

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

CrisMarie Campbell and Susan Clarke

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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.

Well, welcome to the Beauty of Conflict. This is Susan and we have actually taken a little time off post election from having our conversation about conflict. And maybe that was because there just seemed to be so much conflict.

CrisMarie: That's true.

Susan: And maybe it was just we needed to take some time to sit back and figure out what we actually wanted to say. And in that process we actually

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

have done a little bit of writing. Some of you may be a part of our monthly letters.

CrisMarie: On Mondays.

Susan: On Mondays, and we actually had sent out a letter fairly quickly after the election about the fact that really no matter what side of things you're on, this experience has been probably some sense of heartache during this experience. And in my mind, we talk about a crack. And when there is a crack in your heart or heartbreak, the opportunity is to let the light in.

So we have really been focused on how do we want to let the light in? What does it mean to us? And how do we want to embrace what is a fairly conflictual time in our country, not just because of the election, but also with Covid and various things that are going on. And one of the things that we realized in our reflection is that what comes up the most during this time is this ideal of belonging.

CrisMarie: Or the sense of belonging. This is CrisMarie. And how belonging is, it's a really important human need. And sometimes we assume that we have it and then all of a sudden we think wow, I don't belong. Or there's a loss of belonging and for me, belonging, I'd just be curious for you listener, what belonging means to you.

Susan: And think of it even just in this moment maybe. Take a moment and think where, just answer that question. Where do I belong? And see what comes up first. It might be a church. It might be a job. It might be a team. CrisMarie when I asked her in her inquiry process before we got on she was a husky, a rower, yeah, various things. Normally you usually start with some of the roles and the places that we exist. And often with belonging though it starts to go deeper.

CrisMarie: Belonging is important because it, for me, this is CrisMarie, how I define belonging is a place where I feel safe, safe enough to be myself, to relax. I feel accepted. And I settle in. And a lot of times I might be going

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

through the rest of my day kind of armored up or in my role being who I am, but a little bit distant from the people I'm around. Not really trying to, maybe I'm being professional. But the places that I belong I'm willing to say, "Gosh, this is what I really think or this is what I want."

And I even remember in my freshman year of college, that's a place where you're starting a university, so I'm living with new people. I'm going to all these new classes. And thanksgiving rolled around and my parents were in New Jersey and I was in Seattle at the University of Washington.

And my brother and sister lived in Portland. And rather than going back to Jersey I drove down to Portland to stay with my brother and my sister who were living together. And I remember getting there and they were so like, "Hey, just be on the couch, we'll give you a hot buttered rum", which I'd never had before and was really yummy. And all of a sudden I just started to relax.

Susan: No, it wasn't the alcohol.

CrisMarie: No.

Susan: Just to be clear, some of you might be thinking, hot buttered rum.

CrisMarie: It's a good point. But I just realized I didn't have to do anything. I didn't have to be hyper vigilant to am I going to piss anybody off or do they like me or not like me? That was already assumed. And I could just finally relax. And there was a sense of relief and settling in. And I remember that felt sense of belonging. And it wasn't that I thought I didn't belong, whatever, the two months that I was in school. But I was probably kind of more on high alert as I figured out where do I belong in this new location?

Susan: That's a great example. I mean I can remember, I don't know, there's a movie about a young boy who's...

CrisMarie: Tibetan, this is?

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

Susan: No, it's not Tibetan. Empire of the Sun I think it is. Anyway in the movie, I remember reading, he never closes his eyes and it is pretty, he goes through a horrendous internment camp, different things that occurred. And I so related to that movie because of the notion that – I can still feel it. It wasn't until the very end when he had come back to some place that he could call home that he closed his eyes.

And I can remember when I was dealing with my cancers and my life was very, very turbulent. I would sometimes call a friend to go to a movie, a good friend of mine. And she would always be like, "I never get why you pick a movie and you sleep through the entire movie, the minute we get there." And it's true. I never slept any other time. But I felt so safe in that movie theater with her and I would just fall deeply asleep.

And that was, at the time, I think that's when that movie came out. But I'd just got it when I saw the movie because it was like here's, in this little pocket I feel safe.

