

Introduction

Someone approaches you with a head full of fury and steam. They launch a diatribe in your direction that questions your integrity, the circumstances of your birth, and your intellectual capacity. As tempting as it is to retaliate with a vigorous defence of your personal attributes, your parentage, and your brain power, you resist. Leaping to your own defence in tricky conversations is rarely a successful strategy. Instead, you find yourself saying, "Let's not waste time discussing my own personal failings, how can I help you?"

Knowing how to conduct a tricky conversation can save you a lot of angst and unnecessary pain.

An innocent young man – let's place him in his early twenties – enters a pub to meet a friend. He scans the room only to be met with the glowering glare of a lug with too many drinks under his belt and too few neurons to counter them. The lug slurs and menacingly demands to know if the young man is looking at "his woman". While it is tempting to engage the inquirer in a discussion that informs him that women are not the possessions of men and therefore the description of "his woman" is factually if not morally incorrect, it is more likely to gain him a smack in the kisser than to advance the causes of feminism and humanism. Enlightening inebriated people of their ignorance and outmoded value systems is rarely a successful strategy in tricky conversations. Instead, our young man briskly replies, "I was wondering if her name is Emma? I think she went to school with my sister, Kate."

Deftly dealing with tricky people and creating diversions is a skill that once acquired not only can reduce violence, but can also soothe addled souls and increase peace in the world.

"I am not qualified to make diagnoses, but in your case ..."



Chapter 1

Conflict for beginners

“Hell is other people.”

Jean-Paul Sartre

You probably wouldn't want to sit down and have a cup of tea or a conversation with prominent figures in world history such as Genghis Khan or Attila the Hun – or even Joan of Arc, for that matter – but you'd have to admit they would be damned handy to have on your side in a scrap. In the arena of tricky conversations, when compared to these “masters of the art”, you are a fledgling beginner.

Tricky people are human dynamite sticks who impact on all that goes on around them – exciting, dramatic, powerful and often a right royal pain in the rear-end. Even so, they get things done and they get people talking. When a tricky person does something, it generally stays done. Learn how to harness their skills and passions and you have a secret weapon that makes the Stealth Bomber look, well, a bit second-rate.

If you have one or more tricky people in your life, this book is for you. This is the guide book for navigating conversations with them and resolving conflicts. You may be trying to live with them, work for them, manage them (well, at least attempting to), be part of a family with them, or just co-exist with them in a semi-harmonious way that won't set off the next world war.

Whatever you are trying to do with them, this book will help you firstly identify them, and then provide you with strategies for remaining