

Dealing with Stuckness, Fear, and Anxiety



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

CrisMarie Campbell and Susan Clarke

Dealing with Stuckness, Fear, and Anxiety

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's episode is really how to deal with stuck-ness, fear, anxiety or even life just with Covid.

Susan: Without Covid really, but Covid has really brought it all to the foreground.

CrisMarie: Yeah, that's true. And we have politics. So big picture, we keep wondering when are we going to go back to normal? And people have talked about hitting the wall, the six months.

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Susan: Six months, eight months, sometimes. And it's amazing; here where we are we didn't ever really go through a first wave. But we are now in a big wave of Covid testing positive and our state continues to rise [crosstalk].

CrisMarie: Yeah. So this is CrisMarie, so don't come to Montana because we have had everybody come and now we are tripling our numbers by the day. It is very scary.

Susan: And it's not just Covid in the world these days, there's a lot of factors. There's climate change, there's wild fires, there's hurricanes. We have an assistant who every other week she's dealing with a hurricane.

CrisMarie: And social justice issues and then the election.

Susan: There's a lot. We just know that this life presents us with a lot of opportunities about how we need to continue [crosstalk].

CrisMarie: No, I think this is fun.

Susan: Okay.

CrisMarie: You have nothing wrong with your teeth.

Susan: Okay. I just have to say, she's [inaudible] on a piece of - big clump of lettuce on your teeth.

CrisMarie: Now, I don't know. Susan I am...

Susan: This is Susan, I'd better say that this is Susan talking, not CrisMarie. So here we are back – see this is what life presents us, even in moments like this.

CrisMarie: So today we actually do want to give you something relevant for you, which is how to deal with these, you know, when you get into the stress of your life right now, whether it's you feel stuck, or you get into

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frantic action trying to control everything. Or the reverse, you go into procrastination and more depression.

Susan: Or you are symptomizing. You're noticing you're having a lot more physical symptoms or possibly even accidents, things that you normally don't have.

CrisMarie: Right. But even excessive worry about like oh my gosh, I've got to plan. Are we going to run out of money, or whatever the future focus is? Or I should have, would have, could have, I should have done something differently. So that's a past focus and you're beating yourself about that.

Susan: And also there is a tremendous amount of grief that's present. And for those that have lost people or various reasons why you might be, or lost your business or whatever. These are all situations that we think there are some practical tools that you can use that we want to share with you today to kind of help you come up with ways to kind of keep your energy moving and not get stuck.

CrisMarie: So it's really a resiliency podcast, this is another way to access your own personal resiliency.

Susan: We should mention first, we believe all of these are predicated by the idea that you recognize the importance of breath. And we did a whole podcast on breathing. And we're going to give you some techniques that actually in and of themselves may work. But boy, did they take a bounce in productivity when you start to pay more attention to your breath. So I just want to put a plug in for breathing.

CrisMarie: I love it. Because so many of what we – when I'm coaching people they're trying to think their way through the solutions. Your mind makes a good manager. It does not make a good CEO. Connecting to a larger sense of yourself, that's really the CEO of you, and whether you want to call that soul, or source, or spirit, embodied in you, something bigger than just your mind, or heart is another way of thinking about it.

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I studied with Ann Weiser Cornell who studied with Eugene Gendlin who is the author of Focusing. And he studied at the University of Chicago I think with somebody famous there, I'm not really sure. But what he found is that he did these tests for people that did talk therapy. And he would study them and he really looked at who makes real change from talk therapy. And he noticed if people were, "I'll come, and I'll vent, and I'll talk about my life and then go." They really didn't kind of take big steps forward or changes.

Those people, however, that actually paused and said, "Wow, gosh, that just feels like a lead blanket on me." They paused and they felt what was going on or, "Wow, that's a breath of fresh air." But they're noticing it, "I feel it in my chest, in my shoulders." They connected to their body. Those people made significant changes and moved forward in their life. So there's often the mind and talk separate from the body really doesn't make real change until you start to breathe and check-in with the body, and are aware of those sensations. Those are scientifically proven to make change.

Susan: And it's additionally hard right now because often we are looking at a screen, talking to people over Zoom. We could even imagine we don't have a body unless we pay better attention to it, because sometimes I'm just seeing these faces.

CrisMarie: These heads.

Susan: These heads and little squares on my screen.

