



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

**Shannon Waller:** Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. I am very, very excited today because I have special guest Marlene Chism, who has written a series of books, an incredible body of work. And I was really fascinated, Marlene, because I met you at CoachCon, and I was kind of like, where have you been all my life? From a personal and professional standpoint, we're both very passionate about the same things, have different approaches to it. So if anyone is intrigued about conflict, we're going to talk about workplace drama, and more importantly, what to do about it. So when you said this is one of the things that you specialized in, I was like, you have to be on my podcast, Marlene. So I am thrilled that you're here. Thank you very much for sharing your wisdom.

This will be a broad ranging conversation. Your latest book is from *Conflict of Courage*, which I'm going to highly recommend everyone go grab a copy off Amazon or your favorite bookseller. It's *How to Stop Avoiding and Start Leading*. As a leader, I coach entrepreneurial team leaders, I coach entrepreneurs, I coach business owners all the time, and conflict is a thing. And when I discovered what you do, I'm like, oh my gosh, yes, yes, yes, why we avoid it, what the costs are, all the things. So I'm thrilled to have you here to share some of your wisdom. There's a lot. I could definitely have more than one podcast on this. But anyway, it's a long intro, but thank you for being here. And just to get started, tell us a little bit about who you are. You had an interesting beginning. You've been doing this work for a number of years now. I love that you published your wisdom and your learning so other people have more access to it. But tell us a little bit about Marlene.

**Marlene Chism:** Well, thank you so much for inviting me. I was so excited when we met at CoachCon. You know how the world works, right? You put yourself in the environment, you meet like-minded people. But my little water is wet statement is that I work with senior leaders to build drama-free cultures that drive growth and reduce costly mistakes. So I really talk about how to grow not only financially but internally as a leader. That can mean working with a team, doing some training. It can mean coaching. So I look at it as consulting with consulting being an umbrella. That includes coaching, consulting, training, book writing, and all that. So that's what I do. I have a background where I worked in manufacturing for 20 years so I was a late bloomer and I just jumped because I wanted something more. There's a whole story about drama that goes with that which really influenced my work. So fast forward and it's been over 24 years now and I've written these books and was starting at age 40 and here we are.

**Shannon Waller:** Congratulations. You said there was a drama story that kind of kicked off that change. And it's interesting because I think a lot of times what we are most passionate about is where we have experienced the downside of something. Why did I write *Multiplication by Subtraction*? Because I was annoyed when a leader was there for his reasons and not the owner's, right? And I just saw the cost of doing that. Why did I write *Team Success*? It was because I was coaching team members. It was sinking in a about a quarter inch and I was like, oh, there's something missing. Turned out it was an entrepreneurial attitude, right? So



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developed the exercise and then turned that into a book. So I think, turned back to what you were saying, our own experience when we're at the effect of something, we're like, oh, this is not good. When we transform it for ourselves and then we want to help other people transform it too. So I think it's super powerful, obviously helped to transform you into a new career, which is fantastic. So tell us about workplace drama and conflict, because I'm just like seriously leaning in. I wanna know all the things.

**Marlene Chism:** Yeah, so my definition for drama, I built a definition around it. And what influenced me, first of all, about the word drama and the theory that I have, is that I learned of a concept called the Karpman Drama Triangle. And do you know the Karpman Drama Triangle?

**Shannon Waller:** I certainly do. In fact, I know the Karpman Drama Triangle. I also had the great pleasure of interviewing David Emerald, who wrote a book where he transformed it into *The Empowerment Dynamics*.

**Marlene Chism:** Absolutely. In fact, I was writing my first book when he was writing his, and we both had an island theme, so like in the collective consciousness. So mine, I met Dr. Karpman. I learned about this when I went to a, it was a workshop when I was searching, and I call that search the three life tragedies. You know you want something more, but you don't know what it is. You know what it is, but you don't believe it's possible. You believe it's possible, but now you have to be willing to take action. So I was going through that when I was a blue collar factory worker. And I was just investing in myself, which is what people start to do when they search. So that's a good thing about your employees, too. If they're investing in themselves, then they're ready to go forward.

But I went to this event, and it was called The Event, and they barely mentioned the Karpman Drama Triangle. And when I saw this triangle, I saw myself as a rescuer, and I thought, oh my gosh, my relationships, I'm always rescuing, I'm always picking up the slack, I'm the one in my family that's responsible. And I thought, as everyone does when they first learn something like this, that I could tell other people where they were so they could change. And so it's sort of like when you first quit smoking and now you've got the answer. I quit for two days. Let me tell you what I did. You need to do it too. So I was going to make that part of my world, and I started studying the Drama Triangle. Eventually, I finished college late in life, and then I went and got a master's degree. And my professor said, you know, Marlene, if you'll just finish this up, you'll have a capstone. And that capstone can be a platform. And I didn't even know what a platform meant. He said that it could be like Stephen Covey. You'll have a body of work.

So my capstone was drama in the workplace hampers productivity, the effect of relationships on the bottom line. So I looked at how everything really affects us from a relational standpoint. It affects our health, it affects our well-being, it affects the bottom line, absenteeism, retention. So I did that study and you know me by my Kolbe, that was hard. 3 Fact Finder everybody,



yes. So anyway, I did that and then so the Drama Triangle changed my life and truly I'd love to do a TED Talk on how the Drama Triangle changed my life.

**Shannon Waller:** Well, and before we go any further, let's define the three sides of the drama. Because if you don't know that, first of all, if you can't see yourself in it, you're probably not actually breathing because it's very human.

**Marlene Chism:** So let's describe it just briefly so that people have a— at the bottom of the triangle is the victim. We talk about orientations, behaviors, mindsets. I think Dr. Karpman called it orientations, I believe. But the victim is like the no-choice, you know, not my fault, everybody else's fault, this bad thing happens to me. At the upper left is the persecutor. A lot of times that's the high performer, but they're very rough, they're hard to get along with. And then at the right-hand corner is the rescue, and that's the person always in the middle fixing everything. Let's not tell Sally about this because she'll get upset. I'm paying my family's bills. They're supposed to get on their feet. They never do. That's the rescue role, and I really identified with that.

Now, I adapted the triangle much like David Emerald did, but I just put a D in the middle because what I started seeing in the patterns of me working with people was that the people that would say, I don't do drama, had the most drama. And anyone that says, I don't do drama at all, they're almost always a persecutor or an avoider. And so I put the D in the middle, which means denial. And when I talked to Dr. Karpman, I said, what I've noticed is that when people are in denial about drama, they're in the middle. And when they get feedback or when they get someone confronting them, they generally go into either victim or persecutor mode. They're like, you don't understand, or they get defensive because it's sort of like going through a surgery. They put you out. When you wake up, it's painful, and you've got to have a lot of support.

And I said, is it okay that I write about this and stop workplace drama? And he said, absolutely. He says, I'm retired. I'm, you know, like living at the beach or whatever. And he said, with any good model, there's adaptations and that's what you're doing. And so that was kind of my way of teaching it. And then when I would do conferences, I had a great story about drama, which it's too long to tell here, but I would even gather people up into groups and they would go to a flip chart and put down what the victim does and what the rescuer does, what the persecutor. Then afterwards, I'd say, let's just do a quick survey. How many of you will admit, you know what, I can be a victim? And you get about 10% of the room kind of sheepishly raise their hands like, oh, I know I can be a victim. I complain, I'm negative. I'd say, thank you for being honest. How many of you would say, I can persecute, I can be rough on people, I can be judgmental? You get another 10 or 15% raising their hand and I'd say, how many of you say, man, I'm a rescuer? The rest of the room, and I said, I show the next slide and I say, Marlene predicts at least 75% of people are going to say they're a rescuer because you've already



judged it and said, that's the good role. At least I'm helping. And you decided everybody else is like not right and you are right.