CrisMarie: It's a great way, Susan, of talking about it. Where do you feel home, home enough to relax? And there is a sense, I think today in this 2020, so much hyper vigilance of oh my gosh, is that person wearing a mask? Am I going to get Covid? Can I do this? Is our economy going – are we going to get the right president? All these things that are scary that create this hyper vigilance. I am looking outside of me to know whether I'm going to be safe or not.

Susan: Two things come up for me. One for me another place is with the horses. I just want to acknowledge that. That's something that I settle with them. But the other is watching our dog Rosy. Now, this is a dog that somehow I think from day one knew she belonged. I mean there is something about her that she just looks comfortable wherever she plops herself down.

CrisMarie: Well, she assumes she's safe. She's like you can push me around, you can lay on top of me, I'm okay.

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

Susan: Now, our other dog, just so you know, not all dogs do this. It's not quite as, no, no, she's a little more hyper vigilant.

CrisMarie: A little neurotic I'd say. I love her.

Susan: We love her.

CrisMarie: But she's always like, "Are you okay? Where are you going? Okay, I'll come with you. Oh, no, what's happening?"

Susan: She's hunting, she's working, she's herding. But Rosy, though she does apparently have some herding in her does not – mostly she just looks like she belongs. So we wanted to talk about belonging today because there's so many levels to it.

CrisMarie: Well, we talked about belonging to a group, a family, a company, even your partnership. I think, I with you Susan, it took me about years, but I realized you're really not going away. I could actually relax into this relationship.

Susan: And it's not just – I think for you it wasn't that you had to learn you could relax. You also had to learn you could be messy.

CrisMarie: Yes, I could speak up, that's true. I mean I think that's part of the acceptance. We talk about conflict and I encourage people to speak up and be honest and be kind. But there is in our relationship, I can speak up and be messy and sometimes not even very nice, like blamey, and I'm not proud of that. But it gives me a safe place to be as messy as I am. And then to also reclaim and clean it up and get better at that so that out in the world I can be more honest and real.

Susan: Well, I think we talk about that in our relationship work, in our coaching and various things. It's like for me when I actually begin to feel comfortable with somebody is when I have seen both the good, the bad and the ugly, not just the kind.

CrisMarie: Not the both, but all.

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

Susan: Yeah, because I am usually suspect of the kind of – and that may not be a fair word to even call that kind, but the nice anyway.

CrisMarie: Nice and polite.

Susan: Nice and polite, I just have a very – I don't trust it.

CrisMarie: Well, I do think the idea of fitting in, we can be nice and polite, we can fit in. But not so much very real, and that, when we're operating that way we're – maybe we're hoping I hope they like me. But there is not that sense of belonging. There is a sense of I've got to prove myself or do this in order for them to accept me versus, hey, this is me and do we match or not? Is it a fit or not?

Susan: I think of a good friend of mine and colleague, who I worked with for a while up at Haven, Carole Ames. And she would often talk about how rarely she uses the word, "I love you", because to her that meant something, you just don't say it lightly.

CrisMarie: Lightly.

Susan: And so she would often talk about that in our programs about how she and her partner would, you know, she would just – she didn't just to want to hear, "I love you." It's like I really want to hear that, it doesn't mean anything to me if it's said all the time. And I think that had to do a little bit for her with belonging, where that is a more genuine, where it comes from a deeper place.

CrisMarie: And so think about, where do you feel like you belong? Because there is a different level, there is the groups we're a part of; the theater would be another group that I feel like I belong. And so there's groups. But there's also the sense of I feel like my life's work has been to cultivate this sense of safety inside my own shoes, because I lived my life so afraid in my family. I did not feel like I belonged in my family. And often if we don't belong, like if you're in a job and you're not sure you belong.

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

If you have some place where you do belong, your family, there is a sense of well, I can come back and be myself and talk about how I don't feel like I belong with you. In order to make sense of my world and I settle down. I digest my experience. So you don't need to belong everywhere but there's some place.

Susan: Well, I think about people, how many people, there have been some really strong people in my life who where they belong was in some form of faith or religion. I talk about this with some caveats, because too often I think I don't always experience that with people who are connected to religion. But there are a few people that what always struck me was you could tell, it was a sense of faith and their sense of faith. It wasn't about whether, you know, they weren't talking to me like I need to pray for you because you're sending or you come to God because then...