CrisMarie: Well, in a lot of the tech executives or corporate executives that I coach, they sit behind their computer. Well, one executive said, "I'm starting at 7:00am and I'm booked till 1:00am." Because he has overseas people, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, you've got to build in breaks, you've got to get up and move that body." Because we are physical energy beings and we tend to forget that. We tend to think we're machines with a brain on top.

Susan: I mean maybe Covid will help because now that we're forced to be looking at these screens we are beginning to realize how absurd that is. But I don't know yet, six months may not have gotten us there.

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CrisMarie: It's easy to numb out and not feel, and then you wind up doing things that you're not really happy with and you're not feeling very alive in your work and your life. So Susan and I want to give you some tools.

Susan: That we each for different reasons have found very effective for us. You were talking about focusing, and I love that you brought up some of that research.

CrisMarie: Yeah. So one way to think about this is, you know when you want to do something like start an exercise regime, or start a hobby, or write the book, and you just don't? It just doesn't seem to happen. That's an example of you're of two minds or two parts, I would say, not minds, because there's more of you. But there's two parts of you that are kind of wrestling for some part of you. One part of you wants to write the book and another part doesn't.

When I work with clients I'm often helping them connect into their body, ground in their body. And we've given you tools of that too, the grounding to be in your body. And to feel into the part of you that doesn't want to do it. Because so often we want to like willpower over it, I'm just going to make myself do it, if I schedule it. What's the system that's going to put it in place? And really you can build systems all day long. And until you actually turn towards the part of you that doesn't want to do it, something will keep self-sabotaging you, that part will...

Susan: It's so true.

CrisMarie: And so one woman, she's an entrepreneur that I'm coaching for a while now. And she wants to move forward. And what happens is some part of her – to start a new business, and another part of her is like, "Hmm, hmm." And so as we've turned towards that part, turns out it's this younger part of her that feels like oh my gosh, I'm going to get ridiculed, I'm going to fail. All sorts of stuff comes up. And the key is you don't need to resolve any of that. Often just listening to that part of yourself is enough to actually release the internal resistance to moving forward.

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Susan: I know when you've done focusing with me, CrisMarie, a big key factor is yes, turning towards that part. And not just giving it a narrative, but actually describing it, giving it a sensation. Sometimes it drives me nuts when you ask me this question, "What does it feel like?"

CrisMarie: Where is it in your body?

Susan: Where is it in your body? And when I'm in my head it is not a very – I'm not very, I want to fight you. But I have discovered the more that I let myself drop in and where do I feel it? If I had to describe it and I couldn't just call it something I want to complain about, how would I give it, you know? And the more I do that the more I get into my body. And I think that's an important distinction.

CrisMarie: Yes, because those parts of us, the sensations that you're usually feeling are often in your torso, like a tightness in your chest, a flip flop in your belly, a catch in your throat, a pressure often in the third eye. That's another area where people, "I feel like I have a band around my head." Those are something in you that's coming up. And it's there for some good reason.

And so we really want to honor that and listen to it, turn towards it, as if you would if it was outside of you. If it was some part of another person who was complaining, you'd turn towards that person and listen to them. And that's a very powerful way. There's more but it's a powerful way of working through that.

Susan: And the way that I understand it from what you shared with me too is it's like when we don't do that, we're actually enmeshed with this. And so the act of actually really beginning to move that part out a bit, separate it, get it and know that there's a larger part of myself that can actually, is huge.

CrisMarie: Yes, I love that Susan. So what we're developing when we are practicing focusing is also another part of the brain that can watch and turn towards. Because often when people are – another client of mine has a lot

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of anxiety. And so it's like that little kid, the anxious one is the one who's driving the bus, oh my gosh, we need to do that. And I'd better do this.

And until she actually settles down and turns towards it and develops the capacity in her brain, in her nervous system to turn towards that part. Then she recognizes oh my God, that's a scared little kid who's trying to run my business, or lead my team. And so when she does she can actually – that part will settle down as she's with it. So yeah, that enmeshment, and you don't have to be – sometimes when people are flooded with anxiety, or urgency, it's really a part. And if you can just notice, like wow, that must be something in me, you're already bigger than it.

Susan: It's been helpful to me just to use those words. Something in me is terrified of.

CrisMarie: Right. And that's one way you can actually be bigger than it is just to use the language. Something in me is worried. And if you can just say hello to that part and let it know you're there too, it's not alone, there's all of a sudden like this, oh, it's a real calming to the nervous system quite a bit.