And what Dr. Karpman said to me that totally changed my life because I was in that still beginning stage. I said, this has changed my life. I was a rescuer. I really confront people now when they're lying and this and that. And he said, you do realize if you rescue, you do the other two as well. And I said, no, I did not. And he said, yes, it's actually a circle. Because if you think about it, if you rescue for too long, you feel victimized and taken advantage of. When you're tired of feeling taken advantage of, you get angry and you persecute. And when you feel guilty about persecuting, you rescue again. So my way of teaching it is, and it's very simple. It's much more simple than David Emerald. It's like just become a creator. Like you can't have drama. It takes two to play games unless you're playing solitaire. So if you're in the game, you're in the game. And the way you don't is you become a creator and you see other people as creators.

**Shannon Waller:** Oh, I love that. You know, because I put myself in the creator seat, I would say most of the time. And then when I took on a role that was not my Unique Ability, the rest of it, I actually went through every single one of those stages. Numerous times I might add and I finally realized that was not the place for me. So I needed to move. But yeah, if I've been in the wrong role then oh my gosh, and I'm someone who's fairly tuned to that. But yeah, I know I've sat in every single one of those seats multiple times as you described

**Marlene Chism:** Well, and I still do. I jokingly say I can have drama with no one else in the room. And that's because we do get into our heads. We get into a narrative and we do think someone's wrong or doing us wrong. And we don't bring that up into awareness. It's just running in the background. And the good thing about emotional awareness and emotional integrity is being able to say, I'm angry and I have an interpretation about that anger. That anger actually is trying to tell me something, but it's not the thing I think it's telling me. It's telling me right now to go tell this person off. That's the wrong message. Anger is telling me that a boundary has been crossed, that I'm not asking for what I want, that I don't see my choices. If I can interpret it that way and say my prefrontal cortex is not going to work as long as I'm making a decision in this state, my anger tells me I need to calm down and go analyze this. Because it means something, but it's not what you think it means. So you can't believe everything you think when you're angry. And so emotions are great. They tell you something, but you have to learn how to interpret it.

**Shannon Waller:** And that's one of the things I really appreciate about your work, and it's in more than one place, but *Conflict to Courage* is phenomenal, is that term emotional integrity and awareness and self-awareness is pretty much my holy grail of everything. And my personal rule, which I've said on this podcast before, I trust people to the degree that I think they know themselves.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

**Marlene Chism:** Yes, you can only be as honest as your level of self-awareness. So when someone's not telling you the truth, I guarantee they're also not telling themselves the truth. So you have to know that.

**Shannon Waller:** A hundred percent. So that's a passion of mine for me. And then I also love helping other people understand themselves better. It explains a lot about me. So there's that awareness piece, which is huge. We can dive more into that. But then emotional integrity. I've never heard those two words put together before. So can you just go into a little bit more exactly what that means? And I love your strategy for recognizing what anger is actually telling you. You need to make sure you don't get hijacked by your not prefrontal cortex, your amygdala. So what is emotional integrity?

**Marlene Chism:** I want to know more. Emotional integrity, part of it is making peace with your dark side. When you're angry, instead of blaming everyone else, when you have rude, hateful thoughts, bad wishes, you can't deny that that's going on. It's not that you're out there to blurt that out, but you have to understand humanity. And those emotions will make you think things that you wouldn't think if everything was going your way. So if you have the awareness, you make peace with your dark side, then it's about representing yourself. And so what I mean by that, a lot of times there's a lot of game playing. And I know anyone that's a leader has had this happen to them, where someone comes and says, everybody says they're unhappy with, or people are talking about your leadership. That's not representing yourself. That's you playing power of attorney for everyone else who probably wouldn't sign off on it.

So that's one way you recognize game playing is when someone says, well, everybody's saying, well, since everyone's not here, what do you think? Well, no, I think it's fine. Oh, you think it's fine, so what was your purpose for telling me? Let's bring everybody else into the room. Because when we want to stop the game playing, we have to understand there's no emotional integrity if I'm trying to talk for everyone else and what they think. And if I'm not representing what I think, then I don't have the integrity to actually own the truth of my dissatisfaction.

So it's even okay, I've coached people to say, it's not wrong to say to someone when you're in a conversation, I'm feeling frustrated right now. I'm feeling really angry and I know that's not how I want to show up. So this is where we are, let's take a break, because I value our relationship. And just knowing yourself, I'm frustrated, I'm hungry, I haven't had my needs met, I want to blame you, and I know that I'm not going to. Like, if we have those honest relationships, you can get through it. Because I always say, this is where we are right now, but we don't have to be here in five minutes or two weeks. But this is where we are now. It's okay that we have these thoughts and feelings, but I'm going to own it. It's mine. I'm not a victim. I'm not a persecutor. I'm a creator and I just know that I need rest and things are going to look



different. The key with this though, this is the emotional integrity part too. When we get settled down, we often then justify and say, oh, I was just tired. But by the very nature that you have this response, it means there's something to discuss. We want to avoid it once we've calmed down because it no longer feels urgent. And that's where the courage comes in.

**Shannon Waller:** Oh my gosh. So much richness and wisdom just in that part. I just want to kind of validate what you're saying. I was actually saying this to my mom in the car the other day. I said, you know, I actually love it. And to a colleague, I was saying, I love it when someone comes in and says, I'm really grumpy. Now, if someone says that to me, I'm not going to take what they say personally. I'm not going to get mad. I'm going to be like, oh, is there anything I can do to help? And usually just by saying it, you transform it. And by the way, I have said this numerous times, right? This is like really taking ownership of your emotions instead of the world is full of freaking idiots. The person who cut me off in traffic, the stupid person who changed the door code and I can't remember what it is. Like all the complaining that comes to that. And everyone else is just going to like back away when they see me coming. It's like, oh, she's in the state. Ignore her for a while. You know, get out of the way. And if I just say, if I don't come across well, I'm super grumpy. This happened. It's not you. Oh my gosh, you create so much grace. And it's interesting thing I find, probably because you've actually moved it to your prefrontal cortex, it shifts your state almost immediately. We don't have to be there.

**Marlene Chism:** Because you feel heard, you've heard yourself. You've heard yourself. Also, this brings me to this I think you'll find interesting. When we're blaming other people, we're actually in a state of resistance. See, the toxic positivity movement is all about, we're never in a bad mood, we're always positive, there's always a happy side, cheer up, you shouldn't feel that way. Reality is, I do feel this way, and if I feel this way, and I know I feel this way, and I don't like it, but I accept it, I'm out of resistance, and I now have freedom and willingness to move out of it. But if I shouldn't be this way, and this is not how I am, and I wouldn't have been this way if you wouldn't have, I'm in resistance, and I'm gonna stay in that state so much longer.

So really good listening to someone who's in an emotional state to say, how can I support you? Do you need an ear? I'm not gonna tell you, you shouldn't feel that way. Or you just need to be happy. Like look at all that you have compared to other people. That only makes the resistance worse. So we just wanna support people to say, you have a right to feel how you feel. And we also have the right to say, I'm gonna set a boundary because you've talked about it for five minutes and that's all. We have that right to do that.

**Shannon Waller:** That is so key. And I think people either don't want to take them on, they don't want to hear them because it can be triggering for them. This is why our PRINT profile is so great. It tells you those things that put you into the shadow side. But it's so key to actually,



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

you know, don't argue with other people's feelings. Feelings are valid. What they do about them they are still responsible for but if you're sad or mad or joyous or anything trying to argue with that no it's just like hey it's a fool's errand and also it's very demeaning and not humanizing so it's like okay don't argue with feelings. You might argue with someone's actions or have a different take on it but the feelings are feelings. Like, I'm a huge fan of Chris Moss, you probably are too, you saw him and his whole thing is it sounds like you're feeling, it seems like, it sounds like. Those are words that he says and then you label, you label the feeling. And you're either right and they go exactly, not you're right, but exactly. Or they say, no, I'm not mad. I'm disappointed. Or humiliated, or something, right? And then you're like, okay, you're feeling humiliated, but good to know.

