

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

CrisMarie Campbell and Susan Clarke

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

CrisMarie: Welcome to The Beauty of Conflict, a podcast about how to deal with conflict at work, at home and everywhere else in your life. I am CrisMarie.

Susan: And I'm Susan.

CrisMarie: We run a company called Thrive Inc, and we specialize in conflict resolution, stress management coaching and building strong, thriving teams and relationships.

Susan: Now, we know, no one likes conflict, not even us and we've written two books on the topic. In our work over the last 20 plus years we've found most people avoid, manage or diffuse conflict. The problem is when you opt out of conflict in these ways you miss the creativity, the connection and the possibility that lies in conflict.

CrisMarie: We also know 2020 has been, well, let's face it, a stressful year. And what Susan and I realized is all the tools that we've developed and utilized around conflict apply directly to uncertainty, which is what we're living in now.

Susan: In this podcast we have tools; concept and interviews that will help you cope with the stress and uncertainty of conflict, of Covid, of social justice issues and, yes, even politics. We hope you'll walk away from this episode with some fresh ideas that change your day, your week and even your life.

CrisMarie: Today we're going to talk about habits, are they helpful or hindering you? So we want you to think about, listener out there, what are your habits? Because you can have healthy habits like working out, eating healthy, getting enough sleep, brushing your teeth, those are all healthy habits we learned. But there's also some negative habits that really they can be kind of unconscious and they can drive us, like people pleasing, or worrying, or getting defensive and using anger. Susan, do you want to add some of them?

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

Susan: You could also use even exercise or working, workaholism. There's this whole thing now about how companies are saying they were so productive. But they're actually beginning to recognize as they review it, that that productivity wasn't as real as it presented.

CrisMarie: This is during Covid? Yeah.

Susan: Yeah, yeah.

CrisMarie: I think actually people were channeling their anxiety into working, yeah.

Susan: Into their work, yes.

CrisMarie: I mean shopping can be a habit, like I'm uncomfortable, add to cart. I know I do that, or eating. And really habits are often there, but negative habits are there because we don't actually like how we're feeling and so we want to change it. And so we'll do a behavior to change how we're feeling, versus learning to tolerate that discomfort.

Susan: That discomfort. There is a distinction here, there is addictions and there's habits. And one kind of simple way to think of the difference is a habit can be negative or positive. And addiction is basically negative. And we don't actually want to, you know, we know there's a lot out there to be said that certain types of things like drug and alcohol are diseases, they've been wired into the brain so intently that it's different. But a lot of things are addictive. It still is wired into the brain because we're getting some reward in terms of happy chemicals which we will be talking about in a minute.

It can be just as hard to unwire those. And so for me it actually helps sometimes for me to really call that an addiction, not just a habit, it's kind of like when I, yeah, to call it, I'm addicted to going out there and getting angry sometimes, as opposed to dealing with it maybe in a more acknowledging hurt, sadness versus just getting angry and pushing people away.

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

CrisMarie: Yeah, because again, anger's a cover for something deeper. And we don't want to feel that, so anger is safer, if that's yours. So think about what are your behavior habits that you just see yourself doing and you're like, "God, I don't want to keep doing this", and you keep doing?

A couple of – we've been working with some clients too over this time period where they're just in a constant crisis state. They're like, "Everything's important, we've got to be in it right now." Or there is a sense of urgency on everything, there's not really a crisis. Actually a couple of clients that have this orientation, they're both profitable, they're both doing really well during this time, yet everything's a crisis.

Susan: And sometimes they don't refer to it as a crisis, they refer to it as urgency. But the problem results in the same. And what we have noticed for ourselves is at one point in time where we were kind of thinking we were a healthy pattern ourselves because we were pivoting and making adjustments during this time of Covid.

CrisMarie: This is during Covid, yeah.

Susan: We now realize, wait a minute, actually we're now just becoming a little more crisis driven. And are we really in a crisis? We're actually not in a crisis. So we're getting sucked into that vortex. So we have really had to look at this for ourselves in our own business. And this applies to businesses, it also applies to relationships and we're going to talk about both.

CrisMarie: And I just wanted to say that the reason is emotions can be contagious, just like Covid could be contagious. If you're around somebody who's more crisis oriented and you have any sort of propensity, it's real easy to get sucked into that. And so we don't want to blame the client. My natural tendency is to shift focus, be able to move really nimbly and quickly, shiny object syndrome, could be. And so I have to actually work harder when I'm around somebody like that, or a client, a culture to really stand my ground, but it's tough.

