

# WHY WE ELECT NARCISSISTS AND SOCIOPATHS



**BILL EDDY**

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *5 TYPES OF PEOPLE WHO CAN RUIN YOUR LIFE*

## **Praise for *Why We Elect Narcissists and Sociopaths—And How We Can Stop!***

"Bill Eddy's newest book is a *must-read* for every citizen. The book offers a fresh, intellectually invigorating perspective on the endless political polarization and rapid rise of authoritarian leadership in America. Grounded in his concept of the high-conflict person (HCP), Eddy exquisitely expands our understanding of the dynamics of divided politics. He presents a well-researched historical view of how leaders (from both left and right) with authoritarian, high-conflict personalities have emerged as dictators in numerous countries worldwide. Eddy details a prescriptive, strategic action formula for preventing the predictable destructive outcomes of authoritarian leaders. This book will alarm you, inform you, and shake up your perspective—propelling you to take action—but only reasonable and effective action!"

—**Donald T. Saposnek, PhD, author of *Mediating Child Custody Disputes* and coauthor of *Splitting America***

"Understanding why people follow and support leaders with behaviours that are extreme and unwarranted is the topic of Bill Eddy's new book, *Why We Elect Narcissists and Sociopaths—And How We Can Stop!* In this fascinating work, the tumultuous and horrific impact of such leaders, how such individuals are shaped, and why they are supported are considered in the context of high-conflict personality and behaviours. Fundamentally, the book invites us to consider the role of 'Wannabe Kings' who have managed, often despite being considered incompetent or controllable, to be elevated to high positions and cause havoc. Importantly however, this book gives the readers, and those grappling with 'Wannabe Kings,' tools to prevent their ascension and to moderate the discourse that surrounds their grim reign. From the workplace to the political space, the book will inspire us to think differently about the tactics, behaviours, and personalities of some so-called leaders and revisit our approach to remake our future."

—**Professor Tania Sourdin, Dean and Head of School, Newcastle Law School**

"Thank you for this book. I wish I'd had it at the beginning of last year when I was running for Congress! A huge value of this book to me is to be better able to understand people trying to tear down our democracy. I learned several ways where I might have better persuaded erstwhile friends of mine to look objectively at candidates rather than following slogans."

—**Chuck Eddy, moderate Republican candidate, 2018 primary for Kentucky's 6th Congressional District**

"Personality disorders are dangerously important today, and it's vital we understand this better. We need this book."

—**Marjorie Kelly, author of *The Divine Right of Capital* and *Owning Our Future* and Executive Vice President, Democracy Collaborative**

“Author Bill Eddy has done a remarkable job of assessing the world of modern politics and those who have learned how to use their power to manipulate today’s communication tools to influence unsuspecting voters. It is a brave new world. Bill has competently described the characteristics of many individuals who have no business in positions of power or authority but they are because they have learned how to work the system, to the detriment of the community, for their own personal advantage—a sinister scheme that plays out every day. Bill makes no distinction between partisan politicians, as his observations apply to many of those who seek power. As a long-standing member of the Republican Party and the chairman of the committee to recall the former mayor of San Diego, Bob Filner, I recognize that all of Filner’s faults and failures can be directly attributed to the caustic characteristics so eloquently described by Bill. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in seeing how sausage is really made.”

—**Michael J. Pallamary, PLS**

“The younger generations inherit an increasingly interconnected world, one with global problems that require international solutions. With such powerful world-altering positions being compromised, it is of great importance to know the warning signs and the proper response—else history will continue to repeat itself. In discussing top-ranking politicians that cause harm and controversy, Bill Eddy brings his expertise of psychology and advances a developing theory of high-conflict personalities.”

—**Crosby Doyle, recent graduate in political science and sustainability systems**

“As a former judge and elected district attorney, I have dealt with several high-conflict politicians and elected officials with the characteristics that Bill Eddy describes in this book. He’s right on when he says they create unnecessary crises and conflicts and see themselves as big heroes instead of doing their real jobs. His suggestions for what to do make a lot of sense for reasonable politicians as well as voters. This is a must-read for anyone running for or thinking of running for election and even more important for those trying to govern.”

—**Bonnie Dumanis, former judge and recently retired longtime San Diego County District Attorney**

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# PREFACE

I learned about personality disorders, including narcissists and sociopaths, in 1980 while training to be a child and family counselor. It was an eye-opener. I didn't realize then that I would be teaching this information in regard to leadership and heads of state almost forty years later.