**Marlene Chism:** I call that radical listening in my work. And so what I do for training that, because we all think we're good listeners, but we do tell people, oh, don't worry about it, or like, calm down, or let me tell you what happened to me. It was worse than that. This will make you feel better. So I teach people, I get people into twos. One is A, one is B. Like, tell a story that's disappointing to you. The other person, A tells a story, B is supposed to say, wow, I hear you. Or you can say, that sounds like you're frustrated. That's all you can say. And people find it so difficult. First of all, it's corny because it's a role play. People are like, ah, this is stupid. So I get that. But what it does is it starts to rewire your brain to not have a solution, to not tell your own story, to not try to dig in and say, yeah, I know what you mean. My employee did this too. You just stay present and notice how you're feeling. Your emotions go through your body. And then that way it increases your awareness versus the urge to get rid of that bad feeling when you're taking on someone else's stuff, which is the rescue rope, right? Like this belongs to them, not to me. This belongs to them, it's not mine, but I can be here and witness it.

**Shannon Waller:** So it's really having that emotional awareness and space. You know, you said at the very beginning, who you speak to are leaders, right? So I'm all about entrepreneurial leadership, owners, team leaders, all the things. And actually, I think anyone in their role is a leader. And I wish I could bestow instant self-awareness to everybody, but I don't have the magic wand for that. You know, as a leader, someone who is aspiring to rise in the organization is already at a level where you're looking and providing direction for other people, or you're an owner. As someone said yesterday, business would be so great if it weren't for people. And you have to do it.

Let's talk about, because workplace drama leads to conflict, right? It's not the only probably source of conflict or maybe it is, I don't know. Let's talk about who you need to be as a leader to be really effective. And I think obviously it's part of what you just said, which is just being able to respond to hear, not having to be a problem solver, which I know for myself and for everyone I coach, it's like we take pride in being a problem solver. The more complex, the more intractable, the better. It's like, let me at it, even though we've got 16 million t-shirts. It's interesting, though, because you make some brilliant points. I was like, whoa, this is cool,



because our ability to be a great leader in that situation is actually dependent upon our own selves and how we're handling conflict within ourselves. So can you dive into that? Because I found that fascinating.

**Marlene Chism:** So the inner game, I talk about the inner game, like there is no conflict unless there's first an inner conflict. So if you think about that, if you need to have a conversation with someone and it's going to be difficult, your desire to make them happy, keep them, retain their employment, whatever your desire is, can compete with your desire to have a really honest conversation about a needed change. So I talk about conflict as opposing drives, desires, and demands. So what that means is two arrows going in opposite directions. We're divided internally, you know, a double-minded man is unstable in all their ways, right? So if I'm divided internally, I'm not going to be clear in my approach. So I have to have leadership clarity before I have a conversation. Like I want to define also, like drama, the way that I define drama is not the Karpman Drama Triangle. I love that model. The way I define it is any obstacle to peace or prosperity.

**Shannon Waller:** Let's slow down for one second. So any obstacle to peace and prosperity. Yes.

**Marlene Chism:** So here's the visual with that. So if you're looking at a PowerPoint slide, at the bottom left is a little guy in a boat. At the upper right is an island. We're always trying to get to the island, which is peace and prosperity. So A is the situation, point B is peace and prosperity, and point C is the shark in the middle. So trauma is any obstacle to peace and prosperity. Okay. We're in the boat and we see the shark, that's the obstacle. So what is the shark? It's my obstacle. It's this person that doesn't do their job. It's this person that's hard to get along with. It's the circumstance of COVID. Whatever is my obstacle, that's going to create drama because I want to get to my island and I'm not there because of this shark. So when people talk about their problems, the way you can listen for it is it's going to sound like my shark, my shark, but you don't understand my shark.

So, like for a physician, when they say, you need to quit smoking, and they're going to go, like, you know what? I've been smoking since I was 14. It's the only pleasure I have. I know it's hurting my health, but we're all going to die one day. My shark, my shark, but you don't understand my shark. So, I always say the one with clarity navigates the ship and everyone else shovels coal. So if the one that is clear is going to navigate where the conversation and where the direction goes, and sometimes that's the person with the drama. They're clear about their drama and they navigate and derail any conversation. So as a leader, you have to be completely clear about the outcome that you want and how to direct that conversation.





**Shannon Waller:** That's fascinating. One of my favorite tools at Coach to do that is The Impact Filter. One of the things I know that causes teamwork conflict all the time, I don't always think of it as drama so I have to get that in my head, is when, you know, they get this idea in the hallway passing along random text somewhere and it's not clear. And what's so great about The Impact Filter is you, as the idea provider, has to think about the purpose, importance, ideal outcome, the best and worst, if you take action or if you don't, if it goes poorly, and then your success criteria. And by that point, you may go, oh, this isn't actually such a great idea. That's the filter part. So being clear and actually taking time to get your thoughts on paper, so as Dan says, you can get emotional distance from them, helps you see it from someone else's perspective, which is what is so amazing about that. I don't know if your experience with Impact Filter is similar,

**Marlene Chism:** I love the Impact Filter because in your mind it works. It's sort of like when you're dreaming you can both be flying and underwater at the same time. It's the same thing with our ideas. In our mind, we don't realize we're jumping off of this hemp to go onto this one, and it just feels so good. Writing it down, you start to see where those things are, where you're doing both at the same time, and you've got to choose, and maybe The Strategy Circle comes in if you're not clear on that. But I do love those tools, because when you get more linear in your thinking, it's grounded in reality versus all the different models you've got in your head.

One of the things I do for clarity when I'm talking with leaders is to say, because here's what leaders say to me, oh, they're just, they're a bad employee or they're not a good team member and they just don't care and they're not engaged. Well, that's a lot of generalities. And so we just readily accept, oh, okay, well, let's figure this out. No, we don't figure it out. I want to say, what is he or she doing that he or she should not be doing? And what is he or she not doing that they should be? Because once you answer that, you have an observed behavior as it relates to a result. So it takes away all this narrative about what someone's intention is and why they're no good. And we can say, you know, if Julie is slamming the phone down on clients, that's an observed behavior. I still don't know why that's happening, but if that's happening, I now have something to work off of versus she's just got a bad attitude.

**Shannon Waller:** That is a great example. Slam. Right. I love it. Yeah. Oh, there's so many places I want to go with this. All right. You define the drama and we talked about the inner game. And as you said earlier, conflict can happen without anyone in the room, which I think is really funny. If I understand correctly, that means you really have to understand what your own triggers are. PRINT gives us that in terms of the triggers that take you from best to shadow self, which are so accurate. So if you've done your PRINT profile, it's page eight. And I laughed out loud at that page, I'm like, oh yeah, every single one of these things ticks me off.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

I've just finished recording with Dan and system process of being written called Casting Not Hiring. That's book collaboration with Jeff Madoff, one of our quarterly books. And he talks about the 4x4 tool, which I'm not sure if you've seen yet Marlene, but it talks about performance. You'll love this actually, performance. Here's what I want you to be alert, curious, responsive and resourceful about, okay? Results. You know, if you're going to grow, we're going to grow. Here's what I want you to focus on to make faster, easier, cheaper and have a bigger impact. Pretty clear. Like in terms of job description, I love it because 8.5 x 11. Right. Then the fourth one is here's how to be a hero. And that is for specific projects in the time frame, which is usually 90 to 180 days. And then column four, my personal favorite, drives me crazy. So you can be fabulous in those 12 areas. If you do those four things, I'm probably still going to fire you because they personally drive me crazy.