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

Susan: Well, and I think what you're talking about is also when we saw it related to some of the client situations we're in, it's easy to blame the client, which is actually the part of the addiction really versus the habit.

CrisMarie: Or the habit.

Susan: Versus stepping back and going, "Wait a minute, what's really going on here, it's my own discomfort that's coming up and I'm still playing out that pattern."

CrisMarie: Right. So I want to just give you some descriptions of the happy chemicals that keep our habits in place. One of them is dopamine which is the reward molecule. So any time you accomplish a goal you feel really good, that's going to drive that dopamine in your brain. Serotonin is the confidence molecule. So any time you feel rewarded in the tribe, because we all grew up in tribes, like I'm important. And I think that's why even Facebook and being famous is so enticing, because you feel important and you think you're going to, you know, it helps that part of our brain.

Oxytocin which is the bonding molecule, so those feelings of trust, we're connected, we're in this together. Or endorphin molecule, it's a painkilling molecule, so that's that kind of runner's high. I'm going to work so hard that I'm going to get a runner's high. And the adrenalin, the energy molecule, and I think this one is in particular very prevalent right now because there is so much uncertainty. When we are in that fear place we're like, "Okay, I can get anything done." We feel like we can but we're actually burning out our system because we're not resting and digesting.

Susan: I mean these are all chemicals that...

CrisMarie: Well, when they're healthy they turn on and then they turn off, but in a habit or some form of an addiction they keep going.

Susan: Yes. And that's the thing that we may not even realize. They have just been turned on and we keep then trying to find even more ways to keep them turned on.

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

CrisMarie: I mean I know this, I have a workaholic habit where I get my value, my serotonin, I'm important and even my dopamine when I work hard and I accomplish a goal. And so when I don't know what to do or when I'm uncomfortable I open my computer, what can I do? And so that may seem like isn't that healthy? But it's an overdone strength because I'm not actually learning how to basically self-soothe or find my value in other ways. I'm keeping busy, and gaining my value only through work which is if anything happens to work then who am I? And that's not very healthy.

Susan: Again, thinking about your own habits, where are you in the, you know, do you recognize that something you're doing gives you kind of a boost? But the question you have to ask yourself, do you have to just keep doing more of it?

CrisMarie: And what's the cost to the boost?

Susan: Yeah, what is, you know, I just always think back to a mentor of mine who was a yoga person and loved doing yoga. And that was the way that they could settle themselves before they would go into – they were an ER doctor, before they would go into the Emergency Room. But the yoga became longer and longer, they had to do more. And not only that but more like you cannot be interrupted in the yoga.

CrisMarie: He could not?

Susan: He could not be interrupted in the yoga. And it wasn't actually until some abrupt happened, you know, because here you do yoga to calm you down. And he was doing his yoga and like any kind of hot looking guy, had his shirt off or whatever else. And someone close to him licked his back and he almost killed him, he was so angry. And when he realized how angry he was...

CrisMarie: It's kind of a weird thing to lick his back, but.

Susan: I know, I agree, but it was, you know, they say you have to hit rock bottom. Well, in this case you just needed to get licked. But what happened

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

was he was so angry and he realized, wait a minute, I've been doing this yoga to help me not be that. If I'm not angry, something is wrong with this. And that's what it took for him to realize, this was actually not a healthy habit.

CrisMarie: Susan, what I appreciate about that is the idea of hitting bottom or recognizing the cost of what you're doing. And one of mine again personally was more I tend to people please. So I tend to think people outside me know more than me and I'll just agree with them and I'll try to apply their things. And I was so busy trying to find the expert to solve my problem that I was willing to spend tons of money to listen to somebody else. And it actually created financial instability for you and I, and I realized...

Susan: I couldn't believe she didn't think I was the person she should be telling, but I wasn't it.

CrisMarie: Susan, you are an important person, but I kept finding other people. And it really was that, wow, that instability, that unmanageability, I felt like my life had gotten really chaotic, because the cost in me was so severe. And a lot of times that's what is needed, like a wake-up call, this isn't working. And some of our clients with the urgency and the crisis orientation, their rock bottom actually shows up either in their health or their relationship because they're working from 6:00am to 8:00pm. They're not taking care of their health or their family.

And somebody is knocking on their door like, "Hey, either we do this differently or divorce," having heart attacks or gut issues, all sorts of different things.

