviour in relation to the issue that causes it to endlessly amplify and escalate.

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders



3

So, what's the big deal?

- **Culturally Toxic People (CTP's)** make up about 20% of the general population. Of this segment, **High Conflict People (HCP's)** account for between 50 and 75% of these people, or 10-15% of the general population. Their percentage may be relatively low, but their negative impact on the world is far in excess of their numbers.
- HCPs typically inject havoc into workplace culture (as well as within families, communities, and even nations), and thereby prevent or erode *trust* and *psychological safety*. People *cope* with HCP's, but they never thrive in relation to them (although, some HCP's feed off one another).
- HCP's rarely if ever seek treatment for the underlying clinical and subclinical conditions that lead to High Conflict patterns of behaviour. Treatment programs exist for those who have had to deal with HCP's in families or the workplace for protracted periods of time.
- Depending on severity, HCP's can dramatically increase exposure with respect to Bill 168 (Ontario's workplace anti-harassment & anti-bullying legislation).
- Many highly bureaucratic rules and regulations applied to *everyone* emerge in reaction to a few interactions with HCP's.



*They really ruin it for the rest of us...
...in so many ways.*

And here is the biggest way...

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders



4

HCPs will inevitably abuse power

Here is why...

- There is a different psychology entirely; a psychology of intense *egocentrism* driving them to meet their unmet needs and desires with little or no concern for those who suffer as a result.
- They manipulate and exploit others for their own personal gain. Altruism (*Prosocial Behaviour* for the benefit of others) is a virtual impossibility.
- There is always an ulterior motive for HCPs. They are egocentric and cannot be trusted because they have an inability to form deep, trusting connections with others.
- They will never invest in the mission of the team or organization, although they might appear to, or claim to, as a manipulation technique. They will often “wrap themselves in the flag” or “do it all for the mission/cause”.
- They cannot provide leadership. They may well have a select few favourites, but cannot attach, love or empathize with others.
- They can only be *behaviourally managed*, but never led. Your effective leadership approach that you use with your non-HCP staff will be seen as a ‘weakness’ to be exploited by an HCP.
- They can often bring out the worst in others, invariably damage others they draw to them, and can even evoke a *situationally* Dark Side in others (which will lift when not in the presence of the HCP).

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

5

High Conflict Persons *Persistent Observable Behaviours*

- *Persistent* all-or-nothing (back & white) thinking.
- *Persistent* unmanaged emotions.
- *Persistent* extreme behaviours and/or threats.
- *Persistent* preoccupation with blaming others and will take no personal responsibility.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

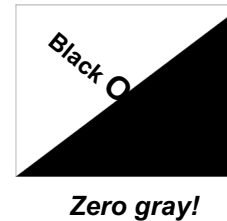
6

High Conflict Persons

Observable Behaviours

All-or-Nothing Thinking

- High conflict people see any conflict in terms of one simple solution, and this single solution inhibits their ability to see other points of view or to take another perspective.
- Compromise and flexibility seem impossible to them, and accordingly, they will not settle for any solution other than the one they have formulated.
- This often leads them to predict extreme outcomes if opposing parties do not handle the conflict their way.
- This all-or-nothing thinking pattern leads them to damage or end relationships with those they see as opponents.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

7

High Conflict Persons

Observable Behaviours

Unmanaged Emotions

- High conflict people become intensely emotional about their points of view.
- They show intense expressions of fear, distress, and /or anger and various forms of disrespectful behaviours and language.
- They argue that these emotions are appropriate under the circumstance and believe others should see them so as well.
- Alternatively, some high conflict people do not lose control of their emotions but utilize emotional manipulation to hurt others.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

