

The Power of Owning Your Inner Diva



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

CrisMarie Campbell and Susan Clarke

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

Susan Clarke: And I'm Susan. We run a company called Thrive, and we specialize in conflict resolution, communication and building strong, thriving teams and relationships. Conflict shows up in our lives in so many ways. Most people, unfortunately, are not very good at handling conflict. Most people have never been taught the right tools for dealing with conflict, and then it leads to unnecessary friction, arguments, passive aggressive emails, tears, hurtful comments, stuck-ness, all kinds of things we don't want. We're on a mission to change all of that.

CrisMarie Campbell: We've spent the last 20 years teaching our clients how to handle conflict in a whole new way. We're here to show you that conflict doesn't have to be scary and overwhelming. With the right tools, you can turn a moment of conflict into a moment of reinvention. Conflict can pave the way into a beautiful new system at work, a new way of leading your team, a new way of parenting, a new chapter of your marriage where you feel more connected than ever before. Conflict can lead to beautiful things.

Susan Clarke: All right. Here we are live. We have a very special guest today. Please welcome Masha from the play Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike.

CrisMarie Campbell: Hello, darling. It's so wonderful to see you today.

Susan Clarke: You can imagine. We have just had a diva in our green room, so we are thrilled to have her here. Some of you may recognize ever so slightly the voice behind Masha, which is the CrisMarie Campbell.

CrisMarie Campbell: Now I can talk in my normal voice, right?

Susan Clarke: Yes, you can. I wanted to interview CrisMarie as Masha because this was a big play for her, a big part, and a big opportunity, and

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we thought it would be fun to share this through our podcast and talk a little about what it was like for you to step in and play this larger than life character, Masha.

CrisMarie Campbell: Yeah, it was really different because when I went to the audition, I thought I was going to be playing Sonia who is written as a pretty pathetic character. So, I had to play big in the audition, and I got it. It was really fun. She did wind up casting it really well, which is kind of hard because I have to really own that I am a bit of a diva, but it was a challenge in working with her.

Susan Clarke: I find it shocking that this was news to you that you were a diva, but I will go ahead and let that one go.

CrisMarie Campbell: Well, she is Masha. When you said larger than life, she is larger than life, and she takes up the stage and will tell stories about herself. She'll suck all the air out of the room. That was not how I grew up. Maybe I would've if I had been unimpeded, but I had a big, what do they call a male diva, divo, to actually step in and continue to tell a story even though people look so not interested. I'm with my brother and my sister in the story. They love Masha, but she can really overwhelm a room.

Susan Clarke: I know, because I actually was living with you through most of the lead up to this show, that you did struggle with embracing this character because she was larger than life. However, it did seem as though you came to terms with that. Do you know what helped you get to the point where Masha was in the house from tech night through each of the shows?

CrisMarie Campbell: I think it was a contrast because what happened is you had gone to Seattle to do your Equus Leadership with the six women executives, and that was happening. I was home alone, and I had a really long day on the phone doing coaching and facilitating an off-site remotely, which was weird. You were there. When I got to rehearsal Thursday before opening night, I was just jangled, and spent, and I did not bring Masha.

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The director pulled me aside, Katie, and she was like, “Listen, Masha is the larger than life character. She brings the energy to this brother and sister who have basically just lived in this house and not really done much with their lives. If you don’t bring the energy, nobody has anything to react off, and so the play is really flat.” I could tell that was happening, and that I felt very disconnected from my body, my energy inside. I had some marching orders to go find Masha.

Susan Clarke: It sounds like the director was able to give you a two by four.

CrisMarie Campbell: Exactly. I was thinking, I didn't actually work harder. That was what was different because I had been working hard all day Thursday on the phone for like eight hours, and how that got me into a different headspace. Masha is much more in her body. She moves very fluidly and very big. So, I had to actually have more fun and enjoy myself to drop into my physical body, move from my hips.

So, I listened to music, I danced, I relaxed more, and that's how Masha showed up because, of course, Masha wouldn't work hard. She's often orchestrating people around her, but my alter ego at times can be quite driven, and that doesn't necessarily serve me. So, that was something to learn from Masha, that, “Hey, when I'm trying hard and trying to make it work, all the magic goes out of me and Masha doesn't show up.”