Susan: Yes. And I mean I was trying to think of ways in which you might even recognize for yourself. I think at least one client I was working with, started to recognize this when they were saying all the time, "Look, I just can't get good people and obviously we have a problem." And really what it

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

came down to was this person realized in kind of looking back at is they were always doing the work for...

CrisMarie: The staff.

Susan: For their staff, and so they were never really developing their people in a way. They hadn't realized though that their own kind of willingness to jump in and do their job was actually preventing them from discovering the potential within the people they had.

CrisMarie: And even part of that whole habit is they were too crisis oriented, so they would just, "Well, okay, we don't have time. I'll do it." And then the staff didn't develop, and then of course they could turn around and see no good staff.

Susan: So the idea being, if you catch yourself saying something like, "I can't find the perfect resource for my problem," or, "I don't have the right people," or...

CrisMarie: Or these people just aren't committed, or they're not, they have ill intent. There's often something you're doing that's creating that whole dynamic as a leader in a company.

Susan: Well, and even that's what helped us, me begin to look at this is it's like wow, I'm blaming, you know, I'm looking at a couple of clients and feeling like I'm getting caught up in their shtuff. And really what caused me...

CrisMarie: Shtuff.

Susan: I was going to say something else.

CrisMarie: I know.

Susan: But what I really realize, CrisMarie, is that what was happening was that I was, you know, how might a habit you have of making something

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

else more important than what you've said is important, how is that happening in my life?

CrisMarie: Susan, I think that's a really good point and one that we don't kind of recognize is any time we feel like somebody is doing this to me, we are active participants. And we can set boundaries and say no. And yes, you might lose a client. You might say something that upsets your boss or your spouse.

Susan: Yeah, there is this place where if you show up you risk losing something. It is true. But gaining it through an unhealthy habit is probably really not gaining it anyway.

CrisMarie: No, because you're sacrificing yourself and it's just really not kind of likely impacts to yourself, whether it's, you might show up like I need to drink because I'm so stressed, or depression, anxiety, health issues.

Susan: Might be critical of others.

CrisMarie: Yes, I know that comes out for me.

Susan: Particularly driven behaviors. I think of it even as something as simple as running for me. I know exercise is a healthy habit for me. And it really teeters sometimes on, you know, when I actually start to cheat my Apple watch and do weird things to make sure I hit my move goal and it's not even me.

CrisMarie: Which by the way, folks, she has done that. She has run up and down the stairs at 9 o'clock at night in order to hit her move goal.

Susan: Yeah. That would be bordering on that exercise habit becoming – or like right now there's just tons of smoke outside. This is not the time for me to decide that I need to go out for a run or a bike ride. And it's really hard for me to say okay, because I start to panic.

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

CrisMarie: If you weren't able to exercise, which you are, because we've got that Peloton in the house. But if you weren't able to exercise what would be the impact to you, what would be the discomfort?

Susan: Well, I do use exercise to soothe some of the other feelings that come up for me. I think right now, even this morning I was – well, I was actually cranky, I wasn't even trying to exercise, but maybe because I knew I wasn't going to go outside and run. I think I was actually feeling a lot of sadness about all that I see in the world, the fires, the political stuff. And feeling that is actually harder to do.

It's much easier to get on the Peloton and ride my, you know, or run, or do something versus allowing myself to sit in that feelings.

CrisMarie: And somebody might say, "Well, of course, why would you sit in those feelings, Susan?"

Susan: Well, because those feelings, if you don't feel – I've been sort of thinking about how Mother Nature is a great teacher for us in the sense that the planet goes into wild fires, hurricanes, earthquakes. It's kind of like – Mother Earth is very dramatic. And I think actually a lot of ways that real time drama, though it can seem destructive and horrify – and a lot of times a lot of it may be directly resulted from some of the habits we've had and not paid attention to.

But I always get the impression that if I watch Mother Earth, it's like she feels deeply.

CrisMarie: She's very expressive.

Susan: And she feels, you can feel the...

CrisMarie: Visceral.

Susan: Visceral. And it's not easy as in this human body to feel that visceral. It's much more easy to try to be rational or to go to some spiritual

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

transcending place, or even to stay in some rageful place that isn't really allowing me to just sit in the feeling and let it bubble.

CrisMarie: Yeah, I think everything we do we do because of how we feel, even though none of us like to acknowledge that. We like to think we're very rational. We make decisions that are good. But we are either moving towards a feeling or trying to get away from a feeling. I eat well because I want to feel better and be trim, I want all that. So our feelings are so much stronger. And when we don't actually allow that, our emotional energy to move through and we try to get rid of it, we don't tolerate it, we are always reacting and in our reactive habits.