Understanding these disorders helped me deal with the most difficult clients I had, as well as a few people in my personal life. These people could seem reasonable and even charming on the surface, but they repeatedly got into conflicts with those around them that they expected me to solve. They didn't reflect on their parts in the problems and never changed their behaviors—even when they were the primary causes of the conflicts.

After a dozen years as a therapist, I decided to change professions to focus on conflict resolution and became a lawyer in 1992. I quickly realized that personality disorders were driving a lot of legal disputes, too—and in a bad direction. These disorders were not understood or even recognized by most legal professionals. Clients with such disorders had disputes that wouldn't settle; then their problems would grow and they would keep coming back to court. The uninformed professionals often made things worse.

I tried to explain to them that many people with personality disorders are stuck in a habit of blaming others, that they are always adversarial in their thinking, and that they often have unrestrained aggressive behavior. They need more limits, not more opportunities to blame others.

But lawyers said, "What are personality disorders? Forget about it, Bill. You're just saying that to win your case." Judges said, "I fail to see the relevance of this to legal disputes." Mental health professionals said, "Don't talk about those disorders in court. They will stigmatize people with personality disorders." These professionals didn't get it.

I found that I couldn't explain what was happening in five or ten minutes, so I eventually wrote a book about it that I completed in 2003. I couldn't find a publisher because they said there was no market for it, that no one would be interested in this subject. At the time, a friend who was learning how to set up websites made one for me. With the aid of this website, I was able to self-publish my book and sell it online.

Very quickly I saw that having a book and a website made a huge difference to getting my message out. I started to receive requests from around the country asking me to speak to groups of lawyers, judges, mediators, therapists, and others.

I taught them that high-conflict legal disputes don't just happen. They are *driven* by people with *high-conflict personalities* or *high-conflict people* (HCPs for short). Eventually I was contacted by human resource professionals, federal agencies, law enforcement, hospitals, universities, community groups, and city politicians who all wanted to understand the bizarre and unpredictable behavior of the difficult individuals who were draining their time, energy, and resources. I explained that their high-conflict behavior was quite predictable, once you recognized the warning signs, and it was simple to learn their patterns.

I started teaching my HCP Theory and developing methods for calming and resolving HCP disputes. After one of my trainings for judges, the organizer, Megan Hunter, suggested that we form a training partnership, which became the High Conflict Institute in 2008. The added visibility led to me speaking worldwide, mostly to professionals, but also to ordinary individuals struggling with HCPs in their lives. We soon augmented our services by adding a dozen trainers and online training.

Amazingly, the HCP pattern was the same everywhere. Were HCPs increasing, I wondered? The people on the receiving end of high-conflict behavior often tell us some variation of the following: "I wish I knew this years ago," "I can't believe they deceived me for so long," and "I had no idea how dangerous they could be."

It was around 2010 that political tensions seemed to erupt into high conflict. Increasing incivility between liberals and conservatives seemed to be occurring worldwide. Populism and authoritarian governments were sprouting all over. Could populist politicians be HCPs, I wondered? Many seemed to have these familiar personality patterns.

I began to wonder if it was possible to educate all voters about personality disorders and their destructive potential in politics. I realized I was having the same feeling as I did twenty-five years ago in the legal field. As I



began to think about writing this book, I asked myself if people would say personalities are irrelevant to today's problems. Or that I was just taking sides, trying to help my favorite candidate win. Now that I have this written, I guess I'll find out. I don't mind if this book creates these controversies. I just want people to *think* about personality dynamics rather than simply react to them.

## About This Book

This book emphasizes extreme cases, but the fundamental patterns herein can be applied to HCP leaders at all levels of government, business, and communities. I wrote this book in three sections.

### Part I: How Narcissists and Sociopaths Get Elected

Part I first covers the patterns of high-conflict politicians, how their narcissistic and sociopathic traits can be extremely dangerous and extremely deceptive, and how you can spot them early on (Chapter 1). Next, I describe HCPs' *emotional warfare*: how they seduce and attack and then divide and dominate whole communities and nations (Chapter 2). This is made possible because voters tend to split into four groups that fight with each other endlessly in response to this emotional warfare: *Loving Loyalists*, *Riled-Up Resisters*, *Mild Moderates*, and *Disenchanted Dropouts* (Chapter 3).