Susan Clarke: I think that's actually something that's worth talking about a little bit because I think that's true. Probably it's true in the play. It was true for Marsha. It's probably true in life. Well, for me, it hasn't been a play, but just today, I was skiing, and I could go in, and be fearful, and try hard, and usually what happens is it does not go well.

CrisMarie Campbell: You fall.

Susan Clarke: I fall, or I just am terrified. I do not ski well. Or I can relax, breathe, and things happened. It sounds like that's what it was like for you

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when you gave yourself permission to quit driving to get this part right, and relaxed and got into your hips.

CrisMarie Campbell: Yes. I learned this in rowing, and I coach people in performance, whether that's giving speeches or leading teams, and influence with them who they are and how they're speaking. Often when we're trying hard, and you know this, even it's reflected when you do the Equus Coaching, like you have a leader there with the horse.

When somebody is trying hard, when I'm trying hard, we just get tight. Our energy does not expand. It doesn't connect to the other human beings that we're trying to influence. It's really important for me to come back and remind myself of that because when I grew up as a little one like, "Okay, the only safe thing is for me to work hard, and that will please dad, and I'll be safe."

So, safety and survival were my priority versus expression and thriving, which actually comes when I sink into it, into my body. That can be quite magical and electric, and that's the feedback I got when I was playing Masha full out. People were like, "Oh, my gosh. You were so radiant."

I was a character that people kind of I think loved to hate because Masha would say anything, and she'd say it with a smile. One of her lines is, "I can't help it if I'm talented, beautiful, and intelligent, can I?" Another favorite line was, "Oh, go get a paper bag for her head, would you? Thank you."

That's because she's intimidated by somebody who's prettier than her. So, she's going to make everybody else contained so she can shine, but that internal impulse to shine can so dampen because I've got to be efficient and productive, and I think that's going to help me. It's actually that thought that really shuts down my energy, and my flow, and my joy, really, too.

Susan Clarke: I haven't gone to both opening and closing night. This was a black curtain. So, there were not a lot of runs of this particular show. I did see when you do, you shined both nights, and it was actually different. That's what's fun about live theater, is it's not the same audience. It's not

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same crowd, but both nights, you really came alive in it. I think that is what acting is all about, but I also think it says something to when you relax, that's a natural part for you. How do you feel about being a diva?

CrisMarie Campbell: A little chagrined because I do want things the way I want them, as you know, whether that's in the house, or the way a presentation goes, or the way an off-site goes. Owning that is a lot better than pretending I'm not that, and then trying to cover it up.

Susan Clarke: Well, I love that you said that because I think that is so important for people to hear. I think that diva is in you anytime, but when you're actually comfortable with it and owning it, there's a playful, real connecting aspect to it. When you're not, then it's actually not nearly as much fun to be around.

CrisMarie Campbell: Well, yeah, because I get really kind of a little bit more hard and bossy because I think, "Oh, it's not going to happen." You said, even when you're talking about your skiing, "When I'm coming from a place of fear, or scarcity, or we're not going to get it right. There's not going to be enough. Somebody is going to be upset with what we do."

That is really negative reinforcing that changes my energy because all of a sudden, I'm focused out there. "Oh, my gosh. I've got to please that person." So, then I'm trying to change me to match them versus coming more from authentically within, and then seeing the impact and responding. Very different. Versus I'm preplanning, and then trying to figure it out.

Susan Clarke: One of the ways that I've heard you talk about that is also the difference between a performance which is pretty static, like it's got to look a certain way, versus performing in terms of the energy of those two. When you're in that performing energy, it's moving, it's flowing, it's actually responding from within to the audience, to your other actors. The performance sounds more like you have to do the work to get there, like know the blocking, know the part, know all those pieces, but if you stay there, it's kind of stiff and jilted.

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CrisMarie Campbell: Yeah, absolutely. The performing energy, and this is what I coach people on when they're in their performance like, "I'm going to try to do it right. I'm going to try to memorize it." Really, when you get up there, it's a lot about letting go, and connecting with the energy, and your energy. So, hopefully, you've done the work upfront, but even if you haven't, even if you have not memorized whatever, you have to take that moment, and breathe into it, and respond.