8

High Conflict Persons

Observable Behaviours

Extreme Behaviours and/or Threats

- High conflict individuals engage in extreme behaviours such as intense anger, swearing beyond cultural norms, physical aggression (e.g., throwing of objects, shoving), spreading rumours; constant monitoring of other people, sending nasty emails, and other forms of retribution or punishment.
- These behaviours are persistent and stem from the individual feeling the loss of control of their emotions or having an intense desire to control or dominate others in the situation.
- Accordingly, high conflict people consistently resort to extreme behaviours (including threats) in an attempt to control their social environment.
- As much as they are distressing to others, it should be understood that in most instances they themselves are in a state of intense distress. Thus, creating and fueling conflict is actually a power strategy to help them feel safe and in control.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

9

High Conflict Persons

Observable Behaviours

Preoccupation with Blaming Others/No Personal Responsibility

- High Conflict People tend to blame others; particularly those closest to them and/or who hold authority over them.
- For them conflict is always personal, and they feel as if they cannot survive in the conflict environment if things do not go their way.
- Contrastingly, they see no personal fault within themselves, regarding themselves as free of all responsibility.
- They are usually unaware of the negative, self-defeating effects of their own behaviour patterns. Accordingly, it is very difficult for them to learn from past behaviour.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

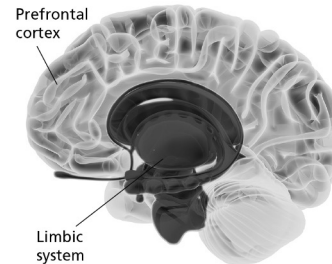
10

CONFLICT vs. PROBLEM SOLVING

In Conflict we typically experience many of the so-called 'negative emotions'...

...wariness, fear, frustration, bewilderment, anger, resentment, contempt, rage... All of which are self-protection emotional states originating from the Limbic System. HCP's thrive in these states.

The Limbic System also contains the *Reward* and *Alarm Systems* of the Brain



- When dealing with HCP's you want to use your emotions as *data*, not as sources of *action*! That is, experience your emotions. Don't act on your emotions.
- If your Limbic System is in the driver's seat, the HCP is in control. It's their game and they know how to play it much better than you!
- Work to reengage your Prefrontal Cortex to steer your actions. Then you maintain control and they don't win.

In Problem Solving it's the presence of so-called 'positive emotions'...

...curiosity, interest, camaraderie, shared-frustration, confidence from the collective, excitement, shared celebration... All of which are social cohesion emotional states originating from moderation of the Limbic System by the Prefrontal Cortex.

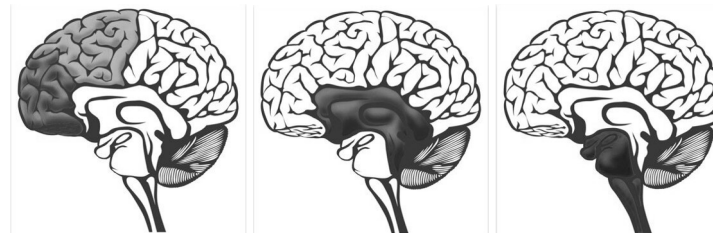
E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

11

HCP's Diminish our Functional IQ: Aggression is their Weapon



Prefrontal Cortex:
Executive Control System
Cognitive Processing
(I.Q., E.Q., S.Q., C.Q.)

Limbic System:
Social Survival System
Reward & Alarm Centres
(Emotional/Motivational States)

Brain Stem:
Physical Survival System
Instinctual Responses
(Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fold)

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates



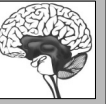
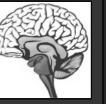

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

2022

12

Emotional State & Diminishing Functional IQ

Brain State	Calm	Alert	Alarm	Fear	Terror
Dominant Brain Region	 Prefrontal Cortex	 Prefrontal Cortex & Limbic System	 Limbic System	 Limbic System & Brain Stem	 Brain Stem
Nature of Cognition	Abstract/ Creative	Concrete/ Routine	Emotional/ Vigilant	Reactive/ Impulsive	Reflexive/ Instinctual
Functional I.Q.	100-120 Optimum	90-110 - 10 Pts	80-100 - 20 Pts	70-90 - 30 Pts	60-80 - 40 Pts

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

*Your fear is
their weapon!*

2022

13

High Conflict Persons Underlying Psychological Dynamics

Personality Disorders (Clinical)

- A personality disorder is a long-term dysfunctional pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving that effects many or most aspects of an individual's life, including their relationships with others.
- Individuals who have a personality disorder have blind spots with respect to themselves, meaning that they have a great deal of difficulty seeing how their behaviours affect the people surrounding them.