Susan: It's a pretty powerful body of work. And I think the way you have incorporated it, because I mean you, CrisMarie, have done a variety of different somatic, that's not just focusing. So in your coaching I think you do expand and include a number of different ideas. And so focusing is a big key piece for you and has been hugely helpful.

CrisMarie: And one thing when I think we had a 100 sessions in a month or something, and I was coaching a lot of technology executives. And they are so focused in the brain, to actually bring some presence into the body, made huge leaps and strides in settling themselves and accessing more. Because when you're that stressed and just using your brain, your IQ drops 10 to 15 points. So bringing more of you online and present, you're more creative, you're smarter, you feel better, you feel more energized.

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Susan: Yes. So I actually wanted to talk a little bit. So I mean I actually have come to really had some profound shifts using focusing. So I do think it's a very valuable tool. And I also – we always kind of like to – we have our differences about what techniques we use, although we do share them.

CrisMarie: And you have been doing this body focus work for 30 years up in The Haven.

Susan: [Crosstalk].

CrisMarie: Well, I just want to just add your credibility here, because you have a master's in family systems. And have been leading people, and groups, and coaching people for 30 years to help them deal with all these different types of things.

Susan: Yes. I realize a lot of times what I talk about is how it really came about because of what was happening to me with cancer. But I did spend the next 20 years doing an incredible amount of training - 30 years. I've got to acknowledge my age. And as a result, it's not just an experiential pathway to me, it does come based on [crosstalk].

CrisMarie: You've worked with people, you've taught it. I know you're resisting me having to say all this.

Susan: Yes.

CrisMarie: But you teach people about it. I mean you develop people along their process. Isn't that amazing? So I just want to give you a...

Susan: And I have had the opportunity fortunately to train and work with some incredible masters. And so why I'm even talking about that is one of the things that I got introduced to and I still to this day find incredibly profound. Is it would be classically called gestalt or the 2-chair process, which was actually introduced by Fritz Perls years back, probably was one of those 60s big ones, same age as Ben and Jock.

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CrisMarie: Bennet Wong from Haven, so they were contemporaries, even of Eugene Gendlin.

Susan: Yes, they were all, yeah.

CrisMarie: And the humanistic psychology movement.

Susan: Yes. And the whole idea with gestalt therapy is this idea that we have various things that...

CrisMarie: They're kind of unfinished things.

Susan: Unfinished, and when we can identify those things, and begin to externalize them, and do the completion work, we are more present. And so why I say that is a lot of times someone will tell me, "I can't, you know, there's no way I can talk to my boss. There is no way I can do this, there's no way." And I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to encourage you to consider having a gestalt maybe with your boss."

CrisMarie: So you could have it, this is for those of you out there listening. So if you have kind of like, oh, I don't know if I could talk to my spouse, or my boss, or even if you have a physical symptom that keeps reoccurring, that's...

Susan: I'm going to get to that.

CrisMarie: Okay. Well, I want you folks to just be thinking about it because this is a process you could use to work through that.

Susan: I love this about CrisMarie because I often think I'm giving you the right level of detail. And what I often find is that I may have jumped ahead or kind of missed some critical steps that hopefully are valuable to you, even though I thought they were there, but obviously not. Yes, there are a variety of ways. Anything that you can kind of objectify, or a person, or...

CrisMarie: What does objectify mean?

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Susan: Turning into an object because – and actually move it outside of yourself. In some respects there are elements of gestalt therapy that are similar to focusing in a number of different ways. I think gestalt therapy has externalized it even more because you literally are – you'll find out, kind of be moving between two chairs or something along those lines. And you can – for me, I've done this – I mean early on I did it with my tumors. I had tumor talks.

CrisMarie: Well, this is when Susan had cancer.

Susan: I had cancer in my early 20s. I would do tumor talks. I've also done it – I had a lot of kind of unhealed situations with my family. And before I ever tried to talk with them in the present I used this gestalt to kind of go through all the things that I was really pissed off about in the past. And, frankly, these days I have my Trump talks. It's like I am mad at somebody in the political spectrum, not that I'm going to say anything about my position.

CrisMarie: You just did.

Susan: I don't know. But I will have that conversation, it could be – and I say Trump talks, so maybe it'll be better, I could have it with my doctor. I could have it with you. Let's just say, sometimes it's better for me to do the gestalt process because a lot of times what I discover when I do this is that I am stuck in an old loop, something that is not current. And I need to be brought up to speed before I even can have the real conversation with the person that I might.

CrisMarie: Maybe go through the process.

Susan: Well, let me talk around a client, it might be easier.