**Marlene Chism:** I love it.

**Shannon Waller:** Right? Clarity is king. I know. And Dan cracks me up because, yeah, and I'm not seeking counseling for these. He's clear. He's very clear. And I have to tell you, actually, I nominated Dan because he did so much work. We had a heavy recording schedule over two weeks, and he spends two hours writing a Fast Filter for every single chapter. So in addition to all the recording time that I was on with him all the time, he did 10 extra hours, actually closer to 11, of prep in addition to what the rest of the team did. I'm like, he is a phenomenal team member. He's amazing.

**Marlene Chism:** He's great.

**Shannon Waller:** And yes, he's the owner and co-founder of Strategic Coach. It doesn't matter. He's so committed to being a great team member. And he thanked me for the award, the nomination, which was kind of fun. Like, yeah, you get nominated too, buddy. And it's so cool because he's just really, really clear. And the example we have in the book is actually when he hired his podcast manager, Gord Vickman, who's brilliant and I dreamed with him to work. And what Gord was saying is it told me how to be successful and what never to do. Like, don't get underwater with a project or overwhelmed with it and not communicate. That's one of Dan's drives him crazy. Like, don't let things go into the black hole.

**Marlene Chism:** I love that. And it's interesting because I just got through filming a LinkedIn course, and my project manager said, you know, you were so great to work with. She said, you kept me updated every week, and I said, because you specifically said, here's what I like and here's what will drive me crazy. I like you to check in with me. Even if I don't check in with you, I want you to tell me where you are. If you need a meeting, you need to reach out to me. And I just took note of that. And I put every week, I'm going to say, here's where I am or I haven't done anything. And so I thought I'd just let you know that. And I thought she seemed so surprised that I heard her because apparently a lot of times she gets no updates and she's swimming in lots of projects. And like for her, that's comfort. And I said, I love to be a great



follower. I do. I love to be a great follower because if you lead me and you're a good leader, that's so much fun. And I love to lead and I love to have a good follower. So I think it's symbiotic that you need to be able to be a good leader and a good follower to be a good leader.

**Shannon Waller:** Well, and that's just it. We all want to provide direction in our own unique area. And in every other way, I want to be like, I want to be managed. I've had two brilliant support partners. Oh, my gosh. I've had 10, 11 years of intensely fabulous level of support for me. I'm a quirky human. 3295 Kolbe. Very independent minded. Move fast. Katrina was out of the office for a couple days and off yesterday for her birthday. And I was left a little bit to my own devices. I completely overbooked myself and jam myself. It's like, yes, this is the difference you make love. Anyway, it was really kind of fun. But it's that partnership mindset. You know, you're unique in my area and I'm willing to follow your lead and direction and your area of Unique Ability and vice versa. And that's when the teamwork and the synergy is Unique Ability Teamwork, right? That's really the joy for that. So in terms of leadership in the inner game, I wanna give a couple of pointers to what can people do when they realize, oh yeah, I'm the one with the friction internally, so I'm just conflict waiting to happen. I'm drama waiting to happen. So what are some self-awareness things people can do or what do you coach people on to help them just even a tiny bit get better at this?

**Marlene Chism:** Well, one thing is the awareness that you and I love. You know, it's being aware. There's a difference between self-awareness and self-obsession. I want to say that.

**Shannon Waller:** I know. Okay, that's hysterical.

**Marlene Chism:** Yeah, I know, and I think it's really actually called something else, but for some reason self-obsession sticks with me. Is it narcissism? Well, I don't know that it is. I think it's overly concerned about, like, I'm this way and I'm not that way, and what do you think about me? Enough about me. What do you think about me? And then I think I made them mad, and I think I know that. It's this over like whenever you're in that place, you need to like focus outward a little bit more. I think self-awareness is more about what I like, what I prefer, what I'm good at, what I enjoy, how I feel, my emotions, my narrative. That's another big part.

I think most people need to work on understanding their narrative because it's silent for the most part, and we have a narrative going on in the background that we're not even aware that drives our conversations with other people, drives our motives for the things that we do. For example, there's an author I used to love, Gary Zukav, more the rage stuff, and he says, if you don't know your intention before an interaction, you'll know it afterwards. So I love that because it's very true. So in other words, if I buy you a birthday gift and we're at a party and I'm like, I'm just so giving, I brought a gift and you're like, thanks. And you're out there dancing, having a good time. I'm like, well, she didn't even acknowledge my gift. What was my reason? I wanted you to acknowledge me in front of other people. There was an underlying intention that



I wasn't even aware of. Because if it was just about doing something for you and whether you liked it or not, it was an expression of me, the way that I give expression to, like, appreciation.

So I think so often we have ulterior motives, opposing drives, desires, and demands that we're not even aware of. And part of releasing resistance is to say, I call it the fulcrum point of change. Willingness is the fulcrum point of change. So when I'm getting ready to do something, nothing's going to happen unless I'm willing. If I need to forgive someone, I can want them to change all day long and I can have a conversation, but I have to be willing for it to go well or not go well. And I'm willing to let the feelings be what they are. So always when I see resistance, I know there's a lack of willingness. So part of that internal journey is recognizing resistance because it is going to be a distraction to you. It's going to hold you back.

**Shannon Waller:** It's really interesting as you're talking, Marlene, one of Dan's expression, I said this to you before we hit record, is that why I was so excited to have you on today and probably more than once, I hope, is that the problem is never the problem. The problem is not knowing how to think about the problem. And you are very much, here's how to think about conflict, drama, resolution, all the things. But there's a mindset there that we're getting at, which I think is really cool. And that is that, you know, there's some people that are so, intractable is my word, where they'll justify to the nth degree, their decisions, their actions, their mindset, all the thing. And it strikes me that what you have to be willing to do to make this work is to grow.

**Marlene Chism:** Oh, I've got something to say about that. I'm saying so many things. I've got like four threads I can approach. So first of all, the story is the source of your suffering, not the other person, not the situation. I learned that in narrative coaching. When it comes to coaching, you cannot coach an unregulated person or dysregulated, whatever the name is.

**Shannon Waller:** You cannot coach a dysregulated person.

**Marlene Chism:** Whatever that word is, dysregulated, unregulated, someone that's upset, you cannot coach them. They don't have the capacity to hear, to improve, to understand you, to see that you have their best interest. Regulation before resolution always. Regulation before resolution for yourself and for other people. If someone's not regulated, it's not the time for I told you so or here's what you need to learn or what did you learn. It's not time. Timing is everything when it comes to regulation. So you have to understand that your story is the source of your suffering. And what that means is the way I interpret something. Oh, they ignored me. Oh, they meant to. They meant to. I may not know what's underlying for them. Like they were in a rush. Someone died. But yet I'm just concerned about what I experienced. And I know that's the truth because this happened before. So I'm basing it on my past. And now I've got this story and now I'm unhappy and now I've got a grudge, and now I'm in resistance, and now I'm in justification. The story is the source of your suffering.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

So I know, for me, that when I'm suffering, whether it's I lost a business deal, whether something didn't go right on an airplane, whatever it is that I'm in resistance, I know that the thing that's making me suffer the most is what I'm telling myself about it. And so to say, you know what, safety is first. And you know what, if I would have made that claim, what if it crashed? It's like telling yourself a different story that could be equally true as the one that you're buying into. So we have to really understand not to be Pollyanna-ish or to shift the story to something that's not possibly true, but to say that most of what we think is made up. It's just close enough to not bump into the furniture. You know, it's not... It's not the facts, but we're not robots, so we're not gonna be factual all the time. We're not gonna be logical. In fact, most of everything we do is emotional and past-based.