Personality Dark Traits (Sub-Clinical)

- Dark personality traits are called "dark" because of their malevolent nature. They are not considered clinical disorders *but are as toxic and destructive in the family and workplace as Personality Disorders.*

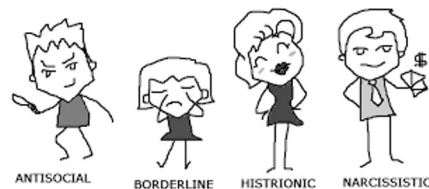
E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

14

High Conflict Persons *Cluster B Personality Disorders*

What are the personality disorders?

- Anti-Social Personality Disorder (APD)
- Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)
- Histrionic Personality Disorder (HPD)
- Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

15

Core Fears of Cluster-B PD's

- **Anti-Social:** Fear of being dominated, includes fear of losing control over you, their spouse/children/boss/co-workers/employees, their money/assets, or themselves.
- **Borderline:** Fear of being abandoned. "I hate you! Don't leave me!"
- **Histrionic:** Fear of being ignored. "I'll disappear if I'm not the focal point of everyone."
- **Narcissistic:** Fear of being publicly exposed, humiliated, and/or belittled and diminished in the eyes of others.

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

16

High Conflict Persons: *Underlying Causes*

Personality Dark Traits (Sub-Clinical)

- Dark personality traits are called “dark” because of their malevolent nature. They are not considered clinical disorders *but are still extremely destructive in the family and workplace.*
- Dark employees can gradually (and sometimes rapidly) destroy the positive morale in the teams they belong to. They can get away with below standard work performance and will engage in a variety of counterproductive work behaviours.
- Dark leaders show the same type of behaviours, however, on a much larger scale. They are capable of making the whole organization fail by creating a toxic culture.

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

17

High Conflict Persons *Dark Traits*

- **Severity:** Dark personalities may not seem to be severe conditions; that’s why they can easily go undetected. In reality however, they do cause severe destruction to others in their lives.
- **Prevalence:** Dark personalities are extremely common and can be found in people from all walks of life (unrelated to education, socioeconomic status, organizational rank, age, gender, etc.)



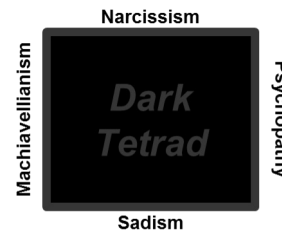
E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

18

High Conflict Persons

The Dark Tetrad Model

Dark Tetrad is the most well-known model of Dark Personality Traits and consists of four dark personality dimensions.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

19

High Conflict Persons

Dark Traits

Dimension 1: Narcissism

- Narcissism is characterized by a grandiose sense of self-importance, along with an excessive need for the admiration and adoration of others, pronounced arrogance, and a sense of uniqueness and entitlement.
- Because they see themselves as special and superior, they demonstrate a **lack of empathy** for those they see themselves as better than (most people), envy towards those they aspire to be like (a few powerful and high-status people), and a strong tendency to exploit others whom they see as their inferiors (again, most people).
- Narcissists can be extremely competent and successful in their work life, but not necessarily. Their sense of greatness need not be based in anything real or any real talents or abilities. They will do whatever possible to reach the high status they have always longed for. They often move toward positions of ever-greater power as a means of feeding their "narcissistic supply."
- They can be charming and likable at first, especially if you are a powerful individual. They love to hoard and 'suck up' to powerful people they wish to have as allies. They turn very dark toward you very quickly if you cease to be powerful in their eyes.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