Susan: So one of the things to think about, hopefully you've been able to tag along with us and stay with the original theme which is talk about habits. If you begin to realize that maybe you have a habit that is hindering you. It is not always easy to change a habit.

CrisMarie: No, actually one of the things is often you do have to hit a bottom where there's a kind of a shaking up of your status quo, either feedback that you've gotten from a spouse, a boss, or your own body. And you have to recognize when you go to change these habits, whether they're people pleasing, worrying, kind of getting angry and defending, or anxiety, or workaholism, whatever they are. That when you change your behavior it is going to feel odd and uncomfortable.

If I don't open up my computer and work I'm going to feel like something bad is going to happen.

Susan: Well, and from a, you know, brain chemical thing, you're not getting that happy chemical so...

CrisMarie: Yeah, I'm not getting the serotonin and the dopamine that I'm so seeking.

Susan: And of course you're going to feel uncomfortable. So that realization is there first and recognizing that that is going to be the case.

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

CrisMarie: And the other piece is you – all of us when we go to change habits, we are changing our nervous system. So it is a brain, body, it's a whole system. So it's going to take time and reinforcement. So some of the things that we suggest is you actually identify really concretely what habit it is that you're trying to break. If it's this crisis orientation, you want to break cancelling everything and making time for the next urgent thing.

Susan: I was thinking about for you CrisMarie, tell me where I'm wrong, but you – one of the ways this showed up for you was you realized that one of your habits is actually to worry or seek approval which, you pick one.

CrisMarie: I would say probably the people pleasing.

Susan: People pleasing.

CrisMarie: I don't want to say no because then somebody will be mad at me. And if they're mad at me then something in my psyche thinks oh my God, I'm not going to be able to survive.

Susan: And just as an example, I think for mine, one has been I don't want to just get angry, I want to actually learn how to tolerate that anger. Because I realized the anger was giving me a hit, some energy, so I wouldn't feel despair. So it's kind of like a...

CrisMarie: So the habit for you Susan is to get angry so you don't feel the despair?

Susan: Yeah, because it gives me a push of energy.

CrisMarie: Okay. So one would be to identify what the habit is. And then two, what would good look like? What would, you know, that – I could say no and still feel a sense of safety even if a client or you, Susan, or my parents, or my friends, were upset with me. Oh my God, I could survive if somebody was upset with me, that would be – of course I feel discomfort because I've been wired the other way all this time. So for you, what would good look like, or if you were changing that habit?

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

Susan: Well, I think instead of going to the reactive habit, the anger, to actually allow myself to, one, feel if it's despair, it's despair, but to feel it. And to not even stay stuck there, because that could become another [crosstalk]. But, you know, because that is usually what happens, I kind of collapse versus to be okay, that's what's happening now. And to notice how – for me what's been helpful is learning how to pay attention to it as what's the sensation of it in my body?

And instead of getting trapped in the story of it, to sit in the sensation of it a little longer.

CrisMarie: Breathe into it.

Susan: To breathe into it because then it actually does begin to do, something different can start to happen.

CrisMarie: One, know it's going to be uncomfortable, figure out specifically what it is the habit is bringing you pain and suffering, that has a cost. And then what would good like? And then you need to build some support, whether it's daily reading that kind of shifts your, you know, gives you new information and inspiration, a podcast, anything that helps you shift your thinking. And then two...

Susan: Also be reaching out to different supports, like getting a coach.

CrisMarie: Actually having a trusted advisor, a coach, a mentor that you talk weekly is not too frequently to talk weekly about how you're doing, what's working, what's not, is a great sounding board. And also doing a daily check-in. Wow, I really got triggered three times today and did say yes when I really wanted to say no. Actually two of them I said yes and one I said no. And what helped me say no, was I breathed, you know, things to settle myself.

That daily evaluation helps me kind of be specific and identify what's working and what's not, to change my habit.

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

Susan: And the key here is to do the best you can to let go of judging yourself for, you know, I mean with really urgent, highly driven people we say seven days, but frankly, it's really like 21 days.

CrisMarie: Yeah, not to try to change it, just to be aware of it.

Susan: Yeah, just to be aware of it. So habits do take time. But really the first thing is to recognize, you know, another piece that I think is really powerful has been to look at what is the gift, what is the payoff for this habit?