And when you said, yes, there's justification, there was something I learned a long time ago that has been really a part of my work in sort of an underlying way, and it's the Oz Principle, living above the line. And so the way that I think of that is that when we're in the energies of, and by energies I mean thought processes, behaviorally, when we're in the energy of blame, resentment, justification, and judgment, we are not taking responsibility, and our narrative is that of a victim. So when I'm coaching someone that has employees, or whether it's them what I'm listening for, is what I call responsible language. Because responsible language is speaking to the vision, speaking about what I want. It's not blaming. It's full of choice. And so the battle cry of the victim is, I didn't have any choice. That is the battle cry of the victim mentality. I had no other choice. I mean, I had to do that. I had no other choice. There's probably a lot of choices, but responsibility is at first the recognition of choice. If I don't recognize my choices, I can't respond.

**Shannon Waller:** Yes, this is fascinating. I can imagine like going into a leadership meeting. This is where my crazy non-Quick Start brain goes. I can imagine going into a meeting and recording the conversation and putting it through ChatGPT or perplexity.ai and going, please analyze based on responsibility-based language or victim-based language, no choice. And then please analyze.

**Marlene Chism:** That's an interesting concept. If we look at the political narrative right now on either side, not to get into that, but there's everybody wants a hero. Everybody wants to blame. Everybody wants to be shortsighted about their candidate. But, you know, like judgmental about the other on both sides. And someone was posting today saying, I just don't know why you don't, like, not me, but the collective, why don't we have the courage to say your beliefs? That's what America is based on. And if you care more about keeping people happy than sharing your beliefs, then your beliefs aren't that important. And I thought, you know what, I've got to speak to that. And I said, the majority of conversations about politics on social media has absolutely no value. It's biased. It's one-sided. It's full of blame, lacking of facts and



lacking of issues. Therefore, I don't find value. I'm not offended by anything anybody posts. That's their opinion. That's how they see the world. But I'm not going to entertain conversations that's not going to change anyone's mind because we refuse to talk about issues and we want to talk about personalities. I'm just very clear on that, and you can make me the enemy from that post, but see, that's a very neutral, responsible post, and therefore it's not going to get attention.

**Shannon Waller:** Right, 100%. And you'll keep your sanity, and everyone else will lose it.

**Marlene Chism:** Yeah, I'm just not going to do that, because I get tickled at the memes and stuff that's out there. I'm like, oh, don't get engaged. Don't buy in. Just stand on the bridge and watch this thing, because it's just a circus.

**Shannon Waller:** It's crazy. So what are some other examples of responsibility or responsible-based language? How do you describe it?

**Marlene Chism:** Responsible language.

**Shannon Waller:** Responsible language. Okay. So what are some other examples of that? Like, I know what I'm listening for with victim and, you know, it's their fault, blame. It tends to be generalizations, to your point. I mean, I imagine that you actually hear curiosity and questions and that kind of thing.

**Marlene Chism:** Curiosity, questions, even being able to answer the question, what do you want? This is a fun thing that I tell leaders to do, especially when there's someone complaining. When someone is in their drama and they're saying, my shark, my shark, when they come to you, you do radical listening. I hear you. I hear what you're saying. You have a right to your feelings. You feel frustrated. No, I'm really angry. Okay, you're angry. Yeah, I'm angry. Once they say, yeah, I'm angry. Well, so here's my question. What is it that you want? You can ask that in many ways. What's your objective? What do you want? If you had a magic wand, you can say it, whatever the language is going to hit for them. But what they're saying is, well, you're in a boat. You see a shark. What island are you trying to go to? And so they say, well, let me tell you what happened last week. That's not responsible language. Let me tell you what happened last week. Let me tell you why I can't have what I want. Let me tell you what the last supervisor did that was better than what you do. That is irresponsible language. I just ask you one question, which you cannot answer, and you cannot help someone that does not know what they want. So when you say, what do you want? Well, I just want Sally to be fired. Okay, so here's what you do with that. You say, what would that give you that you don't have now? I know Dan says you want what you want, but I teach it a different way.

**Shannon Waller:** I love that. What would you have that you don't have now?



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# From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

**Marlene Chism:** If they say, well, I would get along better with everyone and I could go home at five o'clock instead of staying till 6:30 every night because she can't get her work done. So what I'm hearing is you want to get done at five o'clock, you want to get out of here, and you want to feel like you have a better relationship with people. What they're doing is they're getting stuck in The Gap on the rock called Hal that says, if Sally was fired, I would have these things. Versus, I'm not going to worry about the shark. I'm going to worry about I want to have better relationships. I want to get out at five o'clock. How can I make that happen? I'm blaming Sally right now. So we look at where they are in The Gap. Is it a distraction? Because that's a distraction. We're going to the island called, that's not fair. And look what Sally did.

**Shannon Waller:** Oh my gosh. We've started so many drama conversations. It's not even funny. And you talk about this in chapter seven, "How to Have Difficult Conversations." And you give some great examples, higher level language. And what I really enjoyed about reading some of those conversations is how you show the not effective, there's even other words for this, but basically how not to have the conversation, because it will not have a successful outcome, and then how to have a conversation that actually gets you to a profitable, productive result that actually will move things ahead. Can you just talk about a couple of those?

**Marlene Chism:** Part of that, the way that I've got this divided up is into kind of three sections. Well, there's a foundation as well. So there's a foundation that you learn the foundation, then there's the leadership clarity, there's employee clarity, and then there's the third part, which is accountability. So once you've done the foundational work to examine the problem, what's happening that shouldn't happen, what is it you want, how is it affecting productivity, teamwork, safety, patient care, whatever, then you're going to say, I'm going to start this conversation with an intention because the research shows that when people don't know what's happening, their brain goes into high alert. I'm going to get in trouble here. I might be getting fired. But when you say, look, I would like to talk to you at two o'clock today, my intention is to talk about improving teamwork. That's where we're going. That's the island we're going to. Anything that gets off track from that, what someone didn't do, why it's someone's fault, why it's never going to work, that's a distraction. That's a left-hand turn. We're not going to do that. We're going to regroup and keep going to the place called Improved Teamwork.

Now, when you did your analytics on this thing, what you've come up with is that this person is a bully. And they're a bully because they interrupt, they take people's parking spots, they make fun of people. But you're not going to say, hey, the intention for my conversation is to talk about why you're bullying people and what's going to happen if you don't stop. We don't start it from the past. We start from the vision. We speak to the vision. My intention for this conversation is to talk about improving our teamwork. What I've observed, that's where you go. What I've observed is that last week you took John's parking space every day and I asked



## YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

# From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

you about it, you justified it and said it's going to be good for him to lose a few pounds and walk. So you say things like that at a meeting and while everybody gets a laugh, what I've observed is that's shutting down the team and it's actually making some people think about not staying. That is so rude. Oh my gosh. I'm just, I'm being really dramatic.

**Shannon Waller:** I know, I love it. It's a very clear example.

**Marlene Chism:** So in other words, what happens is when we see these things that happen, we either want to avoid it or get aggressive or we want to go right for the jugular. But the truth is that's not helping people to be the best that they are. You're only putting them on the defensive because they're just having a good time. Believe me, I worked in a factory. The way we joke, the way we did things to each other, like it would be ridiculous today. I didn't know these things then, so that's why I know that these things happen. And supervisors don't know how to address it. And so when you say, well, okay, the problem is they're showing up late. Whatever the problem is, the opposite of that is what the intention is. If your problem is you're not getting along with your team, then the vision is, the intention is, we're going to talk about improving teamwork. If being on time is the problem, we're going to talk about our rules and standards for working together. So we're going to figure out what's not happening or what's happening, and then we're going to flip that, and that's going to become the intention and the driving force of the conversation.

**Shannon Waller:** I just have a question, because we have four core values. And the acronym is PAGE, Positive and Collaborative Teamwork and Alert, Curious, Responsive, Resourceful that I talked about. Then also providing a growth in results and then providing an excellent first class experience, PAGE. For some of the conversations I'm imagining that I would like to be having is around those things. Right.