20

High Conflict Persons

Dark Traits

Dimension 2: Psychopathy

- The most obvious expression of psychopathy is *criminal violation of society's rules*. 15% to 20% of all prison inmates are psychopaths, but they make up only 1% of the population. ***They not only lack empathy but have no capacity for guilt or shame.*** They know the difference between right and wrong. They just really don't care.
- All Psychopaths are Narcissists, but ***not*** all Narcissists are Psychopaths. This is the only necessary co-occurring link between any of the Dark Tetrad personality dimensions.
- A hallmark of psychopathy is a very strong tendency toward taking dangerous risks. Accordingly, the life expectancy of psychopaths is somewhat lower than the general population. Psychopaths do experience emotions, but on a flatter amplitude, so they often do extreme things to feel emotions. Moreover, they are very good at switching emotions off or on whenever it suits them.
- When paired with a high IQ, psychopaths can better control their impulses, and plan more carefully for their actions. Intelligent psychopaths are great at deceiving you, and take great delight in doing so (e.g., organizational psychopaths).



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

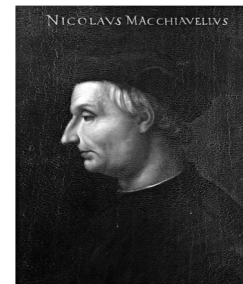
21

High Conflict Persons

Dark Traits

Dimension 3: Machiavellianism

- Machiavellianism is characterized by a duplicitous and deceitful interpersonal style, a cynical disregard for morality, and a focus on self-interest and personal gain without regard for the effects they have on others. Accordingly, they demonstrate impaired empathy (callousness) even as they will often appear gracious and caring, but this just is a means to their deceitful ends.
- Machiavellians *WANT* to deceive you, but they are not necessarily good at it. Moreover, they may not even realize they are not good at it, although some are very good at it and know they are. They are among the most dangerous to others, but many think they are “getting away with it” when everyone sees right through their manipulative power games.
- Accordingly, There is no relationship between Machiavellianism and IQ. Nor between Machiavellianism and *Theory of Mind* (anticipating what others are thinking in interpersonal interactions).



Machiavelli was an Italian Renaissance diplomat who wrote a classic book on amassing and sustaining power. In *The Prince* he espoused the principles that for a ruler “*it is much better to be feared than loved*” and “*the end justifies the means.*”

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

22

High Conflict Persons

Dark Traits

Dimension 4: Sadism

(Newest Addition – that made the “Triad” into the “Tetrad”)

- Sadism is characterized by gaining pleasure from harming others, physically or emotionally, without using harm as an instrument to achieve other goals (i.e., for the sadist, harm is the end in itself).
- “Everyday Sadism” (Buckels, Jones, & Paulhus) emphasizes that it can happen everyday in any workplace, often in more psychological than physical forms. Playing the puppet master to harm relationships, spreading rumours, getting other’s in trouble are all psychological means of harm. But practical jokes to mask cruel intentions are common as well.
- Among all Dark Traits, sadism is the strongest predictor of almost all kinds of counterproductive workplace behaviours.



“One must do violence to the object of one’s desire; when it surrenders, the pleasure is greater.” — Marquis De Sade

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

23

Manifestations of the Dark Traits

Tendencies	Narcissism	Machiavellianism	Psychopathy	Sadism
Callousness	High	High	High	High
Impulsivity	Elevated	–	Low/High	–
Manipulation	Elevated/High	High	High	Elevated/High
Criminality	–	(White-Collar)	High	Low/High
Grandiosity	High	–	Elevated	–
Enjoyment of Cruelty	Vindictive/Punitive	–	–	High

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

24

The Common High Conflict Tactics



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

25

High Conflict Tactics *Targets of Blame*

- HCP's persistently identify people they can take their internalized negative emotions out on. In so doing, they reject and deflect any form of responsibility for the conflicts they are in fact producing, sustaining, and even escalating.
- They can have various Targets of Blame across the different facets of their lives (e.g., romantic, family, friendship, workplace settings, etc.), and the targets frequently shift over time. Everyone in the family or the work team can find themselves with a target on their back at some point.
- The main function of selecting targets is for the abuser to manipulate others' sense of reality so as to look entirely reasonable. Their poor behaviour or performance is entirely because their "Target of Blame" makes them angry or fails to perform or behave to the HCP's expectations. *"It's ALL them; not me!"*