It was a real deep sense of who they were. There's like this little collection of people that come to my mind who I thought really lived up, this one woman, Judy Sutherland, she was a youth director for mostly my sisters. But I had contact with her too and she just was a salt of the Earth, grounded person. And if anyone would have convinced me that I should have ties to her, go to the church in some fashion it would have been her.

CrisMarie: Was she tied to the church, Susan?

Susan: She was a youth director, she was very strong.

CrisMarie: At the church?

Susan: Yeah. But what struck me was when she hurt her back and she was laid up for a long time. The way she did it, she said, "I just have these vibrational prayers; people's names come to my mind." And that so moved me, I could just see her doing it, and so she's someone to me who like her faith clearly allowed her to belong and she felt that sense of connection to herself, to her God. And it wasn't something that kept a distance from anyone; it was something that allowed her to include herself in everyone.

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

CrisMarie: I think that's, one thing that I am cultivating, because I grew up as a Catholic and that – no offence to Catholics out there who it's very strong for you like my parents. But it did not feed my soul. It felt like rules and I was wrong. And so I didn't grow up with a relationship with the higher power. And it's not been until more later in my life where I've cultivated a sense that, wait a minute, I've done intentions, but this idea of prayer.

And there's a power out there that actually loves me. And I can pray for other people or whatever. And that gives me a sense, an internal sense that I belong to this something bigger than me. And that I feel really feeds my soul and kind of settles me down. There's Ben Wong who coined the term, or I think he did, faith, he defined it as the felt sense of the continuity of life, the felt sense of the continuity of life. And when I have a connection to my higher power I relax and I kind of zoom out and see the bigger picture.

Small things are put into context and made sense of as opposed to oh my God, I've got to get everything perfect, which can be so painful and again, trying to prove myself. Trying to make sure I'm okay by pleasing the outside environment as opposed to knowing, hey, I'm already okay right here right now. And that's so powerful.

Susan: I think there's a reason this is showing up more universally than it did before. We've recently been a part of a more spiritual practice, a group that – the gentleman who does that, Passionate Ease, we've probably talked about before, Lawrence Conlan.

CrisMarie: Conlan.

Susan: Conlan, great guy. But he's clearly done a lot of his work through more, I guess, traditional Indian.

CrisMarie: Buddhist.

Susan: Buddhist, followed people, and I don't know all the names of the people he's followed. But a lot of the people in the groups know those

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

names. But it's just not the path either one of us have taken. So we don't always – and he rarely knows the names of the people we know.

CrisMarie: Oh my gosh, yes.

Susan: Just different worlds.

CrisMarie: I know.

Susan: But we were just in a weekend workshop with him, a lot of that workshop there was a deep conversation about this idea of belonging, and how to belong in yourself and through meditation.

CrisMarie: So there's belonging to a higher power but there's also this possibility of belonging to ourselves and getting that self-love from ourselves.

Susan: And I think he would say that is actually his path for connecting to that higher power. But also we, in the same time have been listening to a lot of Brené Brown. And so it was interesting because in our meditation he had this concept of, yes, I am, bringing your energy up your spine, the masculine...

CrisMarie: Breath.

Susan: Breath, bringing your breath and energy. Okay, we're just...

CrisMarie: We're arguing now.

Susan: Yes, a little conflict on our Beauty of Conflict, yes.

CrisMarie: It's a breathing practice.

Susan: It's a breathing practice. And let's just be clear, CrisMarie did differently than me but we both had our orbit, where you breathe up through the spin, yes, I am. And that's the masculine coming into form. And then the feminine thy will be done is the surrender back in. And so we did this practice and at the same time, the day after we finished I was listening

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

to a Brené Brown podcast and she was talking about belonging. And she was talking about it from this concept of a strong back, a strong spine and a soft heart.

CrisMarie: A soft front, I think it was a strong back, soft heart.

Susan: You're right. And she had the whole concept of that actually came from someone else and she added the wild heart.

CrisMarie: She got this idea from a woman she was doing a talk with. And the woman said most of us have a weak spine and an armored front out of fear, which makes us very brutal. And the cultivation of that inhale, yes, I am, up the spine. I am me. And then surrendering to what life brings, that soft front is very powerful and it's what Lawrence Conlan calls this orbit breath around up your spine and down your front, this little orbit.