CrisMarie: Those are two different things, right?

Susan: Yeah, there's the payoff and the gift. Those are two different ways to look at it. And so what's the payoff for me in getting angry is I do get a burst of energy. I am kind of like I'm – I can suddenly have something, yeah, I'm energized. And the gift in it – actually maybe that's, you know, because it has been a way to kind of to not go into my collapse and want to just quit. And there have been times where I've had to recognize that that would have been the other.

CrisMarie: And for me, CrisMarie, my people pleasing to say yes, well, a lot of people like me, I'm so flexible. And so I get – my payoff is people like me. The gift is I think really long term is I get to really find my voice and find my boundaries, and speak up and say no. That's what I'm hoping the gift will be, I received the payoff, not necessarily the gift yet.

Susan: Yeah. Sometimes it might be harder to see the gift in it. You may have to imagine you're talking to a whole crowd of people some other point in your life when you're older. And telling them the gift you got from changing this habit.

CrisMarie: And I was thinking about the organizations that are urgent or crisis oriented. And I think the payoff is they get to keep things in their own hands, they're not delegating. And they get a sense of I'm busy, I'm doing the best I can. And I get to be the hero. I think there's a lot of payoff in that.

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

I don't know what their gift would be long term. I think if they don't shift it, that's going to dwindle their company and their results, it might be.

Susan: Yeah. I mean we probably couldn't - I mean I can think in terms of our own business. I think the gift in terms of how nimble, and sometimes reactive and yes, crisis focused we can be, is that it really has allowed us at certain times, like in Covid the uncertainty was our gift and it kept us, you know, we were able to use that and respond.

CrisMarie: And actually help other people get out of their structured thinking and pivot so that they could respond to the current uncertainty. So yeah, I guess the gift of our style is that we are really good with uncertainty, we shift and change.

Susan: Yes. And it's good to kind of recognize that.

CrisMarie: So thinking about your habits that you do want to change, that you see yourself doing and you're like, "I never get to," you don't shift it. What is – you may even want to start, what's the payoff of that habit and even the gift?

Susan: I'm just joking because as people may be listening to this particular podcast this time, they're also seeing one of the other payoffs sometimes, or gifts, I'm not sure which. Is that if this comes out it's coming out having us being very far behind when we were supposed to have delivered it. And as, you know, it's funny because we make it sound like in some respects we're saving money by responding to our clients. But we actually spend money when we do these crisis oriented things. And we could be ahead of the curve, but we're not, we're late.

CrisMarie: And our production company, if they're nice, will still edit this and get it out on time. But we are looking at our own style of how we focused on some crisis out with our clients, how we let go of what's important to us, which is generating our own content, doing podcasts, writing. And so it's given us a little bit of a kick in the pants to say, "Hey,

Are Your Habits Helping or Hindering You?

wait a minute, we want to make sure we shift this pattern,” because it’s not healthy for us or the people that help us.

Susan: Yes, okay, alright.

CrisMarie: So look at your habits; know that they’re going to be hard to change, pick a big why, why do you want to? What’s the gift if you did change it? Maybe that’s a way to look at it. And just recognize it’s going to feel uncomfortable, and give yourself a long lead time. But measure yourself on a daily basis and also ask for help, get a coach, a mentor, a trusted advisor that you can digest and work this through. And we are happy to help you. We’ll fit you into our busy schedule. I’m just teasing. We have time for you.

Susan: Alright, take care and we’ll see you next week.

CrisMarie: Thank you for listening to the Beauty of Conflict podcast. We know conflict, stress and uncertainty can be hard to navigate. So if you want more support you can check out our other resources. We have two books on Amazon.

Susan: Our business book is The Beauty of Conflict: Harnessing Your Team’s Competitive Advantage. Or our couples book, The Beauty of Conflict for Couples. We also have an eBook, How to Discuss Difficult Topics. We’ll put the links in the show notes to make it easy for you.

CrisMarie: Also if you need help with your team at work we regularly conduct team sessions both live and virtually. If you’d like us to speak at your next event or if you want coaching, Susan and I each coach business leaders, individuals and couples. You can reach us at thrive@thriveinc.com, that’s t.h.r.i.v.e@t.h.r.i.v.e.i.n.c.com.

Susan: If you have enjoyed today’s podcast, please take 30 seconds to give us an iTunes review, it helps get this show out to others. Thanks again for listening. We hope you have a peaceful, productive and beautiful day. Take care of yourself. And we hope you’ll join us again for another episode.