I then cover how the *high-emotion media* attracts high-conflict politicians from the fringes of society and launches them into leadership positions around the world, multiplying their emotional warfare thousands of times to reach millions of people (Chapter 4). Finally, I explain how the core secret of their narcissistic and sociopathic power is repeatedly promoting stories about a *Fantasy Crisis Triad* ("there's a terrible crisis caused by an evil villain that requires a super hero to solve—me!") as the only way to sell themselves to voters, because of their lack of skills for solving real problems (Chapter 5).

### Part II: The Fantasy Crisis Triad Worldwide

In Part II, I provide eleven examples of how Fantasy Crisis Triads have been used repeatedly by high-conflict politicians over the past hundred years to gain unlimited power. First, I analyze the original examples of Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and Mao Zedong, including how their personalities

developed and how they rose to power (Chapter 6). Then, I examine five present-day elected leaders from around the world who have taken their countries in a simplistic authoritarian direction using the same strategies (Chapter 7). I then delve into American examples that fit this pattern: Joseph McCarthy, Richard Nixon, and Donald Trump (Chapter 8). Finally, I review key mistakes that were commonly made in all of these examples (Chapter 9).

## Part III: How to Stop High-Conflict Politicians

Part III looks at how to end this pattern of giving power to HCPs. First, I explain methods for building relationships among groups that have been divided (Chapter 10). Next, I discuss how to identify and explain the patterns of HCPs to the political parties who choose candidates, to those who campaign for them, and to individual voters who want to discuss this problem with other voters (Chapter 11). Then, I go on to explain how anyone can expose the Fantasy Crisis Triads of high-conflict politicians to others (Chapter 12). I address how to be as assertive as high-conflict politicians are aggressive to block their unrestrained aggressive behavior with a more compelling message that is presented *factually and repetitively* with positive emotions (Chapter 13). Lastly, I look at how individuals and news outlets can analyze fake news, to shift the focus from promoting HCPs, their emotional warfare and their fantasy crises, to presenting more useful information about real problems and real solutions (Chapter 14).

## Conclusion and Appendices

The Conclusion reinforces the need to remain aware of HCPs in politics and the Appendices provide simple guides for recognizing their patterns and manipulations.

## A Cautionary Note

The personality pattern information in this book may make you think of some people you know. *Please make sure that you don't tell them that you think they are an HCP or have a narcissistic or sociopathic personality.* This always makes things worse, whether you're right or not. Just keep this point of view to yourself and learn how you can adapt your own behavior to deal with them more effectively.

On the other hand, if you are talking with others about a public official or anyone who wants to be elected to a position of power, it can be very helpful to say that you believe the person may have a high-conflict personality. Then you can explain why this is such a big concern and describe the warning signs and patterns that you see.

Of course, you might wonder if you have some of these patterns of behavior yourself. This is normal when people are first exposed to high-conflict personality information. It's healthy to reflect on your own behavior (people with personality disorders don't do this) and consider changing it if you believe it is problematic (which they also don't do). If you continue to feel worried about anything you read in this book, I encourage you to talk about it with a counselor.

## **My Concern and My Hope**

HCP politicians have the same patterns as HCPs in everyday life, but they have much more power to harm and deceive people on a much larger scale. That's why this is the most important book I have ever written. I want people to understand the seriousness of what we are all facing.

The greatest threat to humanity and democracy is narcissistic and sociopathic HCP politicians, regardless of their initial political identity (far left or far right). They are above and beyond politics and, because of their extreme personalities, they have been the cause of most of the world's suffering throughout history—especially the last hundred years—with no end in sight. As you will read, the conditions are as present today as they were in the past.

Yet I also have hope for three reasons:

1. We have had real success teaching tens of thousands of legal professionals about HCPs, how to spot them earlier, how to manage them, how to set limits on them, and how to help resolve their disputes.
2. For the last hundred years, as I describe in this book, HCP leaders have not had the support of the majority of their populations. Therefore, when the majority gets informed and organized, HCPs can be stopped—and this is what has happened throughout much of history.
3. HCP behavior has simple patterns that are easy to learn and teach to others. People like knowing and recognizing these predictable behaviors. When they do, they respond much more effectively and confidently in dealing with HCPs, rather than inadvertently escalating their dangerous behavior and making things worse for everyone.

## You and Me

Throughout this book I speak of you, me, and us. This tends to be my writing style, but I also know from experience that we need to work together to deal with high-conflict people effectively. Imagine a world where we don't allow high-conflict leaders to gain power to create chaos and bloodshed and instead make room for reasonable leaders to join forces to solve real problems. We already know a lot about what works and what doesn't work with HCPs. We just need to spread this information much more widely. So let's get started. We may not have much time.