CrisMarie: That's great.

Susan: Okay. So a woman that I work with who – she is in our vernacular, in our work we would call her an accommodator in terms of how she –

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she's great at taking care of everyone. And she is a master at her team and her business. She's in telecommunications, technology line of things. And she's a master at supporting her clients and things.

And she actually came to me because she realized she felt like she wasn't really gaining her own voice. And initially some of that was specifically related to a situation that was with a parent that was coming up with – her mother was in an illness process. She was having trouble figuring out how to talk to her mother or her father in the pattern that they were setting up. And so I suggested trying this gestalt with her. And what was interesting was she hardly – in talking to her she never got upset or angry with her parents.

She was incredibly helpful, trying to solve the problem, but when she got into the gestalt she had to really do some breathing. So gestalt is you start off as yourself, she is talking to her mother as though her...

CrisMarie: Out loud?

Susan: Out loud, her mother's not there, she's talking to her out loud. And at some point in time she's going to go over, be her mother and respond. And then she's going to come back and be herself. That's the simplest form. And when she did this she realized there was so much that she wasn't saying to her mom. And she got in touch with some things that she was really angry about, it took a while. She wasn't going to say them. And I said, "You're talking to a chair." This is my coaching, "Remember you are, yes, but she's not here."

CrisMarie: Yeah, you're safe.

Susan: "So if you are so stuck that you can't say that even to this chair this could be part of the problem." And she really got it. And so she then breathed and she got into it. And then had to go over and be her mom. And this is a big step. A lot of times people struggle going over to be this other person. "I don't know what they'd say, I don't know." "Trust me; you've got some version of her in there." That was sort of my coaching to her. To her

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credit, she was willing to breathe. And it was surprising to her what came up.

I said, “Just trust it, this isn’t about fixing it, change it. This is just for you, a discovery process.” And she really was able to kind of mimic what dialog she thought she would hear from her mom. And it was the first time she really was – I said, “Let that out.” And she really did. And it was quite profound for her because she said later what happened was she ended up having a real conversation with mom, but it was like it was a different experience. And I said to her, “It was, because you weren’t stuck in that old gestalt, you weren’t in the old pattern.”

And that’s what can be quite profound about a gestalt, if you actually, if you use it as a discovery process. It’s not about fixing it, it’s not about figuring out the right thing to say so you can change the other person, because you’re actually just dealing with yourself and your own inner psyche, kind of like focusing.

CrisMarie: Right. And doesn’t gestalt mean like the whole thing, because it’s all inside of you, but it creates?

Susan: And most of these things are incomplete. So gestalt is bringing it into a whole because when you bring that unfinished piece into wholeness then you can be present. Another one of my clients had, years ago her mother had died. And it had left – it was just – really it was like her world. And at one point – she had a pretty regular pattern of going through a real depressive cycle around her mother’s death. And so I suggested to do a gestalt.

And in the gestalt process when I was coaching her, it was the first time she was ever able really to get back in touch with her own guilt about what happened at the time. And she could almost not talk, but I was like, “Try to stay with it,” encouraged her, “Stay with it. What would you have said? What did you want to say? Imagine she’s right there.” And she had a very profound experience in that. And she said, “I was much freer, it was like I

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felt guilty about some things. And when I finally acknowledged how guilty I felt, I had to forgive myself really.”

But it felt like that was the process that occurred. And suddenly she just had all these other experiences around her mom and her mom’s support going forward that she had kind of lost. So it can be really quite profound.

CrisMarie: Regaining a whole bunch of who she is.

Susan: Because if we’re stuck either at a point of anger, or a cutoff point, or grief point, then we don’t have access to the rest of that until we work it through in some way. So gestalt and focusing are two really helpful ways.

CrisMarie: I really love your examples. I’m kind of jealous of your examples. I wish I could have given better client examples.

Susan: Well, do you have one in mind?

CrisMarie: Well, I was thinking about this one, a gentleman who wanted to – he felt so safe. And every time, so we were doing focusing on the something – so he would just not do, just not look for another job. And when we did focusing it turns out he found a part of himself that it was like he was terrified of the newness, what he was going to do, criticism. Maybe he was going to make a mistake. He would look like a fool.

And when we actually had his larger part be with that part that was so afraid of that, we tend to want to get control or safety, like can I make my outside world safe so I will feel better? And the key with focusing is really – it’s almost like a re-parenting process, it’s like being there for those parts of us that are scared and letting him know, “Hey, you’re not alone, I’m here.”