**Marlene Chism:** Always, always your values and vision is really a part of that. So what that's the best North Star you can have. So like you say, if the client experience like I know CoachCon, they were told, what was it? Make everybody have a wonderful experience. So like if three people that are supposed to be greeting people are off giggling and on their phones and showing pictures and laughing about politics or whatever, like that doesn't go along. So the conversation might be... That's not what happened. I'm joking, I'm joking because it's a relevant example. So if that happened, and it never would because there's a tight ship there. Let's just use that example. Okay, so the intention for our conversation is to talk about the future of CoachCon and how to have a wonderful experience for everyone. What I observed was that during the busiest time, you know, and I know everybody needs a break, but at the busiest time, this is what was going on. And the way that this affects our client experience is that there's three people walking around without anyone to introduce them. Three people didn't pick up their badges. We had people wandering around not knowing what room to go to. So walk me through what was going on for you.





YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

**Shannon Waller:** It's interesting because I realize, and you actually say this in the book too, and I thought this was profound. If you ask people what do you think your capability level is with conflict resolution and having these conversations, the really inexperienced managers go, I'm great.

**Marlene Chism:** Absolutely.

**Shannon Waller:** And the more experienced go, uh, no, I don't.

**Marlene Chism:** It's hard. I struggle. Like, I don't like it and I think there's so many complexities to it.

**Shannon Waller:** I feel like that's me. Like, I've got high standards and I want everyone else I work with to have the same high standards. Shocking. And when people don't do it, I can get mad.

**Marlene Chism:** Believe me, I always tell people, don't ever think of me as a guru or a sage on the stage. I say I'm the bald guy telling Nadia to point her toe on the balance beam, like I truly am. I might not be able to stand on that balance beam, but I can tell when your toe's not pointed and I know what makes you do a good flip because that's you and I'm outside of it and any coaching is easier than being in the situation. So I'm going to have my own situations unique to me where people that know my work can coach me because they know my work. Because I can't sometimes coach me when I'm in the middle of it, just like anybody. Can't coach yourself, it's very challenging. You can't steal a label from the inside of the jar, right?

**Shannon Waller:** Yeah, exactly, exactly. So there's the inner work to get your own self calmed down and all the things and having a buddy to reflect to you is another thing that I do. And then there's the outer game, which is some of the skills, and I so love what you're saying Marlene, because like words are tools. I mean, if there's one thing I'm happier about as I've gotten older is I have way more words, right? I can express myself. I can explain. I can connect. Because I know when I was younger, I didn't know what to say. It was so bloody awkward. Thank God for maturity. But it's like you provide words, you provide the framework. And the framework also, though, speaks to the mindset. You know, asking questions, being curious, starting with a vision. I mean, it sounds really obvious when you say it, but I'm like, oh, that would make a difference, Shannon.

**Marlene Chism:** Well, it's just reminding us it's that simple question. Even when we're upset and we need to talk with someone, the thing that can bring us back is to say, what is it that you want? Because the mind wants to say, well, listen to what they did. I mean, look what they did. Wouldn't you feel that way, too? I mean, that's what we want to do. So you need to feel heard about it. Oh, yeah, but that was painful. That was disrespectful, you know. Once you've been



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

heard, though, you need to move on to say, but like, okay, with that all said and done, what do you want? Well, what I want, I can't have. Would you be willing to have it if you could, though? Because what people will do is they get into resistance by saying, well, you don't understand my shark. I can't have what I want. So I'll say, suppose that's true. But if you could have it, would you take it? What would it be? Oh, well, I would want perfect health, like someone that's struggling with maybe their health. Well, I mean, I'm not going to get well. I've been diagnosed. I understand. I understand what you're saying. But if you could have it, because there's something that's valuable about saying what you want, even if you can't get it. There's something that's truth telling and your soul knows it versus pretending it's not important to you or pretending that it's not possible because until the field of possibility is open, you're closing the door.

**Shannon Waller:** Oh, I love that. Until the field of possibility is open, you're closing the door.

**Marlene Chism:** You're closing it. Like, if it was possible, would you say yes to it? Because that opens your mind to say, like, you're resisting it because you need to be right about whether or not it's possible. If you didn't need to be right about whether it was possible or not, would you want it? It's gonna feel bad to say, oh my gosh, I could have been a multimillionaire five years ago if I'd opened to the possibility. And that's gonna feel worse than just being right about how hard it was.

**Shannon Waller:** Well, and that question, would you be willing? I mean, as soon as I read that, I was like, oh my gosh. So that ties in, again, another super useful model, is how do you think about something, whether or not you want it, and then are you taking action? But this is can, want, will. Will is a statement of striving and intention and mental energy, and frankly, that is way more powerful. We can be intellectually capable of something, we can want something, and if we take no action, we're not willing.

**Marlene Chism:** We're not willing, and we're making excuses about the shark. This was funny because I was teaching this to some entrepreneurs. One of the high-level entrepreneurs said, oh, so you want to want to. I said, no, want and willingness are not the same. Desire and willingness, when you have both of those, you're in that quadrant two. If you have only desire but not willingness, you're going to have frustration and believing in magical powers. If you only have willingness with no desire, you've got compliance. It's not that exciting. When you've got neither, then it's either a strong no or you're just confused, right? But if you've got both, if you've got both the desire and the willingness, then that's where the magic happens because it's fun to be aligned in your desire and your willingness to take action. So I listen for that when someone wants something but they make excuses about why I can't get organized, I can't sell, I can't do whatever. You're not willing to either hire someone, get the support. There's something within you that's in resistance, and it's almost always based on the need to be right.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

I always say, what are the three words that will solve any conflict? The three words that will heal any conflict? You were right.

**Shannon Waller:** Oh my goodness, you were right. We're right. Okay, I feel like I want to throw some circumstances at you to see what happens. So what if someone is not showing up as per your company values? Like what if someone is, you know, could be one of our values. There's lots of other great, great company values out there. What if someone is not compliant with those or not doing that. And that might be too general. I can get more specific if you want. Like if we have positive and collaborative teamwork, but they're kind of ignoring a team member or they're ignoring certain rules or guidelines that we have. Like, what do you do with that situation?

**Marlene Chism:** I'd like to talk with you today at two o'clock. There's a lot of things you can do in the moment. You can say, I noticed that when Kim asked for your help, you said you had to go to lunch. You know, I noticed, I noticed, I noticed. Walk me through what's happening. Like, it's just being curious, but you're using, like, you know what the value is, right? And it's happened five or six times. The story I'm telling myself is that you and Kim have something going on that's not working. I'm not saying that's true, but when I say I've observed, I've observed that the last three weeks when Kim has said, could you just help me with this, you've said you've had a reason not to. And so the story I'm telling myself is there's something going on between the two of you. Walk me through what's your perspective. Because I might not be right, but I'm saying it's a story that I'm telling myself, and I'm sharing my perception as your leader, what I'm seeing. This is when the floodgate is going to open, or it could go like this.

Well, let me use a different example, because I want to show you what people often do. You know, I noticed in the meeting when I brought up the next proposal, I noticed that you crossed your arms and you actually got on your cell phone and it seemed to me that you were disengaged. So the story that I'm telling myself is that you disagree with this next step, but you just didn't want to say it in front of the group. Oh, not at all. I was just a little bit cold. I've been checking in on someone in the hospital. No, I'm okay. Well, if you do disagree with it, I definitely want you to come because next time you do that, I'm going to bring it up in the group. That's good. Because people will always deny it if they're not very self-aware. Chances are your story is probably pretty close. You felt the energy, but you're giving them a chance and you're giving them an out that I have learned that when you do that, people change. Because if you say, my story is that you were angry with me. Oh God, no, you're just too sensitive. That's what they say when they're being defensive. You say, you know, I could be, but here's what I need.