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

26

High Conflict Tactics

Negative Advocates (a.k.a. "Flying Monkeys")

- HCP's foster relationships with people who (wittingly or unwittingly) will collude with the HCP to justify their actions.
- This allows them to avoid confronting their negative behaviours as someone else is agreeing with their point of view. Negative Advocates can even go so far as to join the HCP in their abuse of their targets of blame. They take the side of the HCP and participate in the accusations, rumour-mongering, jibes, and admonitions of the HCP's target.
- HCP's will typically appear fiercely loyal to their Negative Advocates, but in fact their loyalty is only up to the point that their "Flying Monkey" ...
 - remains totally and unquestioningly loyal to the HCP - they must NEVER question the HCP as such disloyalty will be severely punished, turning them into a new Target of Blame) or,
 - until such time as the Negative Advocate is no longer useful to the HCP, at which point they will be abandoned or discarded by the HCP.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

27

High Conflict Tactics

Manipulation of Authority Figures

- A variant on Negative Advocates is HCP's propensity to work extremely hard to manipulate professionals into supporting their efforts to vilify and harm their Targets of Blame. Physicians, psychologists, social workers, clerics, child protection workers, police, lawyers, judges, union representatives, school principals, bosses, etc. are all seen by HCPs as valuable assets in their efforts to attack those they see as deserving of punishment and retribution.
- They are unencumbered by truth in their efforts to manipulate these professionals as they generally believe that if they say something, it's true, or if they know it's a lie, they believe it's entirely justified because their target deserves all the bad that they can direct their way.
- While HCP's rarely see it coming, it is often their undoing that one or more professionals will eventually see through their manipulations and actually punish the HCP for attempting to manipulate their authority toward their ends of harming another.
- **Power Strategy:** Manipulation of *Information* and *Subordinate Power* to leverage the *Expert* and *Legitimate Power* of others.

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

28

High Conflict Tactics

Creating a Hypervigilant Psychological Space: Walking on Eggshells & Precursive Signaling

- HCP's "train" those who they interact most with to fear "setting them off". People who are subject to the power plays of an HCP will typically recount how they must "walk on eggshells" around them for fear of "triggering" them and evoking their wrath.
- It's not uncommon for HCPs to develop habits which signal a coming escalation, unmanaged display of emotions, or indeed, an attack. Those who have had to deal with them for long periods of time will learn these cues that an outburst is pending.
- These cues are unique to the HCP. It might be anything from performing a routine task that they only do when warming up for an attack to a behavioural cue that precedes a bout of outrage (e.g., "he only does the dishes when he's about to blow!" or "she's humming again. She's going to go ballistic in the next 30 minutes!")
- Most HCPs are unaware of their signalling cues, but those who are their targets learn them quickly and stay ever-wary for these precursive signals in order to self-protect and better prepare themselves for an attack.

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

29

High Conflict Tactics

Time Distortions: Manufactured Urgency & Strategic Delays

- **Time Distortions** is a strategy that many HCP's will use to demonstrate their power. If they were to give you their attention easily and as you ask it would mean for them that you have the power, and unless they admire you and wish to garner your favour, this is unacceptable to the HCP. They need to be in control.
- **Manufactured Urgency:** They will often portray a situation as urgent and in need of an immediate reply, solution, or act of assistance, or something devastating or catastrophic will happen. "I need to know right away, or we'll lose this client!" when in fact the client has said, "Okay, we'll get back to me when you have a few moments. No hurry." The purpose here is to bring you into an alarm state which diminishes your logical reasoning abilities and puts them in control.
- **Strategic Delays (a.k.a. "Stonewalling"):** Often HCP's will withhold doing something for you that you need done so that you become beholden to them. You must show that you deserve their attention, so they will find many reasons to delay responding to your requests or need for support. You must show them that you know how important they are, so they train people around them to "suck up" to them so that they get what they need from them when needed.
- **The Double Standard:** So, if you ask them for help on something time sensitive, they will often keep you waiting to demonstrate that their work or activity is much more important than what you are asking of them, but they will demand an immediate response to their questions or requests for assistance – again, because they are more important than you.