Because there often are arrested parts of ourselves that happened when we bumped into a situation that overwhelmed our capacity to respond back then, that we develop these coping mechanisms of control, or not doing something, or avoiding that. And those parts of us know, hey, there is this adult that has a lot of resources there, and can take care of me. They start

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to actually move forward and live forward, mature. So you do, same idea, you regain all that energy and the capacity to move forward.

So he wound up actually getting a new job, he looked on what would be the best job and he applied and got it, and he's very happy. But would have stayed in the same position had he not actually turned towards that part of him and gave him that part comfort and listening.

Susan: I love that you actually decided to come back to it, because I love that. I mean I think why we're bringing these things up is we are big believers in – with teams, and when we're working with couples, we want them to have these really important conversations, because that's what allows you to get to creativity. The same is true with the stuff inside you.

CrisMarie: Inside you.

Susan: This is why the Beauty of Conflict within needs to eventually come without.

CrisMarie: Meaning our book needs to emerge, our next book.

Susan: But anyway, we hope you will find this useful and we, yeah, it was going to be just a five minute tools thing. But I think we've gone on a bit, so I think we may have a whole episode.

CrisMarie: You can read about gestalt work or focusing, the Power of Focusing by Ann Weiser Cornell, is much more accessible than Eugene Gendlin's book, which is very, very dense, and very science orientated.

Susan: And I actually, I learned about gestalt through Haven which is a whole different world. But you can definitely pick up some of the books of Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen if you want to know more. I would suggest that. I don't know that reading Fritz Perls books would...

CrisMarie: Are very dense.

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Susan: Yes, I once talked to the editor for one of Ben and Jock's books and he was like, "Yeah, it's good they got an editor." They're brilliant guys, don't get me wrong, but sometimes an editor is important.

CrisMarie: And if you need help we're always available for coaching, if you are stuck or kind of dealing with procrastination, or excessive worry, or anxiety. Because it's often helpful, I get my coaching every week to help me continue to move forward in my life.

Susan: Can I share one more little story?

CrisMarie: Sure. Oh gosh, yes.

Susan: I was thinking, we actually started an online program up at The Haven and so we were doing things online. And one of the things we were doing was helping people, remind them of some of the tools they learned at Haven. And so we would do a gestalt, one of the models that is a part of Haven is the selves model, which I think we've talked about.

CrisMarie: A little bit.

Susan: There's two sides, self-compassion and self-hate. And we would do a gestalt process where people would – most people jump to have a gestalt with their self-hate. I don't know why. And I have too.

CrisMarie: Because it beats us up, who likes that part of that?

Susan: But because I was always leading this and doing examples and things like that, would decide to gestalt my self-compassion. It really – I think of it now and I think it was probably a little bit like a focusing session where I was talking. But I always was fascinated by what the compassionate part of me had to say.

So even something as simple as that, if you are in beating yourself up, don't go try to talk to that critic. Go talk to – because all of us have a self-compassionate part. All of us have a child even. And most of us don't – we think, no, we've got to get busy and get work done. But maybe we really

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need to have a conversation with the child, or the compassionate part of us.

CrisMarie: Okay, I'll just give a plug here because I've also been coaching some people on The Artist's Way which is – Julia Cameron is – well, she's fabulous. She used to be married to Martin Scorsese. And she's a screenwriter. And she started teaching these creativity classes. And really she has two tools that are quite powerful, Morning Pages, and Artist Dates. And she talks about how our inner creative part is a child, and it needs play, it needs images, it needs breaks. And so often that's the hardest part for people to integrate because we are puritan, we need to get work done.

But you can only fish the well, or yeah, I guess it is, fish the well, so before the ponds.

Susan: [Crosstalk].

CrisMarie: Fish the pond, I don't know. You've run out of fish, you need to actually go play and get some fish.

Susan: You need to go to the ocean. Somehow, we've [inaudible]. But I love that, because an Artist Date is a wonderful thing that is available and good to do in Covid.

CrisMarie: It is, it's just taking a drive, because you can take a drive in your own car, somewhere that you haven't gone. It's about novelty, and adventure, and newness. And it doesn't have to – it's an hour, whatever. I went to City Beach, I went up on top of our mountain, thank goodness, last week, just it takes...

Susan: Now we have snow.

CrisMarie: So do something that nurtures you and you'll be surprised at how your energy and your mood will come up.

Susan: And reach out if you want some more support.

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CrisMarie: Take care.

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.

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