

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

CrisMarie Campbell and Susan Clarke

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

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

Susan: And I'm Susan.

CrisMarie: We run a company called Thrive Inc. and we specialist 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 had 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, concepts, 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: Do you want to be right or do you want to be relational? Because you can't be both and today, we're going to talk about that. Right, Susan?

Susan: Yes.

CrisMarie: This is CrisMarie.

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

Susan: We think this is a good topic to bring up because there's a lot of situations that we're facing right now in the world where it's really easy to get into a right/wrong.

CrisMarie: I mean, you need to wear a mask. I don't want to wear a mask.

Susan: Masks are bad. You need to stay six feet apart.

CrisMarie: I don't want to stay six feet apart.

Susan: Yeah, schools should be online.

CrisMarie: Yeah, no, kids need to go to school to be with each other.

Susan: Yes. So, we could use COVID as the almighty example of that, but we also have politics.

CrisMarie: Oh my gosh, yes.

Susan: You know, everyone thinks you're not supposed to talk politics.

CrisMarie: I kind of wonder about that. We're not supposed to talk politics at work or with our friends, but then who do we talk politics with and if we don't we get what's happening now which are just these big positional pieces and it's so explosive because we're so polarized on either side.

Susan: To me, that is really frightening. Like, CrisMarie, just this past week I was with my golf buddies, we golf on a weekly basis, and we often have various conversations, but we were having a dinner afterwards and I just said, "Look, I want to talk politics."

CrisMarie: I bet you said that pretty tentatively.

Susan: I did, because it's not like the dinner conversation most people want to have, but what was really – what I really appreciated that one, they wanted to too and they struggle. Now, I get the people I was with had fairly similar views –

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

CrisMarie: You didn't know that when you started.

Susan: I didn't know that for sure when I started that. I kind of had some good ideas, but I thought there would be some things we had some differences on. There weren't as many as I thought, but one thing we all three said was, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could actually have this kind of conversation with some people who had different perspectives and just talk?" And that is so hard to create.

CrisMarie: Yeah. I mean, right now we have people even in our little town of Whitefish, Montana and there's bigger versions of this, of course, going on like in Portland, where we have one side of the street protesting for Black Lives Matter, that's been happening over time, and now what's gathering on the other kiddie corner to that are Trump supporters. What's starting to happen is those two camps are escalating in their anger towards each other.

Susan: It's interesting the different ways that it gets shared out to us in the paper. One person will say, "Our signs were really just positive signs wanting to show support." I think it was after the Republican Convention probably when this was going on, and they were really offended by this other group that had such a strong opinion.

Yet, this other group had their own position that they thought was really vitally important to continue to support. I don't think they were trying to be just hostile towards the other group with their signs, but it really does – there's things happening say in Portland where the same Trump –

CrisMarie: And Black Lives Matter.

Susan: Are getting very riled up. Now, sometimes that actually did escalate into paintballs, mace, someone got killed. You can see where we get into these right, wrong positional things we don't have a whole lot of way to get through it. There is no relational dynamic to that.

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

CrisMarie: Even the politics right now, we can believe the ads or whatever you're getting downloaded, but there's very little way without the sound bites or just the sound bites to have a conversation with somebody across the aisle and say, "Wow, how are you putting this world together? Because this is so different than how I am, and help me understand."

Because it quickly goes to, "You're bad. I'm right, you're wrong. Let's get out of here."

Susan: I hope, from a political perspective we're in this cycle. It can get worse.

CrisMarie: Yeah, I get it.

Susan: I mean, I get things constantly to invest money so that this camp and these people have this much money, it's going to be negative. The reality of it is any ad I invest in is going to be the only thing I see really because I don't – we are now in these little pockets. If you watch Fox News you're going to see what Fox News has to offer. If you watch NPR would be another.

So, we're not even hearing any kind of anything outside of our own echo chamber. Even in the news cycles it's hard to get that.

CrisMarie: Now, this isn't just about politics. COVID and politics are so loud and in our face right now and escalating, but it's also in your relationships and probably more often and you have a better chance you bump into that, "Wait a minute, I'm right here, you're wrong." I know Susan and I bump into this.

Susan: You actually have a lot better chance of beginning to develop the muscle to do it differently if you pay attention to where even in your closest relationships are you bumping into, "I'm right, it's no longer relational."

CrisMarie: I mean, this happened last night. We were talking about something simple, what a fever is, and you said –

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

Susan: You were talking about, CrisMarie was sharing that she was very hot, and I said, “Well, do you want me to see if you have a fever?” And she said, “That would not be – “

CrisMarie: I wouldn’t have a fever if I was hot, I’d feel chill.

Susan: I think I said, “Well, so when you have a fever you feel chilled.”

CrisMarie: Chilly, I would have the chills.

Susan: You could see we might still be fighting even on this podcast for who’s right and who’s wrong.

CrisMarie: Well, what started to happen is Susan just stopped talking.

Susan: Ah-ha, right, yes.

CrisMarie: You did, and then I thought, “She thinks I’m wrong.” So, what was happening in that place, I was like, “She should answer me. She needs to respond.” So, here I’m making her wrong, trying to control her. What I did instead was I said, “Wow, I feel really uncomfortable because I think you’re making me wrong and I feel, basically, insecure.”