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates

Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners

Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

30

High Conflict Tactics

Gaslighting

- Gaslighting is a form of emotional (and sometimes, physical) abuse.
- Originates from the 1940's movie "Gaslight".
- It's a tactic used by all manipulators: a.k.a., those who would score high on the *Dark Tetrad*.
- Its main function is for the abuser to manipulate the victim's sense of reality.
- It destabilizes the victim leading to confusion and self-doubt.
- It can occur in any type of relationship (romantic, family, friendship, workplace settings, etc.).



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

31

High Conflict Persons

Types of *Gaslighting*



1. *Classic Gaslighting (Denial)*

- Outright denial of a person's reality. *"That never happened. What's wrong with you!"*

2. *Withholding (Boundary Control)*

- *"I won't talk to you if you bring that up"* – an obscuring boundary that leads one to self-censorship (*"I can't ever bring up what most bothers me. It sets him off."*)

3. *Contradicting (Correcting)*

- Revising facts in the recounting of a personal event. *"You aren't remembering it correctly. Let me tell you how it REALLY happened!"*

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

32

High Conflict Persons Types of Gaslighting



4. Diversion (Narrative Seizing)

- Changing the subject to make the problem about the victim and deflect from the deeds of the HCP. *"Ya, whatever... What matters here is what's being done to me!"*
- Using shame or a past negative event against you. *"I hurt you!?! Let's talk about that time when you hurt me!"*
- Using sad or traumatic events in their life to make you feel empathy towards them. *"You know how much I suffered from my parents abuse, and now you are just doing the same thing! You are a bully just like them!"*

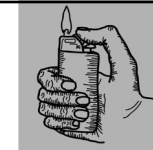
5. Minimization (Belittling)

- Devaluing and being dismissive of your feelings. *"You are being so petty" or "You are way overreacting!"*

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

33

High Conflict Persons Types of Gaslighting



6. Physical Gaslighting (Inflicting Harm)

- Causing physical pain but accusing the victim of overreacting to it, even to the point of shaming them for being hurt. *"It was just a tap! I didn't actually hit you. You are WAY overreacting!"* – all aimed to make you feel badly for them NOT hurting you.

7. Gaslighting by Proxy/Tribe (Inducing Negative Advocates)

- Negative Advocates, also known as 'Flying Monkeys', may gaslight on behalf of the HCP. They will typically do so by justifying, minimizing, or defending the bullying behaviours.
- These can include immediate or extended family, friends, co-workers, etc. *"She's your mother. Whatever she does, it's always out of love. One day she'll be gone, and then you'll realize how ungrateful you are being!"* or *"He's an amazing boss. You should feel lucky to have him leading our team. You are just selfish and ungrateful!"*

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

34

Strategies for addressing Gaslighting

- To maintain your own sanity and sense of reality, you may have to resort to recording or documenting events. Many HCP's will document what they view as your infractions, errors, mistakes, faults, and failings. Typically (but not always), they will be chaotic in their documentation, but they will frequently have a mass of documents to "prove" the injustices they have "suffered" due to your (or their target's) actions toward them. Their catalogue of "evidence" will be bewildering to their target as it will be based on interpretations of events, intentions, and reality that are unrecognizable to you and others. Strangely, this is normal... for the HCP, that is.
- Wherever possible have witnesses present so they can see the actual event taking place. HCP's have been at their game all their lives. They can be extremely convincing, including to authority figures.
- Remember that a key indicator that you are dealing with an HCP is if you start to question yourself, your recollections of events, even at times, your own sanity. Again, this is a normal experience... when dealing with an HCP, that is. If you don't question yourself or sense of reality with others in your life, then you have been gaslit by an HCP.
- Watch for the following phrases...