Susan: And interestingly enough for me I've been working with a couple of clients who have taken up this concept of mindfulness or meditation to find some way to deal with the anxiety. And one of the things I've noticed repeatedly in conversation with some of these people is that there is some way in which that doesn't quite work because though it may calm them.

CrisMarie: The breath.

Susan: The breath, the meditation and mindfulness. And I think the reason why is because there is this, in this place of belonging or finding that felt sense, it's not just about trying to rise above. It's about really going into, saying in a way, "Yes, welcome, I am going to go into this intensity, this pain, this sensation." And that too often, and I don't think anyone's trying to teach this, but there's a tendency, it's like okay, I'm doing meditation so I can get over it.

CrisMarie: Away from.

Susan: Or above it or away from it.

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

CrisMarie: Yeah. I think people tend to transcend what we feel. And all of this is about actually embracing what you feel in your body, because feelings happen in our bodies. And we will have heartache and we will have joy. We'll have everything in between. And not trying to get around it, or above it, or beside it, but embracing it.

Another way that actually really helps to help me belong to myself is this idea of permissions. And when you're starting meditation or even when you're racing to get to some place, to actually give yourself permission for what is happening, because we all have that critical voice, oh my gosh, you're late, you should have done this differently. They're going to be mad at you. This is my critic. Versus okay, it's okay that I'm behind schedule. It's okay that I'm agitated.

And as I do that even now, I took an inhale of breath, it helps me breathe and settle down. And that's a way of belonging to myself, what is happening right now is completely okay. It's okay that I'm angry. It's okay that I'm impatient. Whatever those things that you think are wrong, actually give yourself permission to feel.

Susan: And in our vernacular, the work we do I think the equivalent to this is what we think of as the backbone and heart being a me in a we. Be that a couple, be that an organization, be that a family. And that is one of the biggest challenges. How do you come to who you are, your place of strong back, soft front and then go out in the world? It's not an easy endeavor.

CrisMarie: Yeah, we do think. And I've always had it flipped, I looked outside of myself for safety so I was always scanning for signs of disapproval, do you like me? That's putting the we first versus the me. And the whole idea of putting your own oxygen mask on first is the metaphor of breathe, even that's breath, that's too funny. Breathe in for yourself and then when you exhale you're giving to others or connecting to others and be mindful of that.

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

One of the things I wanted to – what breaks down belonging or that sense of I'm okay is when we often bump into something that we interpret as a breakdown of trust or a breakdown of respect, or even a betrayal. And usually that is a values difference which with our political, and even our mask wearing or not mask wearing, those are valued challenges that we're bumping up against with somebody else. And that can all of a sudden make us feel they're the other, the us and them.

Susan: I have to say kind of a funny story about that for me. So we this year put out our political signs.

CrisMarie: All over the yard with our American flags.

Susan: And I was, you know, we've never really done that.

CrisMarie: No, we've not.

Susan: So we were putting ourselves out there. And across the street from us we happen to have a neighbor who we've often...

CrisMarie: He's a grouchy neighbor.

Susan: Yeah, okay. CrisMarie's given you some interpretation. But I had developed a little bit of a rapport with him that I thought was pretty good. And so I was walking down the driveway with the snow coming down and I looked across and was, "I can't believe it's winter already." And it was like this silence, I kind of told myself maybe he has earplugs in, whatever.

And what was interesting is then I drove down the road to get something and I was on my way back. And I was coming by the other side of his, and I saw this huge banner for Trump. And I could feel myself going that's why I'm the enemy. And I right away, now, this is how quickly it happened. And I thought, I had to take a moment. But first I thought he probably really did not like all those signs. I had some actually empathy for the...

CrisMarie: What he might have gone through.

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

Susan: I did. I had to breathe to not go to a place of the hard heart, but to stay open. Because it's like, no, even though he might be a grumpy old guy I also...

CrisMarie: He's really grumpy.

Susan: I also have enjoyed when we have had contact so I don't want to lose that just because of our differences in values or position.

CrisMarie: I mean that came up when I had a conversation with a dear friend of mine who I found voted for Trump, which is different. And I was surprised. And at first I was like she's my safe person, she's where I do belong. And all of a sudden I was like, how am I going to navigate this? And she said, "I want us to talk honestly about it." And so I gave my opinions and it was – what I recognize though, because of the conflict is I tend to go to a state of confusion. I don't understand why he does this and why he does that.