Susan: What was fascinating, to me, was I just thought you were making me wrong which is often something that occurs. I can easily recognize when I think CrisMarie is blaming me or making me wrong. I am not always as good at turning it around and saying, “What sort of agenda do I have here? How invested am I in my point of view?”

I have this kind of slimy way of saying, “As long as we can both have our position it’s okay.” But then if I’m really honest underneath that I don’t know if I’m very curious about your position at that point, so I’m not particularly relational and that comes up in all sorts of ways. I think it’s kind of a slippery way to say, “I’m open,” if I’m honest.

CrisMarie: I like that. I appreciate your honesty. Now, you might think this is a silly thing, but think about your own life and think about your

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

interactions that you're having with your spouse, your children, your in-laws, and where do you, "You know what, they're wrong"? Or do you feel like you need to defend your position? We talked about defensiveness on the last podcast.

Susan: I mean, one other piece we'll say about this is that relational skills really have to do with what we talk about quite regularly, and the other piece that's really critical here is the curiosity piece. Can I listen and actually genuinely let something else in? That's the slippery slope I was talking about before.

CrisMarie: But what happens when we get to that, like, "No, this is the way the world is." Whether it's, "Trump should be president," or, "Biden should be president." You're really sure in your position what starts to happen is it's kind of black and white thinking. There's less like, "Well, where is there room for me to consider that maybe something about this other person or their position would be valuable for me to hear?"

Susan: You know, it's interesting. I want to talk about this even from another example where I have a strong opinion about people wearing masks.

CrisMarie: You do. I've been with her and I have seen it, folks.

Susan: But there was a moment recently where a friend who I have a lot of respect for – actually I found out had left their job because they didn't agree with wearing masks and I got – this is how I got how righteous I am about it because I was actually more curious about this person's position because clearly in my own bias I gave them more room for why they might have a different opinion. So, I actually got curious about, "So, what's behind your reason?"

CrisMarie: Because it was somebody you respected and liked?

Susan: Yes, which is like, oh I was so humbled to realize, again, but I gave her the credit and so often we don't even recognize the biases that we are

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

carrying that are blocking us from even hearing somebody else's explanation.

CrisMarie: Yeah, I think that's the fundamental attribution error. Like, if I don't know that person, I'm going to assume they're wrong, but you knew this person and so you let it in.

Susan: Even in that conversation I was talking about with my friends in the golfing with politics, I knew that I thought I could have a conversation where I saw the differences to say, "Well, what do you think this is about?" Because I might be able to hear a different point of view from them than I could hear from someone who was adamantly in another camp. It's one way, but I have to really own that's where I lack my curiosity about that other position.

CrisMarie: I think we tend to lack curiosity when somebody's views so threaten the way I've put my world together. Like, "This is good if I'm – Black Lives Matter is important and this is what it looks like," and somebody's saying, "Hey, that's not a big deal. Focus over here." I feel offended because the way I've just put my world together, my anchoring bias or how I'm filtering information just keeps reinforcing my story and there's not a relationship. So, if somebody is yelling at me that's not very relational for me to hear a different point of view.

Susan: You're going back to the Black Lives Matter and I do think that this issue, I mean, it's difficult to talk about but if I feel like I'm being yelled at, that I'm a white supremacist and all of that, all I can do is go to defense. It's really hard to really stay in, but it's true I am. I did grow up with privilege, I did grow up with this, I still want to exist.

Go back, I'll give Brené Brown credit for this, you really cannot use shame with a social justice and as soon as someone feels shame, they are going to go to defense and I think that's what you're talking about.

CrisMarie: Yeah and making somebody wrong. So, it happens in primary relationships where we are trying to influence our partner or our kids and

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

we can use shaming like, “Well, you didn’t get that done,” which is basically a shaming tone. My intention is to make you wrong so that you’ll feel bad and then do it my way.

Susan: Now, the thing for me about this is I think where I really am aligned around this shame piece is I need to look at where am I actually using shame?

CrisMarie: Yes.

Susan: Like, in the subtleties of it because if I just feel shame that’s a whole different thing. I could actually use that to – God, part of why this whole thing around white supremacy is so hard for me is I do feel acutely aware of, “Oh my God, I am a white person. I have done this.” That type of shame when I actually feel it and own it is actually a way to come forward. So, I think that’s actually – no one is shaming me, but I’m feeling my shame.

CrisMarie: That’s actually a healthy shame because it does actually make you consider, well, maybe I do need to do something differently, but think about how often you go to shaming using shame as a tool. And, of course, we were shamed growing up so it’s in there, it’s just natural to try to change somebody’s behavior with disapproval.

Susan: A lot of our systems, our religious ideas are built around shame. I mean, let’s face it.

CrisMarie: Yeah, and shame is different than accountability because we teach accountability which is, “Hey, you said you were going to do this. You didn’t do that. What happened?” That’s holding somebody accountable. Blaming is, “Oh, you didn’t get that. Why didn’t you get that done?” Like, you can hear in my tone I am trying to make you feel small.