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

35

Common Gaslighting Phrases

Here is what it sounds like...

- You're overreacting!
- You need help... Seriously!
- I didn't do that. I never did that!
- I never said that!
- You're upset over nothing. You need to learn to calm down.
- Just calm down. It was no big deal!
- You must be confused again. You know how you get.
- You're so dramatic!
- Why are you so defensive?
- It was obvious to anyone I was just joking!
- What are you talking about?
- It's your own fault! You know you are your own worst enemy.
- You're so sensitive. Chill, sweetie!
- You twist things. You are always twisting things.
- Stop imagining things.
- Oh, so I suppose you're going to make it my fault again! You always do that to me!
- No one with half a brain would think that's what I did/said/meant!
- It's always something with you, isn't it?!

Gaslighting is when someone intentionally twists your perception of reality for their own gain




E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

36

High Conflict Tactics

Preemptive/Retrospective Justifications for Cruelty

- You say you want honesty. I'm just being honest.
- I'm only being honest. No one else will tell you the truth about you. They are all cowards!
- At least I'm not two-faced! I say it like it is. You just can't handle the truth.
- Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind.
- I don't like it either, but it's for your own good!
- You just can't deal with hearing the truth.
- I don't like being mad at you. Don't make me mad at you.



E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

37

The Gaslighting Logic Spiral: "No, you're the cruel abuser!"

That didn't happen!... (denial)

...and if it did, it wasn't that bad!... (minimization)

...and if it was, it's no big deal!... (minimization)

...and if it was, I was only joking!... (diversion)

...and if I wasn't, it's not my fault!... (deflection of blame)

...and if it was, I didn't mean to do it!... (denial)

...and if I did, you made me do it!... (counter-blame)

...and if you didn't, it was for your own good!... (justification)

And if you call me out on my abusive power games toward others...

...I'll cry and make you out as the bully! (self-victimization)

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

38

High Conflict Tactics continued...

CC'ing & BCC'ing

- HCPs will not think twice about strategically carbon copying people who are not relevant to the discussion in email conversations to embarrass, humiliate, or shame their target(s). This only causes further escalation of the issue, but that's what they want.

Triangulation

- Triangulation can take many forms and can happen in parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, workplace relationships, intimate relationships, friendships, etc. Triangulation is used by HCPs primarily to "control the narrative".
- HCPs will delight and feel justified in pitting people against each other.
- If a parent refuses to acknowledge their children's personality and individualism, and at the same time, **siblings are treated very differently and discouraged from communicating with one another except through the parent**, it's triangulation.

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

39

High Conflict Tactics continued...

Ingratiating... The unasked-for favours, gifts, and acts of kindness and consideration... That AREN'T!!!

- HCPs will frequently go out of their way to do favours, arrange special surprises to mark occasions, come to your aid to "save the day", give gifts, and generally show highly considerate behaviour. They often say of themselves, *"I'd give you the shirt off my back!"*.
- But here is the "catch" ... get ready for a heavy "ask" at the worst possible time, which if denied, will be met with *"After ALL I do for you, this is the treatment I get!!!"*
- HCPs are "banking" their credits for future use, and they impose their credits upon you and then call them in when and as it suits them best.
- Related to this theme will be the HCPs who, when called out on inappropriate and/or bad behaviour, build a stockpile of good behaviour against which you are supposed to forgive future bouts of bad behaviour.
- Keep in mind that their "good behaviour" is frequently just doing their job without drama or a power struggle (which they are capable of doing when it suits them). Moreover, building a bank of good behaviour NEVER warrants bad behaviour. If you wouldn't tolerate the behaviour from a well-performing team or family member, there is no justification for tolerating bad behaviour with the excuse of *"but I've been so good!"*

E.M. Vokes, Ph.D. & Associates
 Organization Development & Change Management Practitioners
 Building Solutions • Facilitating Vision • Developing Leaders

40