And she said, "You're sounding confused. And I don't think you're confused. I think you have a strong opinion." And I was like, "You're right, I do." And that was really helpful because that's what happens when I feel like my belonging, this person that I care about, who I maintain my sense of safety, is opposite of me. I think that's going to threaten us. I'm going to be abandoned. And so I, as a strategy, which I was not aware of is I go to confusion.

Susan: And the beauty of what you just described is that safe person of yours gave you a path back to belonging.

CrisMarie: She did.

Susan: And you took it. So that's a pretty cool place. And you didn't have to agree.

CrisMarie: No. And we spent that conversation, and we had another hour long conversation about it. We don't agree.

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

Susan: On this issue.

CrisMarie: No.

Susan: But there's a lot more to life than just what we agree on.

CrisMarie: Yeah, I guess I felt seen and heard. And I think she felt seen and heard. And that's part of that belonging is being seen and heard for who I am gives me I guess a sense of acceptance, not agreement, but acceptance.

Susan: I'm not sure how much longer we have to chat now because we're getting further into our time. But one of the other things that really struck me was this – I think I shared it with you at the time. This article and it was talking about the impact of Covid for children in terms of building relationships. And it really struck me because they were talking about how there's a developmental process where children really need that interaction reciprocal, that's what builds friendships.

And that reciprocal interaction is what creates a friendship. And they were saying, "You can love and be distant from someone and still love them. But friendship takes reciprocal interactions."

CrisMarie: Yeah, it does.

Susan: And in the article the guy had talked about his little three year old who he was saying – it was his five year old, anyway somewhere. And he was concerned because he saw his five year old talk about a friend being this one year old, there was no reciprocal happening. And so what he did was he started to create a connection each week for his five year old with someone from his preschool before, just based on.

CrisMarie: Okay, same age you mean?

Susan: The same age who he knew had been a friend of his in school and now that everything had been blocked. And he said it was kind of horrible in

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

the beginning, kind of like when you get old people on Zoom, their faces, there's an eyeball, nothing's happening for hours.

CrisMarie: But you're up there, yeah.

Susan: But he said they did it consistently, [inaudible] we could have that face time. And they started to get easy with it, they did have play. And at that time the school was still open. And right away he could see that bond was still there, that reciprocal friendship. So I'm just talking about that because we are at a time where that can be harder because of some of the restrictions, because of some of the challenges. So the people you love where you might belong, there's also the friends you have. And those friendships take a reciprocal connection.

CrisMarie: Reciprocal and sounds like frequency, and give and take, and being willing to reach out and do things with them.

Susan: And all of those are where you can find your ground to help you digest the events that are occurring in the world right now and the experience that we're having. So even in a business setting, helping teams, usually it happens when you're walking around your location and you get your coffee and people, you know, or whatever. And those aren't there. So we've really been supporting even businesses finding ways to create more of that reciprocal connection and contact.

CrisMarie: And being willing to actually reach out outside of a meeting and whether it's even on a phone call, you don't have to do another video call to a colleague. Just to kind of shoot the breeze because that's part of how we create those reciprocal relationships, sense of belonging and mattering. Besides me being a cog in the wheel and making things work.

So think about how you can kind of increase your sense of belonging. Where would you like to feel more connected? And maybe reach out today, this will come out after, but it's National Kindness Day. Maybe send a supportive text to somebody that you don't know. Or pick up the phone and

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

give them a call and just talk to them and ask how they're doing and connect like you would friends over a beer.

Susan: Yeah, or over a puzzle, that's what I've been doing with my mom to try to make connections.

CrisMarie: I'm trying to get her to play the guitar with her mom.

Susan: Okay, we'll see. But I think it's a brilliant idea. It might be a little better to bring Clark in, my nephew who actually plays the piano really well. Maybe we could do some singing together because I do think that would be a good idea, going along with this part of the conversation because I do think when you voice something out loud it becomes – it's an accountability piece. So who knows, maybe next time we talk I'll tell you how that went.

CrisMarie: Have a good week. 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.

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

Where Do You Belong? And Why That Is Important

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.