Susan: Or, “I am so disappointed in you not doing what – “

CrisMarie: Oh my God, I feel so bad.

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

Susan: It's really hard to not sometimes go there. So, we actually don't – again, the key here isn't necessarily to make it wrong and to never do any shaming as about recognize when you do it and then ask yourself, be curious, what is going on in me that I am fighting so hard? Because you might be fighting hard because you don't think you have a chance to exist yourself, which would be, “Okay, what can I do to support myself?” Very different, that's a vulnerability that would come back up then.

CrisMarie: Yeah and realize that – have compassion because we all – we're doing the best we can and it's more bringing awareness. What Susan and I want you to do is wake up and notice how are you. Because if you're shaming other people, you're doing that to yourself. That's how you motivate or make sure you get things done is by putting yourself down.

Susan: Now, we're going to take this in a whole different direction for a moment.

CrisMarie: Which direction are we going to go, Susan?

Susan: Because we're talking a lot about the verbal, the words of it, that piece around the relationship and I think we also want to talk about another way to look at this is in the body.

CrisMarie: I was thinking about how when we have black and white thinking or right/wrong it's very like everything's blobbed together and this is the right way. I'm putting all of these pieces in it; I'm making it right. It's a bit like when you go to a yoga class, and I don't know what yoga teachers you use, but I have Julia and Jody who are great yoga teachers here in Whitefish and what they are constantly trying to get me to do is discern and break apart my movements.

So, rather than just kind of moving my arm to lift up the weight she's like, “Now, rotate your shoulder blade, feel your arm –” They're trying to help me break down all these movements so I can feel the little muscles as well as the big muscles versus just –

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

Susan: Relational, they're making it relational in your body.

CrisMarie: Say more.

Susan: Well, just as you described that, I am like a big movement person. If I want to lift weights, I just grab them and try to lift them and I'm not thinking.

CrisMarie: It's kind of scary.

Susan: It is that. It's kind of like yelling across the street, "You're the problem." But if I break it down like, "Oh wait a minute," if I really use – it's a motion where I have to use my legs, my torso, I have to move my shoulder not just – just what you were describing but I meant the relational part is all these different aspects of my body that if I become aware of it's a very different experience.

CrisMarie: And I was thinking about that when we're just making shouting at somebody or just making you wrong, I'm not really noticing the nuances and the different pieces.

Susan: Yes. That's where I was trying to go.

CrisMarie: That's the breakdown in the relationship.

Susan: You did that well. You broke that down well.

CrisMarie: And so, when I get upset and I can feel it in my body, I know the feeling like, "Okay, I'm going to defend myself," what we're suggesting is to turn 180. Rather than me focusing on changing Susan or whoever I'm talking to, if I can just take a breath and notice, "Wow, something in me, not all of me, but something in me feels really defensive, insecure, I feel kind of tight in my chest, I'm not breathing very deeply," those are all cues I can use because those patterns were developed way back when and this is just a current trigger right now.

Susan: Can I go back to the yoga example though?

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

CrisMarie: Yes, you can. I think you're making me wrong that I didn't describe it well enough.

Susan: Oh no, I thought you actually took it back to the conversational piece really well.

CrisMarie: Okay.

Susan: It gave me an image because I had this moment where I was thinking it's kind of like when I'm in yoga I often spend a lot of time watching Jody or the person in front of me who usually does it better than me and then trying to just either – if I make myself wrong I just try to muscle my way through it and if I focused over there instead of really turning back in and going, "What am I actually doing here? What are the subtleties?"

More recently I've been working with someone who's really been breaking that – like Lawrence, where we're passion and ease like, "Don't do the move too fast, do it really slow." I guess I was just thinking that's really the same thing that you were describing in the conversation. Like, if all I'm doing is looking over there, I am going to miss what are the nuances of what I really want to say and come across?

CrisMarie: Yeah, so for you out there who's listening, the next time you get into that position notice what's happening inside of you. What are you feeling? And that means in your body, what are you noticing? Where is there tension? Where is your breath? Also, what are the stories you're telling yourself about this interaction?

Like, "Oh my gosh, they don't respect me, or I've got to make them do it, otherwise bad things are going to happen." How are you probably scaring yourself to some degree which is making you more righteous and then making them more wrong?

Susan: Right.

CrisMarie: Right.

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

Susan: All right, well, hopefully you have found this engaging and we wanted to talk about it because this is such a period of time that we're going into where there's going to be a lot of potential to get stuck in right/wrong and maybe not be so relational.

CrisMarie: And you can hear our dogs who are making somebody wrong as they are barking unless the production people could take that sound out?

Susan: And if they don't, just think of it as a nice little backdrop, you know? So, okay.

CrisMarie: Have a good day and are you being relational or are you stuck in being right and can you shift that? The way to do that is to turn 180 and noticing what's happening. We have had to discuss difficult topics as a little – we'll put that in the show notes that gives you some tips as well.

Susan: All right, take care.

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 e-book, *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 thrive@thriveinc.com.

Are You Being Relational or Just Right?

Susan: If you've enjoyed today's podcast please take 30 seconds to give us as 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.