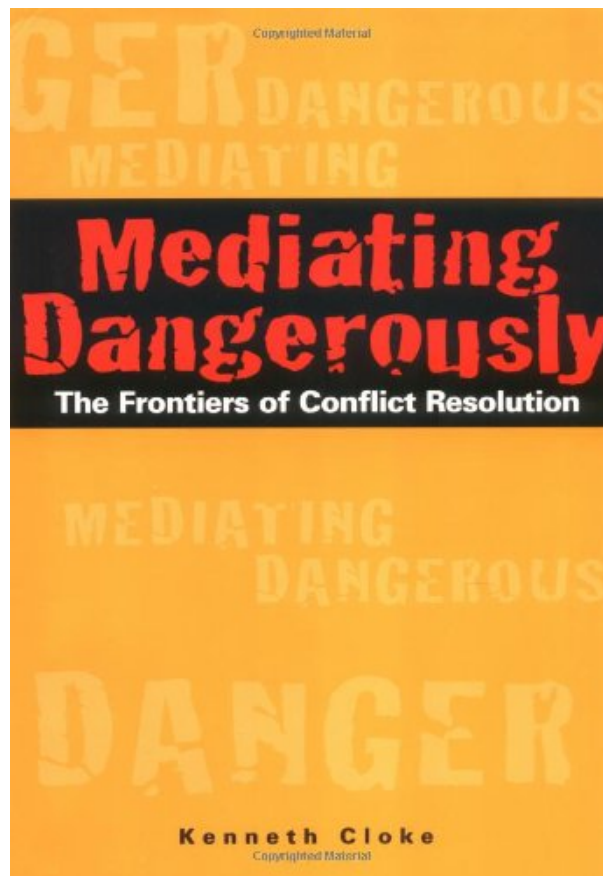
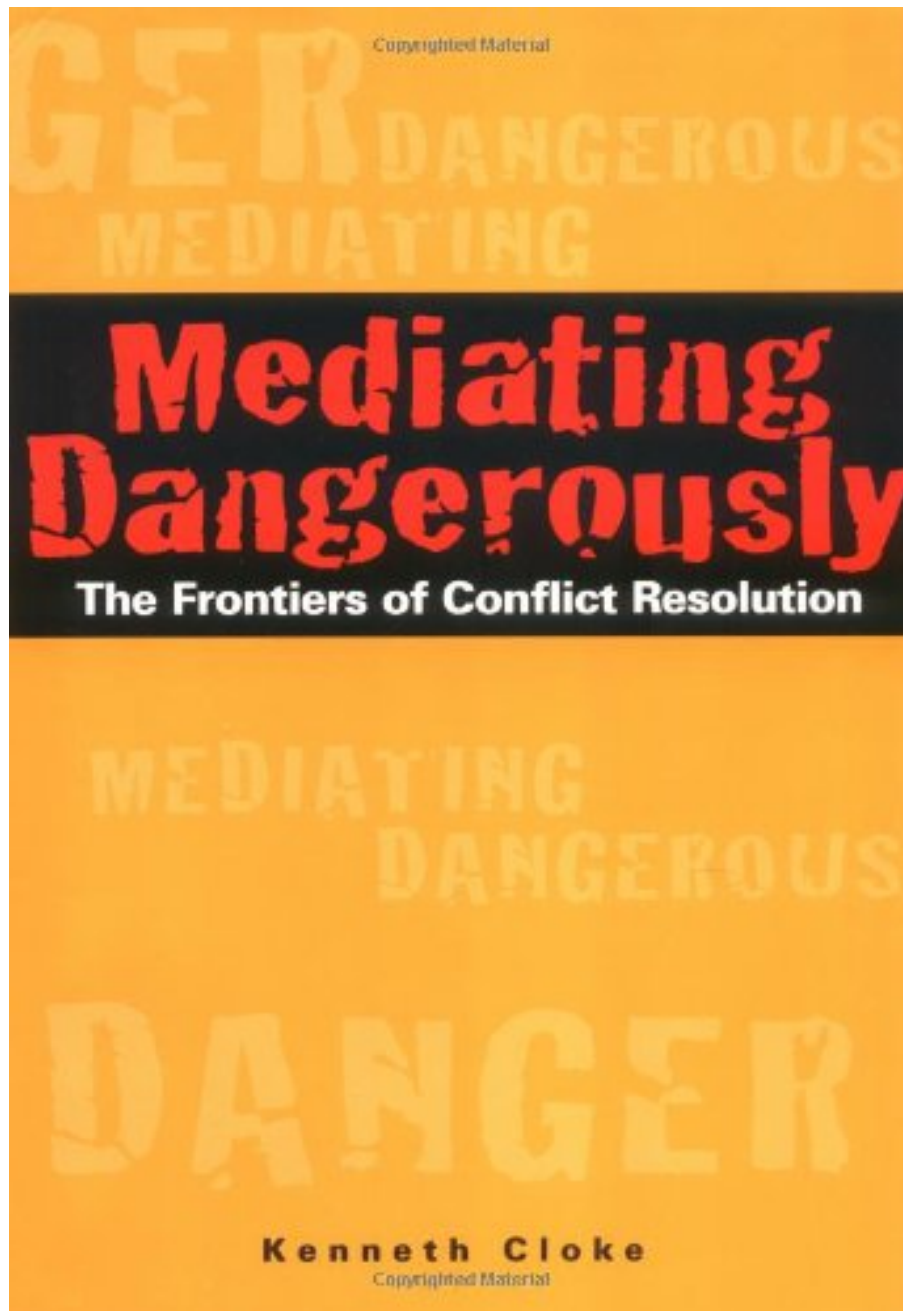


**MEDIATING DANGEROUSLY: THE
FRONTIERS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION
BY KENNETH CLOKE**



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A valuable book with some flaws

By Bob Epstein

This is a passionate, in-your-face plea for exploring the difficult process of transformational mediation, truly digging into the roots, the skin, the pores of people's, group's and organization's conflicts (although Cloke denies being a wholehearted transformational mediation believer).

