

COMMUNITY BUILDING PROMPTS

Triggers, Traumas, or Truths?

Episode 7: Reflection & Discussion Guide

How to Use These Prompts

These prompts invite honest conversation about how groups misread and mishandle conflict — and what happens when we learn to see what conflict is actually telling us. Use them in leadership circles, facilitation cohorts, team debriefs, or spaces where people can speak truthfully about the messy reality of group dynamics.

Ways to engage:

- Post-conflict team debriefs
- Leadership development cohorts
- Facilitator peer circles
- Written reflections after tense meetings
- Coalition retrospectives
- Organizer support groups

Discussion Prompts

Tell a story about a time you misread conflict — and what it cost.

What did you think was happening? What was actually happening? How did you find out you'd gotten it wrong? Did you treat a trigger like a truth? Silence a truth because you thought it was disruption? Confuse discomfort with danger? Be specific about the consequences — to you, to the person involved, to the work.

When has someone named a truth in a meeting — and your group punished them for it?

Who was it? What did they say? How did the group respond? Did people get defensive, change the subject, label the person as "difficult" or "negative"? Were you part of the silencing — or were you the one being silenced? What happened after? Did the group ever come back to what was said?

What's a trigger you know you carry into group spaces — and how do you manage it?

Name the trigger (ambiguity, control, being ignored, feeling dismissed, sudden changes). Where does it come from? How does it show up in your body? What do you do when it gets activated? Do you communicate it to others — or just push through? What would help you regulate more effectively?

When has a systemic pattern (racism, sexism, power hoarding) surfaced in your group — and what did you do about it?

What was the pattern? Who saw it first? Did the group acknowledge it — or avoid it? If you named it, were you believed? If you didn't name it, why not? What would it take for your group to address systemic patterns without scapegoating individuals?

Guidelines for Dialogue

Start with compassion for misreading Everyone misreads conflict. The goal isn't perfection — it's getting better at seeing what's actually happening.	Protect the truth-tellers If someone names a hard reality, don't let the group dismiss or scapegoat them. Say: "Thank you for saying that."
Normalize nervous system activation Conflict activates everyone. It's not a character flaw — it's biology. Talk about what you felt in your body.	Don't confuse reactivity with resistance When someone snaps or shuts down, ask: "Is this about capacity, past wounds, or a systemic pattern?" Don't assume malice.

BONUS

For Teams After Conflict

If you're debriefing as a team after a heated moment, try this:

“What did we see happen? What did we feel in our bodies? What do we think it was really about?”

Go through all three questions with the whole group. Don't skip the body question — that's where the nervous system data lives. Let multiple interpretations exist. Don't rush to resolution. See if you can name whether it was a trigger, a trauma, or a truth.

Follow-up question:

“What would it look like to make conflict discussable in our group?”

What norms would help? What shared language do you need? What structures would make it safe to name tension early, before it explodes?

ADDITIONAL REFLECTION

The Cost of Misdiagnosis

The episode names the ways groups collapse from misreading conflict. Consider:

“Where has my group shut down the wrong person?”

Think of a time your group silenced someone who was actually naming something true. What did you lose by not listening? Who left? What momentum died? What would repair look like now?

“When have we confused someone's capacity limit with resistance?”

Someone said no, pushed back, or shut down — and you assumed they were being difficult. But what if they were at their limit? What if their nervous system was maxed out? How would you respond differently if you saw it as capacity, not defiance?

“What racial or power dynamics do we keep avoiding?”

Name them. Who holds power? Who gets heard? Who gets interrupted? Whose emotions are acceptable? Whose are punished? If you can't name the patterns, you can't change them.

PRACTICE TOOL

Creating Shared Language for Conflict

The episode recommends building shared language so groups can name what's happening in real time. Try these phrases with your group:

“This touched a nerve”

“Something old is coming up for me”

“I'm feeling tight in my chest”

“This feels familiar — like a pattern”

“I'm having a strong reaction”

“I need a moment”

“There's a pattern here”

“Something's off”

“I'm not clear yet”

“We need to slow this down”

Group reflection:

Which of these phrases would help your group? What other phrases do you need? How would you normalize using them?

Groups don't collapse from conflict itself — they collapse from misdiagnosing the conflict.

See conflict as a signal, not a danger.