**Shannon Waller:** Oh, okay. Say more about what, like if someone did that, you're just being too sensitive and you're like, well, I could be, but this is what I need. What kind of thing would I say then if it was me?



**Marlene Chism:** Like you'd say, like someone's rolled their eyes and you said, it seemed like you were rolling your eyes. And my story was that you were discounting what I was bringing to the meeting. And it felt like you wanted to say something, but just couldn't. And I want to give you that chance. Oh my gosh, no, you're just too sensitive. You know, I could be, but here's what I need from you. I need for you to tell me when you disagree, because I'm going to bring it forward next time I see it right in the moment. I just didn't want to embarrass or cause a scene, because that said something to me. And perhaps I'm sensitive, but in my mind there's something underneath that, so I'm going to address it next time.

**Shannon Waller:** I've done that in meetings.

**Marlene Chism:** I feel good about that, actually. We have to, because if we're doing it in front of other people, they are displaying that in the crowd. Like I've had leaders say, oh my gosh, you bring that up, you call them out. And I said, it's not really calling them out, it's bringing into the room what's already happening and no one has the ability to say. The elephant is already there. Everybody's watching that behavior, that arm cross, that sigh. They're watching it. So to say, you just crossed your arms, Chris. Do you disagree? Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Okay. Okay. Well, I just want anybody that disagrees, please come to me either now or after. You can do it right in the meeting.

**Shannon Waller:** I think it's key. And I want to go back to the three A's you talked about, aggression, avoidance, and appeasing. Entrepreneurial leadership teams, most people are not wallflowers. There's a lot of strong personalities. But if people have had history with either feeling not heard or whatever, even the strongest people can end up with that avoidant behavior or appeasing behavior. And it's everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. And occasionally aggression if someone loses their cool. Myself included. I mean, calling that out, we have a ton of coaching, Collaborative Way, which has talked about generous listening, Chris Voss, tactical empathy, you, radical listening. It's like all of these things, but in the moment when it's our issue or we're feeling it, we still I'm not going to say we suck at it, but it can be very, very challenging to show up as, hey, I have a disagreement with that.

**Marlene Chism:** The other thing that's helping me is you're saying my intention with this comment is... Yeah, or to say, you know, I really want us to collaborate, but I'm experiencing, you know, this frustration and there's a story in my head that I don't feel like you're supporting me. I don't want to blame you, but that's what's going on in my head. So walk me through, because what I want... See, when I talk about what I want, not what you're doing wrong, so what would help me, since I'm supposed to clean out the coffee pot on the last break, but I go in there, there's no coffee, and I still got to clean the coffee pot. So what would help me is either clean it if you drink the last cup or leave me a cup.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

**Shannon Waller:** I like that. Yeah, because it's all about how do you collaborate better? How do you be in better teamwork?

**Marlene Chism:** Right. It would benefit me if it would benefit me. What would help me? Would you be willing to? I've noticed that sometimes I go in there and I'm last on break. I'm running a light. The coffee's already been drank. I'm not getting a cup. I'm not complaining about that, but it kind of burns me a little bit to have to clean the, you know. So there's asking for what you want, telling people what would benefit you, setting a boundary. I'm no longer willing to clean it if there's not a cup left, you know.

**Shannon Waller:** Well, it's great because you're actually saying, I'm feeling. That goes back to that emotional integrity that we were talking about earlier. You're almost like three steps into the conversation, right? And you're being generous, which takes courage, to say these things. What would help me? It would benefit me. My intention is, would you be willing? I'm feeling this, right? Like all of those things are actually incredible acts of advanced communication, in my experience, to get to that result. I can imagine leadership meetings taking this on. And this is, again, we're self-awareness, which is why I'm all about the profiles, is because then people know that. And I also know what triggers other people, so I can be a little more aware about how not to tick them off.

**Marlene Chism:** Yeah. Well, you tend to say, there's something I want to say. My fear, though, is that it's going to trigger. So I'm trigger warning, right? My intention, though, is this. Like, this is my intention, and they're going to go, oh, yeah, well, I think we're over it. Or, you know, it kind of lightens it up sometimes, not to make someone else the sensitive one. But just even represent yourself to say, you know, I have something to own. I've been hesitating to bring something up, and it's really just my own stuff. It's just that I value the relationship, and my fear was that we might disagree, but I trust that we can get through it. So I'm going to go ahead and, like, it's just owning. I call it the labor principles. Listen, ask for what you want, set boundaries, own your stuff, and represent yourself.

And I learned that when I was a factory worker with my own boss before I started this business. And I thought to myself, if I can't speak to someone in higher authority in a way that I would want to teach it, I'll never have the real power to do it. So I did it then. And I did go to him and I said, you know, I want to talk to you about something and it's going to be a little bit kind of scary for me, you know, because I'm afraid you're going to say the things you always say. And he goes, no one can make you feel anything without your approval. And I said, and that's true, but now that you know how I feel about it, if you keep doing it, you're doing it with knowledge, which is different. It was my job to put in for vacation. I did that. I wasn't told I couldn't take it. When I came in to remind you, you acted like you knew nothing about it and



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## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

you told me that you were packed full and you couldn't do it. And I said, well, that's okay. And you said, of course it is. You need to work. And I went home and I was so angry.

So first I want to admit that I was dishonest with you and I acted like it was okay when it was not okay with me because I did my part. And he goes, oh, well, I mean, I'm sorry. He goes, yeah, it was. And I said, so I'm going to ask for something. And I said, would you let me go home early, even though it won't be vacation? Would you try to call someone in? I know you'll have to pay them time and a half. And he said, well, I'll try, but you know how hard it is. I said, I do know how hard it is, but I appreciate you trying. I went back to the line, and I thought, he's not going to do it, but I felt this surge of excitement from having the courage, this is sort of the beginning for me. In like 10 minutes, he came and said, I've got someone to come in at 10 o'clock, and if you want me to take your place, I'll do it now. And I went, wow, I was so shocked.

Now here's, I'm gonna tell you something that I know for sure when I coach people. People tell me their deep, dark secrets, okay? They trust me, and they know I'm a straight shooter. And when I'm coaching them on something difficult to go say to someone, I know when someone's actually done it and when they have not. And here's how I know, because if they have done it, whether it was a failure or whether it was a success, they can't wait to talk to me and say, oh my God, I sucked so bad. Or like, what do I do now? Or they're going to say, I can't believe it, I'm singing Kumbaya. They're going to have an emotional experience if they do it. Courage will always create that. If they didn't do it, this is what they're going to say. Marlene, you are so awesome. They're going to butter me up. And they're going to say, you're so smart. Thank you so much. We're good now. I don't need to talk about it anymore.

**Shannon Waller:** They just flat out lie.

**Marlene Chism:** They flatter me. They flatter me because they don't want to talk about they didn't have the courage to do it.

**Shannon Waller:** Oh man, that is wild.

**Marlene Chism:** We're good now. Thank you. It was helpful. Very helpful. We're good now. You were great. You're so awesome. And they don't mean that. I already know they didn't do it because every single time someone does it, they call me even without an appointment. They can't wait to express how they feel. Now, that's the problem, though. When someone has one of these difficult conversations, because the surge of energy feels so good once you do something that was difficult, even if you stumbled through it, you did it, you're rewiring that brain. The next step after you have that excitement is to get on the calendar another time to talk to that person two weeks later, because if you don't, there's no accountability. You have to then call them in to talk about something serious again. It's even more difficult because we both know what we know, and you didn't keep your end of the bargain. And then you're angry.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

So to prevent the anger, to prevent the, oh no, what do I do now? You just say, just because we want to follow up and see how I can support you. Let's look, like on a scale of 1-10 right now, we've decided you're at a six. We're going to get you to an eight. Let's talk about that next time. You know, so that way it's already set up, they're expecting it and they're going to work because they've got the witness. They've got the witness of accountability on them.