Cloke is the highly respected author of numerous books on conflict resolution and the director of the Center for Dispute Resolution in Santa Monica, Calif. He has a very fine sense of the nature of conflict, in all its rough-and-tumble, down-and-dirty depth and breadth. Cloke deftly and deeply explores the psychological, emotional and spiritual nature of conflict within each of us - an important facet of mediation.

But sometimes, in his very exploration of these matters, he overreaches in his hopes of what mediation can

accomplish. Certainly, in the confines of community mediation, even generally with only few participants involved, there is just so much of transformational mediation, of this deep personal examination that one can accomplish in basically a two-hour time period, the general length of most community mediations, at least in most of the United States, I believe.

I find Cloke veering toward encouraging counseling and psychotherapy as part of mediation. Mediators are rarely trained in these and other similar fields and should tread lightly when going beyond their skill level and the parameters of mediation itself. In other forms of more in-depth and complex mediation, these possibilities might be explored, but in community mediation, it hardly seems likely or even possible.

Cloke does come up with some astute observations. He says to not be afraid of conflict, which obviously can become tense and heated. This is very important, especially in Minnesota (where I've been a community mediator for 19 years), where people are frequently afraid of confrontation, of raising of the voice, where, from my understanding, the introductory comments of Minneapolis Mediation Program mediators are suppose to include saying basically that the participants should not raise their voice and not get confrontational, something I have never been comfortable saying, and something I as a mediator rarely do indeed mention.

He gives an outstanding list of questions mediators can use in exploring conflicts (pages 37-38), citing a specific case of bullying. Mediation absolutely benefits from deep and clear thinking, and this series of questions is an excellent example of how a mediator can explore participants' conflicts in a very thoughtful and crucial way. This is a very valuable exploration.

Cloke does a very good job of telling and showing how to become a better, more insightful mediator, a more self-examined mediator and person.

Sometimes, however, Cloke can have his head in the clouds in his hopes and dreams of what mediation can be. On page 47 he mentions "...moving conflicts beyond settlement and resolution, beyond resolution to personal and organizational transformation, and beyond transformation to transcendence" (page 47). Whew! Made me feel like I was at an EST seminar and what exactly was he smoking? But better to have a grand vision and greater reach than to have a small and puny mind. No one could accuse Ken Cloke of that.

He spends pages trying to define "spirit" and gets nowhere. He is just too New Agey in this and some other regards.

Still, there is much valuable and thought-provoking material in this first half of the book, entitled "The Inner Frontiers."

The book's second half, "The Outer Frontiers," is less successful, discussing the larger issues of overcoming fascism and racism, building community, the limits of law, transforming institutional systems, etc. His plea for an issues-based thought process is delightful, and when we can convince dictators and warring tribes about this the world will be a better place. But hey, put out the ideas. Dream. Here some readers will find Cloke a visionary, others a dreamer. I lean toward the latter but admire his reach. I feel Cloke has little here that can be of use to a mediator. But if schools, businesses, government bodies and so on can use this kind of thinking and make some inroads on change and growth, wonderful.

He does make a bold plea for the value of mediating domestic abuse, something mediation, in my opinion, correctly has avoided. With all his arguments, he fails to make the most important one: the imbalance of power between the parties. An obvious omission.

"Mediating Dangerously" can be of significant benefit to both the beginner and experienced mediator, although the complexities Cloke often delves into are much more likely to be of value to an experienced mediator who can more relate to these situations from the very fact of having gone through them. Still, they can be a valuable learning experience for the new mediator.

In spite of some flaws, "Mediating Dangerously" is a valuable resource.

25 of 29 people found the following review helpful.

This is a wonderful book

By shekhar

This book connects conflict mediation with spiritual growth. I found it extremely insightful. Not always easy reading, it takes a bit of time to digest, but this man has a very deep knowledge of both conflicts and human consciousness. This book is a guideline to changing the way you behave when you have conflicts, or to help others that have conflicts. One of the best books I read in the past few years.

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but they'd better know and trust what you're doing

By R. Mullen

If you come to mediation from the perspective of being on high and forcing some concept of "peace" on people in crisis, you will fail. It's just that simple.

"Mediating dangerously" means being the adult in the room, but releasing the need to judge in favor of the need to listen and ask the *right* questions. You can't do that if you're on level one, asking stuff to poke or because you, yourself, are curious. This stuff is level 5, but it's stuff you need if the ultimate goals of mediation as a capacity-building exercise are to be met.

This is not for the faint of heart, but there's really no other way to do it: you have to center yourself, read the angles and give it a go. You will get your nose smacked, but that's how you learn. Helps to have a co-mediator to monitor and support you, but they'd better know and trust what you're doing!!

And, yes, I've used these ideas to support resolution within the framework of those infamous 15-minute ...no, wait, the judge is calling you back after only 10 minutes....sessions that small claims courts often give you to resolve a dispute that has lasted 2 years.

If you're serious about the craft of mediation, immerse yourself in Dr Cloke's work, --then let it simmer.

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