Susan, you're a master at this, like using humor in the moment to normalize a situation, and all of a sudden, everybody relaxes because when we're performing, whether it's giving a talk, leading a group of people onstage as an actor, we are influencing and connecting with our energy and other human beings, even if it's on a video or a podcast even.

The more I can relax and be with my energy and in the moment, the better versus trying to control it so much, which is when we get into that fear control. "I've got to be perfect." That's when our own energy gets too tight and it doesn't transmit.

Susan Clarke: It's not like these things don't happen in the moment. I may be really relaxed, and then all the sudden, I tighten up because our water system starts to make a lot of noise, and I'm fearful that it's going to interrupt and destroy the entire podcast. But if I can remember, I'm probably the only one hearing that.

So, the reason why we wanted to talk about this today is because I think you use these parts to really explore some aspect of yourself and get more comfortable owning it, working with it, so that even when it shows up out in the world, outside of a play, you have more resources inside yourself. Even this diva.

CrisMarie Campbell: Yeah. What I learned from Masha, and I wrote a blog about this, is Masha is in her body. She's sensual. She's big. She's glowing. Not big physically, but big in presence. It's very attractive. So, to me, I can actually go into a room and pull my energy in and be invisible, or I

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can kind of move my hips and be more alive, and people turn and notice. That's a really powerful thing for me to be conscious of and to use when I want to use it. That's pretty powerful.

Another thing that Marsha does that I really appreciate. As soon as she starts to go into a self-doubt like, "Oh, my gosh. Maybe I'm not good enough," she will flip that switch and say, "Nope, nope, I would have been great." She would say it a lot lower. She'd say, "No, no, I would have been great."

So, her voice is in her body, and she flips a switch from self-doubt to self-reinforcement, which in particular for women, is a very powerful skill for me. It's a very powerful skill to take into my life and also coach other women to do that, so they don't get sucked into contracting and going small, kind of staying in themselves and what they believe in. Those are a couple of things.

Susan Clarke: I love that. I think that's great. I do think when you bring that energy into our work, whatever that looks like, it is very palpable and powerful. What I think you're saying is playing these roles is helping you to be able to more consciously embody that and make choices when you want to shine and when you don't, or when you're in self-doubt to know, "Okay, that's what's happening. Let me see if I can switch it."

CrisMarie Campbell: Yeah, and I think a lot of women in the corporate environment think, "Oh, I have to shut all that energy down because I've got to be efficient, productive, and be one of the guys or compete." That's kind of old school. Hopefully, more and more women are changing, but to actually own this energy in the middle of an off-site with a corporate client and have that be okay and have that be me, it actually impacts the energy of the room, I think, in a really positive way.

It's so easy to get up in our heads at work and focus on the spreadsheets, which are important, but not at the cost of this embodiment. Also, yeah, shifting the self-doubt like, "Wait a minute, you're a smart woman. There's a

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reason you came up with this opinion. So, don't boot it out the door quite yet. Let's have a conversation.”

Susan Clarke: The last thing I kind of just wanted to mention because it could be so easy, I think, for you to say, especially in our business and our work, that it's not okay to take the time to play a part in the community theater because it may take us away from some of our other work. But over and over again, I've seen you come up against that, whether you're going to try out or not, and then every single time, I've seen you embrace a role or a play, it has transformed, often invited in new opportunities. It may not seem like it's direct part of our business, but it sure seems like it should be.

CrisMarie Campbell: It's part of our marketing. I do the short rehearsal cycle usually. Now, I have done a part or two that I've like, “I could've skipped this play,” but when I'm in a part that is so alive, and sensual, and big, and radiant, I come alive, and that energy is much more attractive.

It's not like I'm going out and soliciting corporate gigs, but they wind up coming through the whatever six degrees of separation. People call and ask, and I do think it's because I am more open, alive, and happy, and flowing naturally in my joy. By the way, you're the one that usually says, “Hey, CrisMarie, you're going to miss that audition.” I'd be like, “Oh, I forgot all about it.”

Susan Clarke: Then a couple of days later when you get the part, sometimes I'm like, “Oh, what have I done?”