**Shannon Waller:** I love it. Just before we wrap up, I'd love to hear like a turnaround story where you had either a persecutor in the business that got turned around or someone who was a bully kind of thing or someone who was a victim, maybe that's even better, where through a difficult conversation with the you had or someone else had with them, they actually started showing up as a really great contributing team member. And my problem is someone asked me this question, is I have too many examples. I can't think of any in the moment.

**Marlene Chism:** That's what I think. I'm like, oh my God, I'm caught off guard because there are so many. I've coached so many people. I think of one example where an owner had a CFO that wasn't on site and and I could just tell by the things that she was saying that this person was not looking out for her best interests. And I did coach her through letting that person go. I was not surprised because he threatened, like what was interesting is that she had another person working with her that was like her right-hand person that was sort of a persecutor. And because of that and not having that conversation and dealing with that, anytime she wanted to let someone go, they started threatening EEOC claims based on problems they'd had with that person.

So I always say every big problem in an organization that blows up can be traced back to a conversation that should have happened but did not. It's every problem that's really gotten big, especially to EEOC claims, discrimination, that kind of stuff is always traced back to a conversation two or three that didn't happen. And so when she wanted to let him go, he started threatening, you know, that he had brought up to her, it was documented that this person was like a persecutor to him. So she had to do kind of a settlement just to get him gone because she was nervous about it. But she was so happy. But what was interesting about it was because the lack of skill until you get this stuff, and don't know how to stay on track. She said that conversation went on for well over an hour. It should have been a 15-20 minute conversation.

So that's a story that I can share that was of an owner, entrepreneur, another person I coached that was a founder, and one of the investors and him like they were like oil and water. It's interesting, though, because I just talked to him not long ago and he said, we're just best friends now. So I'm not quite sure what happened, but I know the first time that I coached him and he just was struggling with this overbearing micromanaging, putting his nose where he didn't belong, you know, and the other guy was a new CEO, but also the founder. And so he had these people that... What I noticed was they got investors that they weren't really aligned



with vision and values-wise, and that's a problem. If it's only about money, you're going to struggle because values are going to drive your decision making. So that was part of the problem. And what I coached him on was to stop battling with this person in front of the board to quit being the one that took on all the emotional energy.

And I wrote about this in the book, actually. He said, wow, every bone in my body was screaming for release when I didn't take something on. And he said, and to my surprise, the other board members spoke up. Because when we do the emotional work for someone else, whether it's in our family or in our team, no one else is going to step up and take that on. You're doing all the emotional work. So he quit doing that. And because of that pattern change for him, others started holding this investor accountable. And now they are friends. Now they work together.

**Shannon Waller:** It's so true. Like you can't change other people, but when we change ourselves, it changes the dynamic and then other people show up differently. Like if you're doing all the heavy lifting, someone's going to let you do that.

**Marlene Chism:** That's exactly right.

**Shannon Waller:** You're like, no, that's some other people are like, oh, I guess I should pick something up. So that is fascinating. Oh my gosh. Okay. I don't know about anyone else listening, but all I want is like personal coaching now. What about this? What about that? So what I'm also hearing is that when you have these accountability conversations, if people realize they're not aligned, I'm going to assume that people choose out or get chosen out.

**Marlene Chism:** That's the beauty is that if they don't stay, that too was a success in that it wasn't a battle. Oh, you've got that? I wrote it. We're so aligned on that. It's so true. That's what you want. It's not a failure. It's actually a big success that we had this conversation. We weren't aligned.

**Shannon Waller:** Yeah, it's multiplication by subtraction. I love it. I love it. 100%. So I think that's key. And sometimes I know, I think, I'm not sure how much I know, is that people who are like fractious and hard to get along with and conflict-ridden and what I would call complicators, sometimes they can turn around. They can. And they can actually become people who are great contributors when they feel heard, when they understand the intention. Does that land? It's so true, but here's what's funny.

**Marlene Chism:** Like I've got my own growing to do because like I've not worked for anybody. My clients are my bosses, right? Like that's who my bosses are. But, like, I volunteer at this theater in town to scan tickets and stuff, and I was so tired yesterday, I thought, note to self, don't ever volunteer for stuff at night during a work week, because I'm so tired. But I thought, I'll have fun once I get there. And there was another ticket scanner that kept bossing me





YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

around, saying, I think you should stand here, like, put your back here. I thought, oh my God, I remember what it's like to be around people that have to just put their nose in your business, and I'm something that doesn't matter. You can stand however, wherever you want, you know what I mean? It was just, I thought, oh, note to self, like, what do I need to learn from this? Can I just kind of let that be and just be quietly effective? There's no reason to have an argument, but I could tell it ruffled my feathers, and I thought, this is free work and we're scanning tickets. It's not a PhD.

**Shannon Waller:** I feel like that about driving. Although I let two people in the other day. I was really proud of myself because that is not my normal behavior. We have a lot of construction issues in Toronto and people are butting in and lanes that are... And they go into the other lane knowing that it's good and then they try to butt in.

**Marlene Chism:** Exactly. I had that today and I found myself getting as close to the other car as possible.

**Shannon Waller:** Exactly. But I actually let someone in. I thought, oh Shannon, you might be shifting. You're mellowing. You're mellowing. Don't tell me what to do. That's a little bit of our 8 PRINT.

**Marlene Chism:** Oh yeah, for sure.

**Shannon Waller:** Well, I could talk to you for days, but that's a pretty long podcast. So Marlene, how can people find you? What books would you recommend that people get? I know LinkedIn is a great resource for you. I know you're creating an awesome series, which people can buy, which is awesome. So how can people, if they want to learn more about conflict resolution from conflict to courage, if they want to know how to eliminate workplace drama, and what I think is phenomenal is how to grow as a leader and as a human being, because that's ultimately what it is.

**Marlene Chism:** Absolutely, that's what it's about.

**Shannon Waller:** How can people find out all things Marlene?

**Marlene Chism:** They can email me, marlene at marlenechism.com. I have a website, marlenechism.com. There's an assessment on there you can take and it's called, Do You Have a Culture of Avoidance? And you can take that and get a little score back. LinkedIn, I'm on LinkedIn pretty much daily and I have content there and I have courses on LinkedIn. So I'm pretty easy to find.



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## From Conflict To Courage, with Marlene Chism

**Shannon Waller:** Excellent. Well, thank you. And again, for me, this has been incredibly insightful. This is a topic I've read about a lot. I studied a lot. I still don't feel like I'm very good at it.

**Marlene Chism:** It's a journey. It's a journey. There's an art and a science. I think it's more about our inner journey, really, and peace within more than anything else. Because if I'm feeling peaceful and compassionate, the girl that's bossing me around with the tickets, like I can just have fun with that. I can laugh. There's a different approach, but sometimes we forget our choices and we just like, you're not going to tell me what to do, you know? We're just programmed like that. So I think it's a journey.

**Shannon Waller:** Okay, good. That makes me feel better.

**Marlene Chism:** Yeah, it's a journey. I'm not the sage on the stage, you know, at all. I'm on the journey too.

**Shannon Waller:** OK, fantastic. Again, highly recommend *Conflict to Courage*. Great, great book. And I don't know, articulate is one of the highest compliments I can give in a conversation or to a book. And it's such a clear, articulate, inspiring book and provides enormous direction, which again, it's really practical, which is another checkmark agenda of mine. So thank you. I'm really glad I have it. And I'm super excited to dive even more into some of your tools and resources and to get better at it myself. So Marlene, thank you. Thank you for sharing your wisdom, your insight. Some of it hard-won, I'm sure. I know I'll benefit and I know our listeners will too. So thank you. Thank you.

**Marlene Chism:** Much appreciated. Thank you for having me.

**Shannon Waller:** My pleasure.