CrisMarie Campbell: Well, I do think not even just for schedule, but every time I play a part, it's like, “Oh, I'm so excited I got it.” Then I start to get into the character, and I'm like, “Oh, my gosh. I can't do this.” I go into that self-doubt. It's like this dip, and then I start to find my way out. It's a natural part of the process. I think I just want to say that for anybody who's doing anything new, to know that it's really exciting, and then you're going to hit your curve of learning, and then you're going to recover and be able to get into it.

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Susan Clarke: I did want to go back just briefly to what you were talking about just before this about this idea because I think so many people that we work with, so many of the clients we have in big corporate settings are so concerned about slowing down, taking the time. Whether it's on a team taking the time to actually engage in a different way, or whether it's just somebody who's driven taking the time to maybe go on a walk or take a dance break, as we call it, or something, but giving themselves the permission to not be on.

Yet what I think you're saying, and I know I've witnessed this over and over again, is when you take that time, your joy comes up, and you have more energy to give. Now, obviously, you couldn't do that all the time. Like you said, you go for the shorter parts so that you can enjoy them.

CrisMarie Campbell: The shorter plays, yeah.

Susan Clarke: I do think it's important for people to realize when you tap into your joy and you regularly give yourself permission to do that, you're more alive, and you're going to be a better leader.

CrisMarie Campbell: I think this is so important because again, we tend to more, faster, better, quicker, harder, all those qualities. I go back to even several presidents, obviously very busy men, hope someday they'll be a woman, but a couple of them talk about taking midday naps. Taking that time just for themselves, a pause, in a day, as a way of helping them be more productive.

Whether it's a play for two weeks or it's a half an hour where you go take a walk or fifteen minutes, any sort of break really helps reconnect to me and my resources. Get out of my head breathing, walking, connecting to another human being, remembering these are people.

I worked at Chemical Bank, and there'd be this woman. She was so confident. She was a vice president. She'd be like, "Hey, CrisMarie. Do you want to take a walk with me?" She had the time. This is a very busy woman. I was an intern. Had the time to connect to me, and I thought,

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“Wow, this is really neat.” So, one, you make more connections, but there's just more of you, you access, which, by the way, will help you solve those problems.

Susan Clarke: Yes. So, what I'm taking away from this is it's really important to embrace the joy during your day, and to also realize that, yeah, there's important business to be done, but sometimes it's equally important to drop in, and enjoy, and give yourself permission to take care of yourself.

CrisMarie Campbell: I just have to read a couple of Masha quotes. I said one, but I put my tiara on to read this because Masha does wear that. “Anyone who wears a tiara in sequins is always going to be the winner.” I think that should be a bumper sticker for all women.

The whole idea of I don't wait for people, people wait for me, not the other way around. Okay? The idea of just her self-worth, which so many people, especially women, are like, “Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Let me get out of your way.” Versus, “Wait a minute, I matter.” That's not bad. You're not stepping over other people, but you matter.

Susan Clarke: So, the other thing to take away from this is own your diva.

CrisMarie Campbell: Own my diva. Own your diva. Because that's so much more fun. You have more confidence, more enthusiasm, more zest for life, and because you're a diva, you're going to have that confidence to ask for more money, and get promoted, and say yes, and give your opinion. It's a powerful thing. So, I am owning my diva.

Susan Clarke: Wow. All right. Thank you, CrisMarie and Masha, for joining us today for this interview.

CrisMarie Campbell: I love it. Thank you, darling. It's been wonderful.

Susan Clarke: Well, thank you for listening to the beauty of conflict podcast. If you're dealing with a difficult situation in your life or work,

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remember every conflict is a chance for you to be vulnerable, and curious, and find creative solutions that you hadn't considered before and make your situation even better.

Beautiful breakthroughs can be born out of conflict. We've seen this happen thousands of times over the last 20 years, and we know this is possible for everyone, including you. We're grateful you listened to this show, and we're rooting for you.

CrisMarie Campbell: If you enjoyed this show, please tell a few friends, and/or post a five-star review on iTunes. Your review helps new listeners discover the show, and more people listening to this show means less friction, and arguing, and suffering out in the world. That's a great thing for everyone.

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